

Greetings to all on this second Sunday of Easter. There are seven Sundays in Easter on the way to Pentecost, so we have only just begun. And wasn't last Sunday, Easter Day, glorious. Our celebration of the Day of Jesus' Resurrection was especially beautiful this year, I think, and now we continue through this season of new life.

It is particularly appropriate that today we bring a child into the family of God in Jesus Christ through Holy Baptism. Kate and Erik Swanson will bring their son Paxton Richard to the baptismal font today and he will become the newest Christian in the fellowship of St. Andrew's, the most recent to be sealed in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.

Since we will have a brand new member this morning, I think it's important to ask what sort of fellowship we are bringing Paxton into. Who are we and what are we here for? It's the same question the Strategic Planning Committee, currently being formed, will be called on to answer before they ask, "Who is God calling us to be?"

Who are we and what are we here for? I've heard many describe St. Andrew's as a diverse fellowship, a gathering of people with many different gifts, passions, and beliefs. Parishioners love St. Andrew's for different reasons and recount different experiences that drew them here. Many came here to do something – to help with the Rummage Sale or to sing in the choir, to sing in Bob Franke's cantata, for Bible Study, to work at the Salem Mission, or to join one of many projects serving people in need – they came for one thing and stayed.

For so many getting to know St. Andrew's had something to do with hands-on service to others. So we are definitely a diverse fellowship, and we are people with a passion for service, though some of our projects need new life, to be sure. But let me suggest a look at today's readings as a check on whether we could be more than these things. As a community of Christians, is there more we could become?

The collect for today, that prayer we all said together at the beginning of worship, says that in the mystery of resurrection God established "the new covenant of reconciliation." By raising Jesus from the dead, God paved the road on which we can meet each other and God in love and forgiveness.

It's probably been a long time since you looked up the Catechism in the back of the Book of Common Prayer. Maybe you've never looked up the Catechism. But it's useful in that it defines the church's belief and thereby serves as a good starting point for a lot of important discussions.

On page 855 the question is asked: "What is the mission of the Church?" The answer is, "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." We are supposed to be moving toward unity with God ourselves, and bringing the whole community along with us. The goal is to be restored to unity. It's the new covenant of reconciliation mentioned in the collect and we, as the Church in this place, are God's agents for making it happen.

Check out the gospel for today. It's a familiar story and we very often focus on the statement that Jesus enters through locked doors, or on Thomas who doubts, or on seeing the marks in Jesus' hands and his side, or on the blessing of those who "have not seen and yet have come to believe."

But I want to remind you that the last time Jesus saw his disciples they were running away. They were abandoning him to his fate, leaving him alone to die. Peter, perhaps the closest of his disciples, denies that he knows Jesus – 3 times. But Jesus comes to them, on the same day, the evening of the day the women have found the tomb empty in the morning, and Jesus finds them, not to show them how wrong they were or to ball them out for their lack of faith, or for any recriminations of any kind. He comes to forgive them and to show them how to forgive each other.

Jesus finds those who must have hurt him deeply and breathes the power of his Spirit into them. He never mentions their shortcomings, their faithlessness. These are the ones who will begin the covenant of reconciliation and he comes to give them the Spirit's power. They can forgive the sins of another. We can forgive the sins of another. We can be a community of agents of reconciliation.

Finally, the reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. We read Acts throughout Eastertide because it recounts the story of the Early Church and how the spirit of God enlivened those early followers to preach Christ Crucified and to spread the good news of Jesus' Resurrection. In the face of punishment by the authorities, again and again the same men who ran from Jesus' crucifixion display amazing courage. In today's reading we hear Peter and the others say, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Dangerous words. Words that get them into trouble and ultimately lead to the martyrdom of many of them.

I don't suggest martyrdom as a goal for our parish, but zeal for God's Word, the power of new life that comes to us through the Resurrection, the lasting strength of the message of Easter, this I believe can be a part of St. Andrew's becoming more, offering ourselves with enthusiasm as agents of God's covenant of reconciliation.

God's work is done in this world, now, by those who believe, by those who have come to know God in so many different ways, by our hands and hearts and voices. For us Episcopalians our way of approaching unity with God is through Jesus Christ and the mystery of his life, death, and life again. We practice our faith by holding in balance worship, learning, and service. We pray the prayer of Christ, learn the mind of Christ, and do the deeds of Christ, and thereby become God's instruments for good in the world.

Today we baptize Paxton Richard Swanson into the Body of Christ in this place, into the community of reconciliation, which is always becoming something more than it was before, by the living power of the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit descend on Paxton and on all of us this day. Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria

