

Peace Be With You
John 20:19-31

Low Sunday or Holy Humor Sunday (Bright Sunday)

This Sunday is known as Low Sunday. Everyone can guess why it is called Low Sunday. It is called Low Sunday because of the generally low attendance. Last Sunday, we had good numbers of people gathered at the sanctuary. We had a baptism and welcomed a new member. Also, many kids came and enjoyed the Easter egg hunt. The biggest story of all was celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can cross all that off our to-do list for a while and relax a bit. Right? But the Easter season lasts 50 days. Traditionally, the Sunday after Easter was called ‘Holy Humor Sunday’ or ‘Bright Sunday.’ I think “Holy Humor Sunday” is much better than Low Sunday. A little humor wouldn’t hurt!

“So - a little girl and her mother ran into their pastor at the store. The girl told the pastor they were getting ready for Easter. Seeing a teaching opportunity, the pastor replied, “Oh really? Do you know what Easter’s all about?” The girl looked a little offended. “Of course I do. It’s when Jesus went to Jerusalem on a donkey and he got in trouble and they nailed him on a cross and then he died. They put him in a tomb with a big rock in front of it. But three days later the rock was rolled away.” “That’s great!” said the pastor, pleased to know the Sunday School program worked so well. Then, the girl continued, “But that’s not all. When the rock gets rolled back, Jesus steps out and looks around, if he sees his shadow there will be six more weeks of winter.”

As the name, ‘Holy Humor Sunday’ indicates, the early Christian church understood Sundays after Easter as days of joy and laughter. So, I hope that we continue to experience joy and freedom from fear and isolation throughout this season of Easter.

The doors were locked...

Unfortunately, Jesus’ disciples had not experienced this joy and freedom yet even after Easter. According to Scripture, the disciples gathered at a house. They had already heard about Mary Magdalene’s witness, “I have seen the Lord!” but they didn’t believe it. They were afraid of the Jews searching for their next prey so they locked the door of the house. Fear controlled their thoughts and actions rather than trust. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ had not yet become real for them.

Facing the uncertainty and instability of their situation, Jesus’ disciples gathered together. Perhaps, that’s a part of our human nature as social beings. When things look bad and dangerous, we prefer to stay with a cohort. Even in a safe place, we prefer to stay with a group of people with whom we share a common characteristic or experience. On Maundy Thursday, we had a nice fellowship and a joint worship service with Zion Korean UMC. Right? How was it for you? The meal was so good. I’ve learned for the first time that food can be delicious even without meat. An interesting thing was that even though we gathered as one family in Christ, an invisible line still separated us from one another. There were about the same number of Zion church members and Asbury church members. When I saw the pews from the pulpit, Zion members mostly sat on the left side and Asbury members on the right. I didn’t instruct you to do it, but we naturally tend to sit with our cohorts and there was a racial line that still divided us from one another. So next year, I am planning to do something fun to make both congregations mingle with one another. If you want to know about it, please join our 2024 Maundy Thursday!

We prefer to stay with people who are similar to us. That's not a bad thing. The problem is when we close the door to outsiders. Unfortunately, this is what is happening in our society and the world. No one would deny that "Americans are more divided than ever." We don't want to talk about sensitive political and social issues with those who have different views. Politicians are supposed to rationally debate with one another for better solutions for society but nowadays, they use their power to expel members as a weapon against political opponents. People stay with like-minded people and close the door to outsiders. Will there be peace behind these closed doors? Not really. Jesus' disciples didn't find peace in the locked room.

Open the Door!

The good news is that Jesus came to them. Jesus came to the locked house and greeted them, "Peace be with you." Despite their disbelief, Jesus appeared and showed them the wounds of the nails in his hands and the hole in his side. Jesus, the light of the world broke into the locked house and showed the disciples a way of moving forward by giving them a new purpose. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus didn't want his disciples to stay in a locked house. He didn't want them to be locked in fear and remain in isolation but wanted them to open their doors and go into the world. Trust in the risen Christ is the only key to unlocking ourselves from fear and isolation. The only way to peace is opening the locked door and being a witness of the resurrected Christ. I know it's not easy but we can try and open the locked door inside of us and embrace one another.

During the Maundy Thursday worship service, we did a ritual of hand-washing. Two by two, we washed each other's hands saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I bless you." I could see love among you. If you had seen Linda Cameron and Joan White's smiles while washing each other's hands, you would know what I mean.

Of course, it's not easy to wash the hands of someone you don't know, so Asbury members washed Asbury church members' hands and Zion members washed the hands of Zion church members. One exception was Harry Edward and Choong Lee from Zion who washed each other's hands. When I saw that they were washing each other's hands and blessing one another, I felt as if I could hear the sound of a door unlocking! Yes. The door might not be fully open yet but at least, I could hear the sound of unlocking the door between us.

When the service was almost over, a homeless lady, half-drunk, somehow came into the sanctuary. Maybe she heard the sound of the unlocking door. When she entered, she seemed unstable but Harry welcomed her into the church. She didn't really participate in the worship, since she came in as we sang the closing hymn. But she seemed to be very grateful because she felt she was welcomed and accepted at that moment. Can you hear the sound of the unlocking door? We can welcome strangers and show our hospitality to those who are different from us because of the love our Christ taught us. With trust in the risen Christ, we can open the locked-doors inside us and in our society and go out into the world to which we are sent by Christ. That is the first step to experience and build peace.

Sharing a meal...

At the beginning of the sermon, I said that this Sunday is called Holy Humor Sunday or Bright Sunday. Do you know the best and most practical way of sharing the joy and light of resurrected Christ and building peace? Sharing a meal with people! I believe many of you had a wonderful family gathering on Easter and shared a wonderful meal. Sharing meals makes people

come together and it has always been a part in the processes of promoting peace. When Jesus' disciples retreated back to the Sea of Galilee, Jesus appeared again to his disciples and prepared a meal for them. Jesus set a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. By sharing a meal with his disciples who ran away from his crucifixion, Jesus forgave and reconciled with them. So, this is what I would like you to do during this 50 days of Easter season. Please invite one of our church members or your neighbors whom you still do not know well to share a meal, joy and laughter with them. In this way, we can continue to experience and share the joy and peace from Christ throughout this season. My beloved Asbury family. Peace be with you. Amen.