

A New Day  
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(Acts 2:42-47 NRSV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. {43} Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. {44} All who believed were together and had all things in common; {45} they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. {46} Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, {47} praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

There is a pilgrimage that virtually every American feels compelled to make at least once in their lives. That is to make a pilgrimage either to Anaheim or Orlando to visit that pilgrim site known as DISNEY!

Disney is seen by many people as the real symbol for America.

Forget the Statue of Liberty, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights - America means Mickey Mouse.

The recreational mecca called Disney World has supplanted America's historical mecca called Washington, D.C., as the nation's most popular tourist site. Some now argue that Disneyland/World is the spirit of America, the nation's key sacred space, the bearer of the images that carry American meaning and mission.

Disney's mission statement is simple and straightforward: "Provide People Happiness." In its quest to meet this goal, Disney focuses all its energies in the realm of fantasy - convincing the whole country that to find happiness involves escaping reality.

So, when you visit Disney Land, its central image is the Castle of Sleeping Beauty. Its graceful, soaring storybook towers and turrets preside over the rest of the theme park below. Yet unlike all the other attractions in this wonderland it is only a hollow shell - void of content. Except for a few novelty shops along the walkway that cuts through it, this beautiful symbol of Disney's fantasy world come to life is empty.

But its very emptiness is full of meaning.

For that is precisely the function of Disney - to empty us of the harsh realities of life and render us unconscious to those things which are too hard to bear. That is part of the experience of Disney - to become "unconscious" of the real world and to enter a never-never land of fantasy and fakery. Fittingly Sleeping Beauty's Castle - a monument to a trance-like sleep - serves as the portal to this plane.

While Disney entices participants to fall asleep in order to escape life, the church's mission must be to urge people to wake up - in order to experience an authentic and full existence. To experience life as Jesus tells us in John's Gospel: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

I don't know about you — but it has been a tough couple of weeks for me.

I began examining my motives for what I was doing to help the recovery of the region from the flood. Why was I doing what I was doing?

It started with guilt —

I busted my butt to try to do what I thought were, not only the "right" things, but also the most critical things.

I, like many of you, felt guilty that I did not recognize the problem on Sunday. I like many of you felt that I did not do enough to help those who were devastated. So I tried to jump in with both of my feet.

If I was truly doing what I was doing because of guilt, I know that it would not last — because guilt only lasts so long.

When we do something out of guilt — and when the situation gets tough we do one of two things — we either run away and hide, or we become very possessive of it, as we try to convince ourselves that our actions are the only right or correct actions.

Late last week, it all came to a head to me. I became frustrated and disillusioned with the task in front of me. Instead of running away I decided to seek council from someone else.

I called someone that I have gotten to know these last few weeks and shared with them my frustration — and instead of telling me what I wanted to hear — instead of justifying my feelings — his suggestion was —

"Can I pray for you."

For the next several minutes he prayed a prayer that I would be very capable of hearing God's vision for me. And that I would see God's vision for the

future.

It was a powerful experience — because what he reminded me of — is that which we all need to be reminded — that it is not about ME, and it is not about YOU — but ultimately it is all about God.

When we ask ourselves — WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM ME? How do we answer?

Unfortunately — I think the answer to the question depends on how we see ourselves.

In one of Bruce Narramore's books, he wrote about a woman he was counseling. He asked her to write 10 sentences beginning, "I am ..." Here's the way she began:

"I am a poor mother. I am a disappointment to my parents. I am overweight. I am unhappy. I am divorced."

Narramore said, "Ma'am, I didn't ask you to name 10 bad things about yourself. Name 10 good things." Here are the kinds of things she listed:

"I try to be a good mother. I try to keep a clean house. I try ... " What was she saying? "I try to, but I don't."

Those were just 10 sneaky ways of condemning herself again.

Too many of us do the same. We worry about burning a trail to heaven or burning one out of hell until we're neurotic about it. We can't enjoy our religion. We don't believe there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We feed this condemnation to ourselves: "I can't do enough.", I can't do the right things.

And so we do NOTHING.

But God has given us the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. If only we will see the opportunities

Today is commitment Sunday.

My favorite quote from Martin Luther is — Sin boldly, but trust God more boldly still

Today we are inviting you to commit yourself to the ministries of Ridge Church. We invite you to identify where you feel God is calling you in ministry.

The one thing I do know is God is calling you SOMEWHERE

There are no spectators in Christianity

We cannot sit back and let everyone else do it for us

Our Christian life cannot be like Sleeping Beauties castle  
Beautiful on the outside  
but hollow — empty on the inside

God wants us to participate in sharing God's love

The second thing you are invited to do today is make a faith promise for the coming year. We encourage you to set a target for your giving. Because without a target you will never hit the bulls eye!

The challenge the church now faces is not a swelling emptiness in people's lives, — like sleeping beauties castle — but being heard and seen through the crush and crowd of experiences that promise to provide the spiritual presence so many of us are longing for.

There is no problem finding something to believe in these days — the temptation for most seekers is choosing too much to believe in and all the wrong things to believe in.

I have come to understand that the purpose of the church is to be a “school for love”. I wish I came up with that phrase — but I didn't.

But think about it — what makes the church different from other “clubs” is that we have a God who loves us UNCONDITIONALLY and one who wants us to share that love with others.

That means that the church must teach us HOW to love and maybe most important HOW to LIVE in love!

A French proverb says, "You not only have to want what you want, but you have to want what your want leads to."

And what most of us want is to be loved and to belong to others who love us.  
THAT IS THE CHURCH

But where does that love lead to?

It leads to sharing that love with the world.

No longer putting self first.

No longer satisfied with what is best for me

But wanting what is best for those we love.

It means respecting the gifts and talents of all of God's Children — no matter how big or small.

Cardinal Newman, in the last year of his life, wrote in his journal: "Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather fear that it shall never have a beginning."

Today — through our commitments is our NEW DAY — our new beginning  
As we begin to love out God's love for our lives and become a "school for love."

I want to end with these words from Barbara Kingsolver — the great American novelist.

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for.  
And the most you can do is live inside that hope.

*Animal Dreams*