

Year A, May 14, 2017
5 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Alleluia, Christ is risen. (The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.)

This Sunday is a good day to turn our attention to community as suggested by our lessons; it is also Mother's Day in the secular world and so we celebrate the women of our church today. We celebrate them because they bring so much to our community, gifts those of us with a little too much testosterone don't have – much more than just the ability to give birth. And so the diversity makes our community better and stronger and more enjoyable. We need community, as humans we are wired for it – the great majority of us anyway.

This may be one of those times that as Jean Vanier says "...when together we discover that we make up a single body, that we belong to each other and that God has called us to be together as a source of life for each other." And Mary Nelson adds: "the church is the glue that keeps us together when we disagree. It is the gasoline that keeps us going during the tough times. It is the guts that enables us to take risks when we need to." And if you aren't convinced by these visions, George MacLeod reminds us, "The Bible is all about community: from the Garden of Eden to the City at the end." George knew a bit about community, as he founded the International Community on the Island of Iona in Scotland that enjoys a world-wide following today.

When preparing this homily, I recalled a conversation that I had with a Colonel I worked for briefly in Thailand (– this is another one, not the one I mentioned earlier). Nevertheless, in those days, Thailand was very rural and Bangkok was not nearly the modern city it is today. Small villages were everywhere, surrounded by rice fields, which was the major crop and form of livelihood for those outside of the relatively few cities and towns in the country. And usually, somewhere within the village, was a beautiful Buddhist temple shining brightly in the sun from the gold leaf with which it was adorned. And as we drove through the countryside, I commented on how silly it seemed to me that those farmers would take what little money they had to spend on the construction and maintenance of the temple, and especially the gold leaf with which it was adorned. You have to understand that was when I was young and foolish, whereas today, I am old and foolish. But the Colonel thought it made perfect sense. It would be difficult if not impossible for any one person in the village to accumulate enough money to buy a radio or bicycle, or build a beautiful house for

themselves. But together they had this beautiful temple, which belonged to the community, and they could all derive satisfaction and fulfillment from that. I learned a lot that day.

It isn't so different from our church property here. Alone, most of us couldn't afford such a building with all of the finery that we have to support our liturgy. But together, we can. And we take pride in it and participate in different ways to help maintain it. It is a way that we share with each other. It is a way that we can support each other, to provide love and fulfill other needs that we all have. I'm sure that it must mean something to you, as it does to me. Otherwise, why would we keep coming?

Of course, as we heard in the scripture from Acts today, things may not always go well within the community. And although I don't know of any contemporary churches that stone their deacons or ministers, many have a way of driving them out. And it isn't just a problem between clergy and lay people; certainly many church communities have divided constituencies that do battle against each other frequently. It happens far too often; we forget that God's house has many rooms/dwelling places. That there is room for diversity of thought and belief or whatever. It is the thing that I love most about the Episcopal Church, about this church, because, on balance, we seem to be able to stay in community better than most despite the differences we have.

Another possible problem with community was expressed by Billy Graham's observation: "Our world has become a neighborhood without becoming a brotherhood." And while there can be strife within the community, where we are usually very much alike. It is even more likely that we can become closed to those who do not look or act like us. In other words, it is easy to forget that we are called to care for the "widows, orphans and immigrants" who may come among us, or live near us.

After all, Jesus tells us in John today: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these..." So while we celebrate the female members of our community and the joy and talents they bring; while we acknowledge the wonderful benefits and relationships of our community, let us not be closed to those who could also benefit from joining with us.

In fact, you may have read that the Church and our Presiding Bishop Michael are encouraging us to participate in the vision of Becoming Beloved Community. It is a commitment to study and use new resources developed in response to General Convention Resolution C019. It is a long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation and justice. I hope you will learn more about this path and think of ways our community can more actively participate.

I would also ask you to pray and consider another aspect of our community. You may have noticed some cracks, etc., here in the Nave or that our new kitchen has made the Parish Hall look a bit sad. The Bishop's Committee is considering how to proceed, but whatever we do, it will mean the expenditure of money. Therefore, we will have a special offering on Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, June 4th and 11th, to help pay for the improvements and I expect that we will be able to provide more detailed information to you about the plan and needs before then. Your generosity will be appreciated.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. (And the people respond) The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

or

In the name of the one God who created us, who redeemed us, and who sustains us. Amen.