Sermon for Easter Day 2014  
St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church  
April 20 2014

Welcome on this glorious morn when we celebrate Holy Baptism as we rejoice in Christ’s Resurrection. Easter is a most fitting time to welcome a new member into the risen Body of Christ. Because of a vision given by God, Peter has come to realize that God welcomes all regardless of their nationality, or other worldly divisions. Peter goes further than all the other early disciples to claim, based on his vision from God, that a believer in Christ Jesus no longer has to follow the Kosher Laws of Judaism he had previously followed. In fact, our first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles is spoken by Peter to Roman Centurion Cornelius, his family and friends, just before Peter baptizes that entire Roman household.

How appropriate that today we welcome another member of the Miller – Vayda household, into this part of the Body of Christ in Ooltewah, TN. Her mother Suzanne, and her grandparents Don and Pat, and Aunt Christy became members here almost 21 years ago. We rejoice that Kayle has made her decision to be baptized in this church where her family has long ties.

So what is the part of the Body of Christ into which Kayle is being welcomed like? Whenever asked about St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church in Ooltewah, my late husband, Mark, always had a favorite story to share. While Mark was excited from the beginning that we were called to this parish, Easter Morning 2010 he was still in the process of truly getting to know everyone. Though clear skies prevailed, the morning was quite crisp. Since we had not converted Katie Hall into an Activity Center, the people gathered for Easter breakfast had decided the best way to serve food was out on the porch that brisk morning. In an effort to make the breakfast as festive as possible, the wrought iron glass covered table of our porch set was used to display the bounty of potluck dishes. Steaming casseroles were transported from the kitchen ovens to the tables set outside.

Mark, who loved to be in the kitchen was trying to help get food ready. Several casseroles had already left the kitchen. He was gathering serving utensils and headed through the church when it happened. There was a loud crack like a rock being split open. Then there was a clear crash, the sound of breaking glass all around. This was immediately followed by gasps of horror which reverberated through the building. As he rounded the corner, there on the porch were at least a dozen casserole dishes and platters strewn amid the shattered glass table top. The carefully prepared food, now filled with shards of glass intermingled one with another, and covered the porch floor.

All around people stood in stunned silence. Then a voice laughingly said, “I never said I was strong in physics.” Chuckling under their breath the formerly stunned crowd leapt into action. The trash can was retrieved, many hands began to rescue the dishes spared in the fall. Others carefully began to pick through the broken pieces to throw things away.
A man new to the group had an unusual request, “Do we have a snow shovel?” He quickly went to work scooping up the mess with the snow shovel. This unusual tool proved to be the safest way to prevent cut fingers.

Whenever Mark told this story, he always marveled: in the midst of the mess and all the broken dishes, no one yelled or accused another. They worked together, cleaned up the ruined food, and there was still plenty of food for all. That, he would say, is who St. Francis of Assisi parish is.

2000 years ago, the two Marys and the Roman guards watching Jesus’ tomb felt the earth shake, heard Jesus’ tomb crack open, and watched in amazement as an angel from heaven, who sat on the stone now rolled away from the tomb, spoke to them. The words the angel spoke both terrified and delighted them. As they fled the tomb they encountered the now risen Jesus. His first instruction to his female disciples: “Do not be afraid!” His second instruction: "Go and tell the others." Those words of Jesus still echo through the ages and are spoken to any and all who follow him.

In a minute, Kayle, we will pray a prayer for you, a prayer for all those who are baptized by water and the Holy Spirit into new life with Jesus. In that prayer, we ask God to give you along with all of us:

1. An inquiring and discerning heart;
2. The courage to will and to persevere,
3. A spirit to know and to love our great God, and
4. The gift of joy and wonder in all God’s works.

Embrace that prayer, live that prayer, and believe with us that God is working through us all. For the one who stretched out arms of love on the hard wood of the cross in order that all might tumble into his embrace will hold you. The one who was once dead now lives. And nothing, in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, or in all of God’s creation can ever separate us from His powerful love.

Alleluia Christ is Risen!

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