

Christ UCC, Annville
April 15, 2012 Pulpit Exchange Sunday

**“What Will We Do With The Risen Christ?”
(Acts 4:32-35; John 20:19-31)**

The disciples were behind the locked doors and Jesus came to them and said, “Peace be with you” and they began to rejoice in seeing the Lord. But then there was Thomas, called the twin, who came on the scene later, but did not believe the others when they reported of their encounter with Jesus. He wants to experience it for himself...he wanted to touch Christ in order to believe.

In a sermon on this text, the great theologian Frederick Buechner mentioned that we are Thomas’ twin. I honestly think there is some truth to that statement. We find ourselves in between doubt and belief. We want to be able to see the resurrection...we want to touch it. We want to believe it, but we want more than just belief. Yes, we are promised that the risen Christ will meet us, but we don’t always believe that....we don’t recognize the resurrection at all! We are like Thomas...we are between doubt and belief.

The Sunday after Easter is always seen as a low Sunday....the attendance is very low compared to last week’s attendance. It is obvious that people just want to come and experience the risen Christ one week out of the year, but they are not willing to be opened to the many ways that the risen Christ meets us each and every day. It also means that as a congregation we may not be open to the risen Christ.

There was a small, stagnant church in southern Indiana since 1867. The county’s population was growing less than 1% a year, the poverty level is 14% and less than half the population claims a church home. This looks like there is no possibility for growth. In 1994, there were about 100 names on the roll of this church. It was in a remote

location and the congregation felt that if they were to witness to unchurched people they had to relocate. One of the longtime members was asking if this move would wait until her own death. When she approached the subject with her son, an elder of the church, he answered, "Mom, if we wait until you die to move, the entire church might be dead." The mother responded, "Well, then let's go!"

So one Easter morning they gathered for the last time to worship in their church building. The 65 people who were there that Sunday drove down the dusty road to the new building that was located near the highway. The pastor noted that this was an obvious celebration of Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of what had been labeled as a dying church. I would also add that it was a celebration of the resurrection for that elderly woman who realized that this church could not wait for her to die in order for it to live. In ten years, this church grew from 100 people to 1,000 people. Now that is not the point of this story....rather the point is that this congregation lived out the resurrection. This congregation was dying.....the people were dying in their spiritual life and they saw the need for resurrection! To experience some new life!

As I was interviewing for my first church 8 years ago, I remember one of the churches asked me what I would do if I was able to be with Jesus for 5 hours. If my memory serves me right, I said that I would take him all over the town so that he would have the opportunity to meet as many people as possible. Jesus would not want to be contained to the four walls of the church, but rather Jesus would want to be out and about with the people....Jesus was always on the move...Jesus does not want to be locked up and he doesn't want us to be held up behind locked doors. He wants us to be out to spread the good news!

Jesus says to the disciples, as my Father has sent me so I send you. There is a now a call to leave the familiar place and go out to spread the gospel. There has been an encounter with the risen Christ and so the disciples are called upon to do something about that encounter! I am sure many of you have had experiences in your life that you have wanted to tell everyone about it! This is exactly what Jesus is talking about!

Our passage from Acts says that with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. There was not a needy person in their midst because they reached out to all of those in need....they gave their possessions to those in need....they proclaimed the hope and new life that the resurrection provides us. As Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Just imagine what the world would look like, if we shared our possessions with those in need! You have heard numerous times from this pulpit that when one gives to the church we are able to do far more abundantly than we can with other organizations. We do all of this in the name of Christ...we are sharing the love of Christ with others.

I am reminded of a story about Dr. Clarence Jordan, who was a great preacher & biblical scholar as well as a farmer. In 1942, he began an interracial farming community in Georgia, which was called the Koinonia Farms. Jordan was also very involved with Millard Fuller in the formation of Habitat For Humanity. The Koinia Community was always harassed by the KKK. Jordan said he could endure these threats, but he couldn't stand to have his family to bear these threats.

One day, his daughter came home from school crying. She informed Clarence that some boy knocked her down in the hallway. Dr. Jordan asked his daughter why she didn't use her long fingernails to scratch his eyes out. The daughter said she thought

about that, but she remembered a sermon her father gave based on Jesus' command to love our enemies. So Dr. Jordan informed his daughter that he would go into school the next day and ask Jesus to excuse him from being a Christian for 15 minutes so he could beat the daylights out of this boy. His daughter quickly reminded him that we can't be excused from being a Christian for 15 minutes....we should always be a Christian! We must always share the love of the Risen Christ!

One of the greatest challenges in the life of the Church today is that we are so content with the status quo....with mediocre ministry where we exist just for ourselves and not worry about the needs of those outside the four walls of the church. We are willing to be locked behind the doors of the church in fear of what exists in our community and around the world. We are paralyzed and not willing to look at the possibilities that God presents us where we can share the risen Christ with others.

Therefore, in my view, there needs to be a lot of resurrection in the life of the Church today. It is not shocking news that our churches are dying.....they are not living and breathing bodies, which was the goal of our ancestors in the Mercersburg Movement. If we are to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, we must look for ways to resurrect the Church so that all will know the wonderful news that we proclaimed last week "Alleluia! Christ is Risen!"

So I ask you, Christ UCC, what will you do with the risen Christ? In what ways will you give your testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? You have a decision to make. Will you decide to be behind the locked doors in fear of what exists outside those doors? Will you decide to contain the risen Christ in this Church behind those locked doors? Or will you be a church that reaches out to the community and around the world

to share the risen Christ? Will you do whatever you can to create a community by sharing what you have so that others will be able to celebrate the risen Christ? As you make that decision, remember those names of Jesus: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you?” With such a command from Jesus, how can the Church even second guess what they should do with the risen Christ? Amen.