

So here we are, the first Sunday after Easter. Even though Easter is actually a season on the church calendar, it's been my experience that this Sunday is quite the let down. And, this year is no exception. I'm weary; I dare say we're all weary. The Sunday after Christmas, on the other hand, is a great time to sing carols and to listen once more to the familiar Christmas texts. But the Sunday after Easter? It's hard to follow, "He is risen."

Some churches call today "Holy Humor Sunday," celebrating God's gift of humor in worship. Supposedly, this was an Easter custom by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity. And today, many American churches have picked up on this tradition. – a time for the faithful to celebrate Jesus' resurrection with worship, as well as parties and picnics, with Jesus as the "life" of the party! A friend of mine is quite clever writing new lyrics to familiar hymn tunes, to be sung on Holy Humor Sunday. The sermon and texts are especially joy-filled, centering on Christ's resurrection and what that means for all of us. People may even break out into spontaneous silliness from time to time, all in great fun, and all to the glory of God.

Holy Humor Sunday hasn't been our tradition here at this church and I'm not starting one today. Suffice to say, today, I simply want to acknowledge our weariness, our weariness from a long Lent, and more to the point our weariness from a long year.

Typically, today we would take a look at the Gospel reading from John, the story about Thomas insisting on seeing the marks on Jesus' hands before he'd believe. But, many weeks ago, when I chose the texts for today, out of my wisdom or folly, I chose a preaching text that seldom gets top billing in the lectionary, the opening passage in First John. There's actually three letters of John. Some scholarship believes that this first letter is written by the same author as the Gospel of John, and the other two are written by someone else, perhaps the original author's student, or an elder within the community. Other scholarship, you guessed it, disagree and believe the same person wrote all three letters, and it was not the gospel writer. Suffice to say for our purposes today, scholars do agree that these letters were all written in the tradition of John, sent with the authority of John to the communities of John. First John represents the tradition that has been passed on by the official witnesses of these communities. Whoever actually penned this letter, knows the people in these communities. He knows that the people could be easily misled by false teachers. He knows that members of the community have received the Holy Spirit, that they have embraced the Christian tradition to love one another. False teachers in the community solely emphasized the divinity of Christ, and poo-pooed the significance of Christ's humanity and death on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin, and not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. The author of this letter wishes for the community to reject these false teachings, and to believe that Jesus is fully human, and fully divine, and proclaims to the readers and the hearers, to fully love one another. First John emphasizes the fleshiness of Jesus, the humanness of Jesus. Jesus was not only audible and visible but tangible. The letter emphasizes that Jesus is the word of life, that (quoting the text) "from the very beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us."

Perhaps by reflecting on the Prologue of the Gospel John, the writer argues that it is from such an incarnate Word that life comes, and that we have fellowship with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. [Feasting of the Word, Year B, Vol 2, p. 397]

Fellowship, here, may be understood as communion, participation, or partnership. For the writer of First John, fellowship is the goal when the gospel is proclaimed. First John uses the Greek word, *koinonia*, for fellowship, understanding that *koinonia* fellowship, is not only togetherness with one another, but includes abiding in God. One could say that *koinonia*, in this

context, is vertical, as well as horizontal; it's both fellowship with God and Christ, and fellowship with one another. This fellowship, in today's terms is the church, the community of believers in relationship with the divine, as well as with one another.

This has been a challenging year for practicing and achieving koinonia for church communities all over the globe. For us, (and for most American churches), we rely on our church building as the setting for fellowship – me too, by the way. The challenge for session and staff, as well, of course, for families and individuals, is how to remain connected while apart. For us, how do we continue to be the church? How will we continue to worship and celebrate the sacraments? How will we continue ministries and committee work? How will we continue to reach out to our friends in greater need than our own? Bluntly, how will we continue to pay the bills? We are grateful for your continued financial support of the church, as well as many outreach opportunities. We're grateful for your flexibility and patience as we try to prepare for you meaningful worship and ministries. As an aside, the Stated Clerk of our denomination, while watching church professionals quickly learn how to be the church online, quipped that it was like trying to fix a plane while it's flying. I actually think, together, we've done a good job fixing the plane; we've done a good job being the church. That being said, I join you in your eagerness for us to regather once again for worship in this beautiful setting. I ask for all of us to hang in there together for a little while longer.

There's another part of koinonia the writer emphasizes – our walking with God in the light. I invite you, after the service, today, to review the “if we say” or “if we confess” conditional clauses in this paragraph of the text. Some of these clauses are speaking in opposition to these false, dissident teachings that are making their way into the community – this time teaching that people can be sinless; thus, they don't need to be forgiven. Quite the opposite, cries the text's writer, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And the consequences of this are dire – we will not have fellowship with God or one another. The other clauses offer the reader assurance, that if we recognize our sin and confess our sin, God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This whole paragraph reflects on the complicate balance of faithful Christian life. – acknowledging our sin, but not wallowing in our sin. We can't reach sinlessness, but we can do better. We confess our sins and God will freely forgive our sins. People who live in koinonia with God and with one another need not deny they are sinners. Nor should we feel discouraged or “less than” because we're not perfect. We have an advocate in Jesus Christ, who is righteous, even when we're not. Because of his truthfulness, his love and sacrifice for us, we are able to step out of the shadows of sin and shame, and walk, with confidence into the light with God. Amen. [Ibid., pp.398-399]