

JESUS KEEPS HANGING AROUND

(1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Traditionally, in these weeks after our celebration of Easter, we always take time to consider some of the scriptural references concerning the number and type of appearances Jesus made as the resurrected Christ of faith and as the triumphant Lord of history. The passage chosen for our sermon text this morning has Paul citing testimony HE had received concerning the appearances of the risen Lord, which are more than we have scriptural collaboration for. Our gospel lesson from Luke 24 this morning contains at least one of those appearances—if not more than one which has been condensed into one. The beginning of the New Testament book of Acts tells us that Jesus was with the disciples “for forty days” after his resurrection and before his ascension.

One could raise the question this morning as to why Jesus hung around for so long after his resurrection. After all, he had done what he came to do, and he had done all things well that he was sent to do:

- ✚ He had preached the good news of God's steadfast love for those who were poor in spirit;
- ✚ He had brought release to many who were held captive to a religious legalism that neither saved nor satisfied;
- ✚ He had *brought* sight to those who had never seen, and *returned* vision to those who had lost it;
- ✚ He had given some who were oppressed the liberating assurance of their own self-worth;
- ✚ He had announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and had transformed what for many was a bleak present into the acceptable year of the Lord;
- ✚ He had healed the sick, raised the dead, opened the ears of those who could not hear, strengthened the limbs of those who could not walk, and cast out demons in those who were possessed;
- ✚ And, on top of all that, he had made the ultimate sacrifice by allowing humans to *misuse* him, *abuse* him, and *crucify* him, so

that—in the strange but brilliant Master Plan of God—we ALL could be redeemed by God’s “reverse decision.”

One would expect then, that after some initial appearances to establish his victory over death and the grave, Jesus would have immediately ascended to the God from which he came, the place where John’s gospel said he had been from the very beginning of time. One would expect that Jesus would be anxious to get out of town; would be in a hurry to leave this sin-sick world with its fickle humans and their cruel acts, and return to the joy, peace and glory from which he came. After all, who likes to hang around in a place where they’ve already been *mistreated, abused, ‘buked and scorned; talked about sure’s you born?*

However, according to our text, Jesus took his own sweet time about ascending back to heaven. He seemed in no hurry to leave this earth.

Our text says he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. It says he was seen by more than 500 believers at one time. It says his brother James saw him, as did many other of the un-named apostles. Last of

all, long after the others, he was seen by Paul, according to Paul's own words, *as one born almost too late*.

Jesus just simply kept hanging around!

II.

Jesus appeared to his good friend Peter, who was the first among the Twelve to recognize him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He appeared to the same Peter who had pledged eternal devotion to him, but who, in his hour of testing, seemed to be more of a *broken reed* than the *rock* Jesus had earlier declared him to be. Jesus hung around long enough to *restore* a fallen saint, to *lift the spirits* of a downcast friend, to *forgive* the denial of a trusted follower, and to *reclaim* as his very own one whose faith Satan had tried to break, and whose soul the Evil One had desired to sift like wheat!

Jesus always hangs around for we saints who stumble. When others criticize us for stumbling; when our weaknesses and failures seem to mock our faith; when our adversaries seem to have gotten the victory;

and when our consciences have beaten and shamed us, *Jesus hangs around long enough to let us know that he loves us anyhow!* Regardless of our broken promises and our shattered resolves, he still claims us as his own. Jesus hangs around long enough to let us know that, though our sins be as scarlet, *his blood* can still make the foulest clean, that *his love* can still forgive whatever we do, and that *his spirit* can still help us walk in newness of life.

Jesus just keeps on hanging around! Ain't that good news?

III.

Jesus hung around long enough to appear to his Twelve special

disciples. He appeared to those whom he had called by name to leave their fishing nets, leave their tax-collecting tables, leave their families, and give up all to become proclaimers of the dawning kingdom.

The place of the disciples was a unique place in the history of emerging faith. They were the *leadership nucleus* of the movement. Coming generations would depend upon the accuracy of their recollections,

their memories, their writings, their telling of the story of salvation.

And because much had been given to them, much would be required.

Because they were the leaders, they would be the first to die when the church was persecuted. They would be used as examples of what could happen to a person who openly confessed Jesus as Lord. When Christ was crucified, each of them had been gripped by a deep and painful sense of personal loss and tragedy. However, our text tells us that before he ascended back to God, Jesus hung around long enough to appear to his twelve special disciples, the ones whom he called friends.

