

Last week was our first round of town hall budget information meetings here at Resurrection, dealing with the complex workings of our finances and the unpleasant news about our current cash flow shortfall. We have a second round of these after each worship today as well; hopefully you will be able to stay and participate. Last week's discussions were a mixed bag of civility and surliness; we were respectful of one another, except when we weren't. One member began turning red with anger after repeatedly being pre-empted from speaking once by others who kept talking multiple times. Another member said bluntly to our treasurer, "I don't believe you." Many of us began beating our familiar drums about what is most important to us as individuals with little thought to the bigger picture or wider community. Plenty of times we interrupted one another, talked too much, listened too little, and got caught up with more concern about money than about each other. I can only imagine what was said in the parking lot later. All of which leads me to think that what I've long suspected is in fact true. We are the church.

The verses skipped over in the first reading from Acts chronicle in gory detail the bloody fate of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus, and who now has to be replaced according to the scriptural interpretation of Peter, the disciple who denied him. *No scorn for later despisers of the gospel, no judgment upon later infidels, can match the sober, gruesomely detailed picture of the end of Judas or the irony that the one who speaks of Judas did himself deny and curse his own Master, writes William Willimon.*

The church meets no failure or deceit in the world that it has not first encountered in itself--even among those who founded and led the very first congregation. (Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation Commentary*, p. 25)

Robert Capon adds:

The church is nothing but the world under the sign of Baptism. It is the mixture as before, dampened. It contains as many scoundrels as any other sampling--and they practice their scoundrelism with as much vigor as the best of them. (Capon, *The Romance of the Word*, p. 314)

When we pray and read Scripture and meet and mull decisions and seek God's will...and snap and snarl and speechify and betray and deny and worry first about ourselves, we as God's church are, in the words of that great theologian Hank Williams, Jr., *just carryin' on an old family tradition.*

Our current carrying on, of course, comes in the midst of Easter season readings from the final discourse of Jesus in John's gospel, which begins with Jesus washing everyone's feet and concludes four long-winded chapters later with Jesus saying, *I have said [all] this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution.*

But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:33)

During this discourse, Jesus has pleaded with them repeatedly to love one another as he had loved them, to abide in him and to trust in his victory over the world and its ways of division and fear.

He has promised them the Holy Spirit in the world and a secure place in paradise.

He has talked long into the night trying to prepare them for his departure, and now, in chapter seventeen, with the disciples' eyes lost in the back of their heads like college students in hour three of the afternoon lecture, he turns from them and talks to God.

Protect them, he prays.

Sanctify them, which is to say, set them apart, make them holy, make them different from the world into which I have sent them.

Keep them in unity and in joy and in truth.

Help them to value the world but not to swallow the world's values.

Separate them from the world's ways but keep them in the world, for the world's sake.

Separate them from the world's ways but keep them connected to each other through me, prays the vine for the branches.

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; please don't let the world get into them.

It is a bit striking that Jesus doesn't pray for a replacement apostle or economic security or anything else the disciples would identify as primary needs.

Instead he prays that we would stay in the world but distinct from it, sanctified, strange, a different kind of community marked by mutual love and unity and joy, with a signature absence of fear.

As we with mixed results live into his prayer, we should remember that he dies into it.

This prayer is the prelude to the cross; these words are his last before his crucifixion, which on the surface looks a lot like the world conquering him.

There is nothing in this prayer about security or survival.

Jesus omits what is important and prays for what is essential: oneness, holiness, truth, the word that God speaks and the name that God has given him.

God has given us a name too.

Inspired by the power and promise of Easter, we are named Resurrection.

This suggests, among other things, a starting place of death and loss.

It suggests something bigger than we can micromanage, forcing us to rely ultimately on God rather than our own wits and wisdom.

It suggests some chaos and confusion, and unrealistic expectations.

It suggests an irrepressible future.

It suggests the surprise of a joy so complete we cannot generate it ourselves.

It suggests both pain and wild possibility, and a community of disciples that move with Thomas from "I don't believe you" to "My Lord and my God," from fear and locked doors to faith with open hands.

It suggests that crisis and cross are really the arena of God's activity and the strange, surprising center of our hope.

Resurrection is the power that transformed Peter from coward to witness and Thomas from skeptic to saint.

It is the power of Christ's unconquerable life at work in the incorrigible church, which is nothing more than the world sopping wet, but take courage:

He has conquered the world.

Not just around us, but within us, too.

Dear God, direct and companion us as we die and live into the purpose and the prayer of our resurrected Lord.

Holy Father, protect Resurrection in the name you have given us;
sanctify us, until what you do is who we are.