

Easter C-5
May 6, 2007
Pre-School Sunday
Acts 11: 1-8; Rev. 21: 1-6
Title: Personal, Communal, Cosmic

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the risen Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, the first born of the dead, the faithful witness, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Morgan Davidson turned 11 years old when The True Believers Friendship Club went to Camp Agape. I was privileged to go with Them. I told Morgan there are only two times in your life when you Can turn your age upside down and it's still the same. She looked Puzzled. So I tried to explain it—

“Turn 11 over and it's still 11. She got it. So I confidently uttered, “You'll need to wait till your 88 to do it again.” Several other children chimed in!! “PD, how about 18? How about 10? How about 81? How about 100?” And on it went!

As my adult confidence slipped away, one of the children said, “It's okay, PD, we know you are old!” And then they just walked off! And left me standing there stripped of my snugness.

This is a small Easter story, of being turned upside down.
For all our lives, all our years no matter how we number them
Are in light of Easter. It may be true that oldness comes, it's
Even truer to say new life, new life in Jesus.
God's determined purpose is to
Raise the dead and whatever tomb is closing in us, whatever
Physical death is threatening us, it's no match for the spirit of
God.

According to Acts 10, the Apostle Peter's world was turned upside down. The spirit had led him to keep company with Cornelius, a unclean gentile believer. So now Peter goes to Jerusalem to explain this radical shift. To do so Peter must wrestle with leaving behind his confidence about where God is at work. It's not just 11 and 88.

Peter remembered the words of Jesus about the spirit working—

“If God gave Cornelius the same gift that he gave when we Believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?”

What a world shaping revelation with personal, communal
And cosmic implications.

Believe in Christ. Three life shaping words which begin this congregation’s mission statement. We can believe many things
About Christ—that he will be there for us, that
He forgives us, that his love is an example for us—
But it is life work to turn our beliefs into heart shaping
Reality.

I believe in Christ who has freed me from the powers of death,
Therefore who am I that I could hinder God from reaching
AIDs orphans?

I believe in Christ who is making all things new, therefore who am I
That I could hinder God from using me to mentor the faith of
Youth?

I believe in Christ whose spirit lives in me, therefore who am I that I
Could hinder God from speaking through me?

Believe in Christ. How many of us find ourselves needing to
Ask: WHO AM I THAT I COULD HINDER GOD?

John on the Isle of Patmos writes to 7 churches who live in bombed out cities of Asia Minor. His whole mission is to teach the hearts and souls of These churched people that God will not be hindered. To that end His Revelation contrasts two cities—Babylon and Jerusalem.

Babylon is a city of hinderance making personal communal and cosmic claims. Known as a whore where
Fornication lurks—which is to say life is cheap, people are
Used, can’t trust your neighbor, everybody carries a concealed
Weapon, fear blows like the wind.
This is the city in which God’s people must dwell. Sound familiar?

You can get used to believing that Babylon is all there is.
When 85% of couples on TV who are in bed
Are not married, Babylon lurks. When the alcohol commericals present everyone drinking as having great fun---without the

Consequences of drunkenness on the lives of those folks---
Babylon becomes written across the pages of life.

Amidst this decay John argues for hearts of God's people.
You think Babylon is all there is? We worship Jesus Christ
The alpha and the omega, who was entombed by the power of Babylon and
God raised him. I'll show you a new city:

“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down
out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her
husband.” Babylon will not hinder God!

At Virginia Tech's Memorial Service for those slaughtered
Lutheran Chaplain Bill King sounded very much like John the
Revelator. Before the crushing reality of a personal
anguish turned violent Chaplain King said these Jerusalem like
Words:

“We come to this place to testify that the light of life
Cannot be defeated. Let us deny death's power to
Rob us of all we love about Va. Tech. Let us
Cast our lot with hope in defiance of despair.”

Those who teach foreign languages know that the best method of instruction
is to demand the class from day one only speak the new language they want
to learn—Japanese, French, German, Arabic, Spanish—Start speaking that
Language only. No English allowed. Eventually, those who practice a new
Language begin to see the world through it.

John was teaching the church a new language. Resurrection language.
Ravaged by Babylon's lure
And power, these nobodies were invited to hear –
You are the bride of God.
At the very place where they saw decay, death
The language of resurrection broke through

Behold, I make all things new. This is what God does.
And the query of Peter lingers over the church---Who are we that we should
hinder God?

Noted family therapist Virginia Satir tells of working with people on public welfare. The first thing she asks the group: I'd like to know what your Dreams are? One woman responded:

We don't have any dreams. The rats are eating up my children.
I don't know what you can do with dreams.
Upon inquiring Satir found out that the screen door would help
Keep the rats away: Is there anybody around who knows how
To fix a screened door? An older gentlemen said he could do it.

The next week the group came together Satir asked the woman Is your Screened door fixed? Oh, yes.
Then we can start dreaming, can't we? And the group began to dream!
Writes Satir: "In twelve weeks all these people were off public welfare."
Babylon or Jerusalem?

Who was I that I could hinder God?
Behold, I make all things new.

You should know that each week at pre-school
Our children are presented with the language of Jerusalem.
Weekly themes are lived out here. These themes prevade the
classroom, the music, the chapel. This week's theme: God will help you.
And the year finishes with God made us to do good. Imagine these
Words seeping into the lives our young.

Who are we to hinder God? To delimit the reach of the Lord of life.

The reach of the resurrection of Jesus is personal, communal and cosmic.

A city church wanted to remove a stained glass window above
It's chancel. That window depicted the Holy City Jerusalem
Descending from heaven to earth. Some thought the picture
Too other-worldly.

They kept the window and through the years the glass faded. Now
Through the golden image of the new Jerusalem they could look
Out and see their own town.

One city seen through the vision of another.

My brothers and sisters in Christ God is seeking to clothe us in the vision of the resurrection. Like Peter let us ask ourselves precisely at those times when we are ready to settle for Babylon, who am I that I could hinder God?