We can remember this morning that Jesus always hangs around for those from whom much is required. There are those upon whose shoulders the mantles of leadership and responsibility rests like a heavy yoke. They have enough responsibility for two or three persons. *As children*, they must grow up faster and assume adult responsibilities for providing and caring for the rest of the family. *As single persons*, they have to be both mother and father to children; both husband and wife

to hold homes together; both son and daughter for aged parents and other lonely persons. Sometimes their shoulders begin to ache from the weight of the crosses upon their backs, and they begin to wonder if they can *bear up*, or how long they can stand the strain of leadership and responsibility for self, for family, for livelihood, for bills, for trying to stand up for the things that are right . . .

The message of the text, however, is that Jesus hangs around to comfort, empower, and encourage those from whom much is required. If we go on in the name of Jesus, according to his Word, we will never walk alone. Jesus is always with THEM, and Jesus is always with US; because Jesus just keeps on hanging around! Ain't that good news?

IV.

Jesus hung around long enough to appear to 500 believing Christians.

Jesus kept hanging around until he was seen by the church as a whole.

He did not simply appear to the *leadership circle*, or to those who held *special positions*, or to those who were *called and ordained to certain*

ministries, or to those who had been *endowed with special gifts*. Jesus hung around to be seen by the *whole church*!

Jesus understood that it takes more than just the leadership to do the work of the kingdom—it takes the *whole church*. In his appearance before the 500, Jesus demonstrated his lordship, care, and commitment to the *whole church*. Jesus was not just *Peter's Lord*, not just the Lord of the *Twelve special disciples*, but he is Lord of the *whole church*. Jesus is not just Lord for those whose names are always being called, or just for those whose families were charter members—he is Lord of the *whole church*. Jesus is not simply Lord of those who give the most, or talk the most, or do the most—he is Lord of the *whole church*.

Jesus is available to the poorest as he is to the prosperous; to the disabled as well as to the healthy of body and mind; to women as well as to men; to children as well as to grown folk; to those who are part of

the LGBTQI community, as well as to those who are part of the heterosexual community.

Jesus just keeps on hanging around, to provide all that we need to live and serve in the power of the resurrected Lord! Ain't that good news?

V.

Jesus hung around long enough to appear to his brother James. One of the most discouraging and painful experiences of the life of Jesus must have centered around the skepticism, disbelief, and refection from many in his own family toward his mission. When Jesus went back to Nazareth, his home town, after doing mighty works in all the places he had been, he met the mockery, hostility, and disbelief of his “homies” and his home community.

Family, friends, and those closest to us can hurt us in a way that no one else can. Jesus's family didn't understand him. To some, he was as crazy as his cousin John the Baptist! To others in his family, he was an embarrassment, and to still others, he was a mystery. Sometimes,

when God begins to move in our lives in special ways, those closest to us will not understand. However, we cannot afford to sacrifice our convictions or the joy of the Lord because of the lack of understanding, or hang-ups, or lack of vision of others—even family. We must be prepared to let nothing, including the disapproval of those whom we love, separate us from the love of God. *Now is still the acceptable time. Now is still the day of salvation.* This day can be the first day of the rest of your life, because Jesus is still hanging around for YOU! Ain't that good news?

VI.

Finally, not only did Jesus hang around for *Peter*; not only did he hang around for the *Twelve*; not only did he hang around for the *500*; not only did he hang around for his brother *James*; but the scriptures tell us ***he also hung around long enough for a young Pharisee named Saul to meet him.***

It was long after the others had encountered the risen Christ that one day, while he was on the Damascus Road, on his way to destroy another Christian congregation, Saul discovered that Jesus was still hanging around . . . And from that day on, Saul's life took on a new direction. He got a new *name*; he got a new *walk*; he got a new *talk*; he got a new *attitude*; he *changed sides* in the battle, and instead of being on the battlefield AGAINST our Lord, he got on the battlefield FOR our Lord!

That same Jesus who spoke to Paul is still hanging around to speak to you and me today! His grace is *still sufficient*; his strength is *still perfected* in our weakness; his arm of compassion has *not been shortened*; his love *has not and never will come to an end*; his mercy is *still from everlasting to everlasting*; his blood *still sanctifies*; his spirit *still sets free*; his forgiveness is *still stronger* than sin; his joy is *still mightier* than the ocean; his peace *still passes* all understanding; and his salvation is *still stronger* than death!

I'm a witness today that Jesus is still hanging around!

I stand before you today, preaching the good news of a resurrected Savior, because he hung around for ME, and resurrected MY life!

As the song-writer declares:

Love lifted me; love lifted me; when nothing else could help, love lifted me!

I'm talking about the love offered by a crucified and risen Savior, who makes it his business to just keep on hanging around . . .

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