

Acts 6:1-7 1 Peter 2:4-10 John 14:1-14
Come to the Lord

Over the many years of my life as a minister, I've encountered a lot of people who "sort of know" the story of Jesus, and "kind of know" about God – people who have heard all sorts of things, a wee bit here and another piece there. Then, when they put it all together, they come up with a string of things – some belonging to the highly commercialized versions of Christmas [Santa Claus] and of Easter [bunny rabbits who somehow lay eggs]; some to the Jehovah Witnesses; some to groups that are cult like; some to the occult and even satanic worship.

I hope you are sensing that I'm suggesting that there are people around us who have a strange, sometimes frightening, even somewhat dangerous mix of things that have become for them a "confusion of faith."

I also hope you're sensing that I'm suggesting that the main-line Christian denominations, including ours, are doing the least amount of advertising, of telling the story of Jesus, effectively and accurately. We just aren't very good at talking about God or our faith. We are no longer very good, if we ever were, at taking the faith story, at sharing our faith beyond these walls and outside of this faith community. Therefore, the most that people will continue to hear are the confusing, often dangerous, almost always inaccurate bits and pieces of the faith story as others present it.

In the passage from Acts, we have a progress report on how things were going in the early church. It seems that the disciples are frustrated that their time was being consumed with needed and necessary work that was keeping them from preaching the gospel, from telling the story of Jesus. So, they appointed some "office-bearers", within the church. And the church became a double-prong venture. There were those who would preach and teach and tell; and others who would do the practical things, like collecting for the needy and distributing money and goods to those who were either temporarily or permanently in need. The gospel, verbally preached and acted out in deeds of Christian love, was out amongst the people. As the people went about their daily routine, the gospel, in word and deed, greeted them.

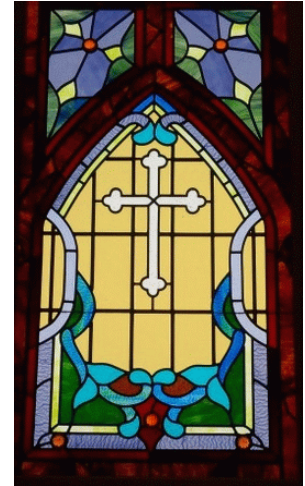
Peter's first letter talks about the early church as well. In fact, Peter talked about "the living stone" on which the church was founded, around which the church was to grow.

The living stone, rejected by many, but chosen and precious with God, was Jesus, and Peter called the early Christians to come to Jesus, to accept him and therefore find a sanctuary and a salvation, a friend and a Saviour – for life.

Here, in Peter's letter, we find again that we are to do something as a church. We are to build upon the rock, the living stone. In Jesus we have our cornerstone, but we are to build the church, to add ourselves and others to make a living structure, an edifice, to build up a community of believers that will strengthen and help one another, and reach out into the world.

There are many today who wonder why we should bother with the church. Why not let everyone find their own way to God? After all, spirituality is an individual thing, isn't it?

I remind you of our earlier reflection, and would add another story. A Spartan king, years ago, boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are these walls about which



you boast?” His host pointed at his bodyguard and his magnificent troops. “These,” he said, “are the walls of Sparta, every one a brick.”

William Barclay has said, “So long as a brick lies by itself, it is useless; it becomes of use only when it is incorporated into a building. ... So too must Christians be built into the fabric of the church.”

Peter describes Christians as a holy priesthood – that is those who come regularly to God and who bring others to God as well. A couple of things come to mind, as I hear Peter’s description. A priest is one who builds a bridge for others to come to God. A priest is one who counts it as vitally important that others find God as that s/he has found God. Of our being chosen as a holy nation and a royal priesthood, Peter said, “you are chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God.”

So, these are our marching orders, but how are we going to do it. Holy, royal, chosen we may be, but we are still insecure and uncertain that we have what it takes to be the church, to be priests, as Acts and Peter have described it.

John’s gospel assures us that Jesus knew that what he was calling us to do would not be easy for us. He knew that we would have second thoughts, self-doubt and timidity. In this passage, he is speaking specifically to the disciples who would soon know overwhelming sorrow and confusion because of his crucifixion. But his words of comfort and hope and presence are for us as well.

Jesus said, “Trust in God, always; trust also in me ...” Then, Jesus made some promises, on which we can all depend. He said that one day his disciples would do what he did, and even greater works. And he promised that any prayer offered in his name would be granted.

Friends, we are disciples of Jesus. In his strength, we can do what he did. Through prayer, in his name, we can draw on the power of God, for good. We can do what he did. And he went about telling the stories of faith, showing those who would draw near who God is, what God is like, teaching everyone about the love of God, a love that never lets us go, never lets us down, never gives on us.

Throughout my ministry, I have met people who “sort of know” the story of Jesus and “kind of know” about God – people who have heard all sorts of things, a wee bit here and another piece there. And I keep returning to the call of Jesus to be his church, to be, together, a royal priesthood and a chosen people – for the sake of everyone who does not know him, those do not know what it is to come to him. I keep hearing Jesus’ promise that we can do what he did, and even greater things, if we will trust him. I keep remembering, when I think of those outside the church, that it was for them he died.