

They Devoted Themselves...

Sermon notes for the sermon
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young
On Sunday, May 15, 2011

When we use the word devoted we usually are referring to a person, such as your best friend or your spouse, or to a cause, such as bringing peace where there is discord or bringing justice where the powerless are marginalized. In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we hear that the followers of Jesus "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Put in other words the earliest followers of Jesus devoted themselves to spiritual disciplines of study, fellowship, communion and prayer. Why would they devote themselves to such practices?

The whole of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth can be summed up in one word: relationship. The main purpose that God's son became flesh and lived our life was to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. Since we were the ones responsible for the break the atonement or repair of that break had to come from our side of the relationship. God could not repair what we had broken without becoming one of us to affect the repair. Further, since we had broken our relationship with God we were also living in a state where our relationship with one another was broken.

The cause of the break in relationship with God and one another is due to the fact that we chose and continue to choose to be obedient to our will rather than God's. On the cross Jesus pays the blood debt that is due to God for our disobedience. With his ministry of healing, teaching and prayer Jesus demonstrates how those who are now restored with God live in God's kingdom. For the earliest followers of Jesus it was a total commitment to the way of life Jesus had ushered in.

You may have heard the fable of the chicken and the pig. It is a cut little story that demonstrates the difference between commitment and contribution. One day in the barn yard the chicken says to the pig, "Let's do something nice for the farmer and his family. Since he has been so good to us providing us with a warm place to live and feeding us good food every day, let's make a ham and egg breakfast for them tomorrow." The pig thought about it a bit and then replied, "I like your idea and, believe me when I say that I think we should do something nice for the farmer. I have one problem, however, with the ham and egg breakfast. For you it will mean a contribution but for me it will mean a commitment."

For the early followers of Jesus the question was: are we committed to following Jesus? It was for them all or nothing at all. By devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking the bread and prayer they deepened their commitment to the Christian life. They believed that by

practicing these spiritual disciplines on a daily basis their self-serving wills would be transformed and give way to God's will. The question for us today is: how are we doing as a community of faith in practicing these spiritual disciplines? Are we like the chicken, practicing our Christian faith in a contributory way or are we like the pig, pondering what it means to be fully committed? To be honest both are needed for the community of faith to be vibrant and alive and most of us if not all of us find ourselves moving between the two. Sometimes I am a pig fully committed to the cause and sometimes I am a chicken offering my support when I can but not sure about being fully committed. Those who are fully committed cannot move forward without the support and contributions of those who are not quite ready to put their whole being into the cause.

So, which one are you today? Are you the chicken or the pig?

Whichever it is we need each other in order for us to function and thrive as the body of Christ. If you are a chicken then be the best contributor you can to provide the resources and support for the good of God's kingdom. If you are a pig then be the best pig you can by fully committing yourself to following the way of Christ. For all of us God has given us the means of grace – bible study, Christian fellowship, communion, prayer and much more – to strengthen our relationship with God and one another for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, the church, for the good of all.

One thing you should notice is that roosters are not mentioned in the fable of the chicken and the pig. You see, roosters are good for only one thing and the rest of the time they just strut around the barn yard making noise and bothering everyone. Yes, they are part of the kingdom too but sometimes the roosters make it very hard for us to love them.