

The Way of Jesus
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

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Since you and I are just getting to know each other, I knew that if I did something outrageous like hand you each a balloon as you took a bulletin, this was riskier than I wanted to be just now. However, I know that you all know about balloons and have probably blown up a lot of balloons for some party or celebration. Even if you never blew up a balloon, you know how balloons work.

One thing that you will discover about me is that I am full of enthusiasm for lots of things. I am especially enthusiastic about “working for Jesus.” The word enthusiasm comes from the Greek word meaning filled with God’s spirit and power. Although I am a newcomer to MCC, I have noticed that there’s a lot of enthusiasm in this church community which must mean that you are filled with God’s spirit and power too. That’s really awesome.

Well...back to balloons. Take a look at this balloon that I am holding. I can blow it up quickly, by filling it with air and I can deflate it just as quickly by letting all the air out. Enthusiasm is often difficult to sustain and in some ways our enthusiasm rate is about the same as this balloon. We are quickly fired up about some things, then are just as quickly bored or lose our initial zest and become deflated. Imagine the balloon as your body and the air as ‘enthusiasm’—God’s power. Sometimes when doubts come along and you feel that God has deserted you, you tend to deflate.

If I tie a knot in the balloon, however, the balloon has resilience. I can toss the balloon and pass it to one of you. If we all had balloons, there could be a lot of enthusiasm and support—God’s power and love—being passed around.

There are many ways that God's power and love help us and heal us. Each of us experiences the ups and downs that come with living our lives and creating some balance and harmony. Our personal faith journeys reflect that.

As Christians we are charged/called, to spread our enthusiasm and share God's power and love with the people who are around us.

This morning's scripture is mostly about faith, faith in Jesus. We heard Jesus' resume and credentials which tell us what it is that Jesus did for us and why we should follow Jesus today. We are reminded of the amazing grace of God's very imprint in Jesus and in us. We are assured that endurance through suffering and joy is the power of God in us for others. We are connected to all people when we travel the Way of Jesus, the Way of Love.

The book of Hebrews goes on to tell us that we have direct access to God, not through rituals we do, not through congregations we belong to, but through Jesus. Because of Jesus, who he was and what he did, we can enter God's presence; we can come before the Lord and Creator of the universe and be heard. We take it for granted that when we lift up a prayer God actually stops and listens to us. But when you think about it, this is an amazing reality---God, focusing on us.

Jesus, the Son of God, as a communication link ----struck a personal chord within me. In my experience as both a parent and a pastor, the mystery of faith that brings the most soul searching and questioning is Jesus as the Son of God. I want to share a firsthand experience with you. When my older son was in confirmation class in 9th grade, I encouraged him to participate but with the understanding that at the end of the year he would make any affirmations and decisions for himself. I was no longer the Christian educator in our home church but I had observed many confirmands not having a voice about joining the church. Because we were active in our church and I worked in the church, we simply

wanted Ed to know that this was his personal faith decision, not his parents' decision. We assumed that he would join because we remembered how Ed loved his first Bible and read it over and over again. He attended church school and youth group willingly. When I started working in the church, he enjoyed helping me and was one of my junior leaders at VBS. Ed's father and I took our baptismal promises seriously and we consistently provided nurture and education through our church community and at home. We tried to be authentic in our own faith practices. Even my parents, especially my Dad whom Ed greatly admired, were role models.

To my great surprise, at the end of confirmation, Ed, humble and apologetic, said that he could not join the church. When I asked him "Why?", he told me that he had been struggling and wrestling with the belief that Jesus was divine and the Son of God. He did believe that Jesus was an exemplary person, teacher, prophet. As his mother, I knew--intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, Ed was on a faith journey that he began as a child. At 14 years old, he did not want to commit and say yes to something that he personally did not accept. Although, I was surprised, I was able to say OK, I am glad that you had the experience of confirmation class, I am proud that you thought deeply about this and made a decision for yourself. Then I encouraged him to continue being a Seeker.

This Seeker at age 20 asked a Marine Chaplain how he could be confirmed. When his own son was born, he nurtured this child's faith, often in the ways that he had been nurtured. Ed is now a deacon and active in his church community. His faith has made a difference in his life. At times of challenge and difficulty when he had done all he humanly could do, he found strength, hope, peace, and encouragement through prayer.

All of us gathered here are Seekers. We are on a faith journey traveling the Way of Jesus. Questions and discoveries are part of our journey. The

mystery of our faith calls us to “embrace paradox----grace and truth, life and death, darkness and light, duty and delight. Jesus is the one who shows us how. Jesus embodies glory and humiliation, power and suffering, authority and servanthood, radical grace and radical obedience.” (Susan Andrews, *Feasting the Word Year B*, Vol. 4, p.136)

This week as I traveled through Branford to visit my mother, I remembered that “Silly Putty” was invented there and manufactured not far from where I grew up. Silly Putty can be compared to human life. Like Silly Putty, we can be pulled apart, rolled into little balls, flung against the wall, or smashed flat. But then like Silly Putty, all this can be reversed.

God believes in us, loves us, and God in Jesus Christ still comes today to forgive us, to scrape us back together again, and mold us into something even better than that which we were before.

I am thankful to God that we are not alone, that we have each other and the Spirit of Jesus Christ among us.

For all that I am truly enthused----filled with God’s spirit and power.

To remember your own enthusiasm---the blessing of God’s power and spirit in your life, I have balloons for all of you after the service to take home and remember this holy enthusiasm---God’s power and spirit---a gift that we receive and a gift to share with others. Amen.