



**25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost:  
“We Are -- The Church!!”  
Nov. 14, 2010**

In the early months of ministry here at Mt. Eden, several of my colleagues and friends came to visit. It is a joy to have colleagues and friends visit, because their eyes see what my eyes first saw: the beauty of Mt. Eden. They are impressed, as was I, with our multi-purpose worship space, how when we gather as a community of faith, we do so around the altar, the table of our Lord – on Sundays, during our Lenten soup suppers, and our various “Mt. Eatin’” gatherings. They like the reality that we are not tied (physically or literally) to pews, that there is the ability to re-arrange worship space –not because one simply wants to change – but with sound theological reasoning behind these changes. Many who have visited have also been impressed with our outdoor worship space – space that on a summer Sunday morning reminds us of being in the world and part of the world at the same time.

That could explain why there is a disconnect with Luke’s Gospel this morning. Jesus and his disciples are in the Temple Herod built. Herod is not well liked throughout the New Testament. Herod’s rule was one of the more violent periods in history. Yet, one thing Herod did accomplish was rebuilding the Temple. This rebuilding more than doubled the size of the Temple Mount. This allowed people to come and go freely without being cramped. The internal work of the Temple was completed in eighteen months. Outer work and decorations of the Temple took most of Jesus’ lifetime to complete.

As Jesus and his disciples are in the Temple, the chief priests and scribes question Jesus about many things. “Pretending to be honest”, Luke writes, they intend to trap Jesus in his own words. They question Jesus on whom to pay taxes to. They question who the “right” spouse is for a woman whose husband died and had seven brothers. Jesus, seeing through their questions, answers in ways that leave them frustrated for not being able to trap Jesus. Jesus turns the questions of the scribes and Pharisees into a teaching moment for the disciples. Jesus warns them about appropriate behavior in the house of worship. “Beware”, Jesus says, “of those who speak long prayers”. In the midst of this teaching moment, Jesus sees a woman give all that she had rather than the little others gave in their wealth and commends the woman for her gift.

This moment is lost on the disciples, who experience a bit of Attention Deficit Disorder, and exclaim, “look at these stones! Aren’t they magnificent?”

The disciples see what they think to be the larger picture: the safety and security that exists within the Temple walls. Jesus calls the disciples out of their ADD and into reality: not one stone will be left upon another, all will be thrown down.

Now admittedly, there are places we visit that take our breath away. Our breath can be taken away because of the beauty, simplicity, or even the extravagance of the place.

But there are also times our breath can be taken away – not from the beauty, simplicity or elegance of a place, but from fear or worry. Without realizing it, we hold our breath as we await news of test results or a medical procedure. We catch our breath when we hear a loved one has entered the hospital or had an accident. We might even gasp when we hear news of the unexpected.

Shortness of breath can be a symptom for a heart attack, anxiety, or panic attacks. None of these are pleasant to experience. Yet there is much in the world today that can take our breath away, for good or for bad. A blushing bride, a newborn baby, the smile of a small child, a beautiful sunset, the celebration of a major accomplishment can take our breath away. Likewise, there is much that can keep us on edge, leaving us feeling as though we are gasping for air. We worry about what the future might hold.

Now the future can be short term matter of time: later today, tomorrow, this week, next week. Future can also be a long term time frame. The future can be filled with those things we anticipate and look forward to: the next school vacation, the next hunting trip, the next month, the next year. Wondering about what is ahead of us can be good. It can provide a sense of hope, a sense of excitement, and a sense of anticipation about what to come. Wondering becomes problematic when we start to worry about that which is ahead of us. It does not help us, but hinders us. Worry robs us of joy. Worry robs us of peace. It keeps us on guard and on edge.

We wonder – and worry about what is next for us. As Christians, we wonder also about when the end of the world will come. For twenty-one centuries of human existence, this question has always existed. Many have tried to guess – and predict when the end of the world will happen.

The reality is, we are still here!

The disciples ask for a sign as to when all of these things will take place. Jesus reminds the disciples – and us, of the order with which these things will happen: nation will rise against nation; kingdom will rise against kingdom. For over 21 centuries, the world has known of nation rising against nation, and kingdom rising against kingdom. As wars have waged, many have seen these events as being part of the end of time. In their false hope, many have been extremely disappointed, not to mention probably ridiculed for believing in an event that did not happen.

In years past, some took Christ's coming to be an immediate event. Anticipating this to be sooner rather than later, many sold their possessions, quit their jobs, and simply sat. And waited. And waited. And waited some more.

This waiting is what Paul was writing about in his letter to the Thessalonians. Paul reminds his readers that “anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” Thinking the return of Christ was soon at hand, some in the community of Thessalonica not only quit their jobs, but also relied heavily on the generosity of the wealthier members of the community. In other words, Paul was admonishing the slackers of the community.

Paul was not telling the community to remove from its midst those who did not work. Nor was Paul addressing individuals who for whatever reason were unable to work. Nor was Paul expressing a biblical work ethic.

Instead, Paul was reminding his readers that as a community of faith, it takes each and every person. A community of faith is not a matter of stones and mortar. Instead, it is people. It is you and I, young and old, rich and poor, who come together.

When we come together as community, when we come together as Church – we have a responsibility, first to God, and to each other. Everyone is part of the community of faith. Everyone is needed to continue the work of the church, here, and beyond our walls into the community of Southern Lancaster County and beyond.

Sometimes it can seem that the work we do as Christians is thankless and meaningless. The world can laugh at us, and challenge us when we least expect it. The world can see our witness and wonder why we do what we do. Even our own families may wonder and turn against us. Yet whether it is through our witness, or because of our witness, I have been reminded over the past few days of what a blessing you are. You are a blessing to the community, to each other, and to me. For being such a blessing, I echo Paul’s words in Philippians, “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

While at the First Call Theological Education event over the past few days, I found myself reminded of this often. The event was a chance to come together with other first call pastors to share and reflect both on God and our various ministries. There was much laughter, and much listening. I heard stories from other first call pastors throughout the region. Some of the stories I heard were positive. Other stories left me wondering how/why a congregation could call itself part of the Church when its care and partnership with its called pastor was questionable.

Mt. Eden has faithful and willing workers. As I have served and worked alongside you, Southern Lancaster County is blessed to have such a faithful witness. Because of your witness, I feel blessed to be part of this communion, this company of saints.

We have been blessed. While neither you nor I are perfect, we are the Church, a living, human, breathing, church that continues to be an instrument of Jesus Christ in word and deeds to our community and beyond.

Sisters and brothers, let us not be weary in well doing, but let us be faithful to the work already begun in us, trusting in God’s mercy to give us the strength and courage for the facing of these days.