

A Kingdom Without Borders

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April 8, 2018

Acts 1:1-8

CHILDREN'S TIME

Do you like eggs? There are so many different ways to fix eggs — fried, scrambled, or hard boiled. You can make an omelet or a breakfast burrito. You can eat them by themselves or mix them with chicken or tuna to make sandwiches. Eggs are also used to make yummy desserts like cookies, cakes, pies, and all sort of goodies!

Did you know that some chicken eggs are white and some are brown? Have you ever wondered why? I had chickens when I was growing up and the white chickens laid white eggs and the reddish-brown ones laid brown eggs.

Now is there any difference between white eggs and brown eggs, besides the shell color?

Well, let's see, if we crack them open.

(Break a brown egg and a white egg into a clear glass bowl.)

Can you see any difference? Nope, on the inside they look exactly the same. The color of the shell actually has nothing to do with an egg's quality, how good it is for you, or even the flavor. On the inside, all eggs are the same.

You know, that's true of people too. Some people may be light-skinned and have blond hair and blue eyes. Others may be dark-skinned and have brown hair and brown eyes. Some people don't speak English, but different languages than we can understand.

On the outside, people look and sound different, but on the inside they are the same, and God loves everyone the same.

Peter was one of Jesus' close friends and disciples. He was Jewish and at a certain point he believed that God's love was only for Jewish people. But God showed Peter that God created people to look different and sound different, but loves them all the same, no matter where they are from. Jesus also taught his friends to love all people, like God does. Sometimes that can be hard, but God will help us.

Let's end our time with a song. Do you know "Jesus Loves The Little

Children”? Let’s sing it together — adults you can help too.

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world

SERMON

We are heading into a post-Easter season with a focus on an international and inter-faith stage. We’ll be considering the book of Acts through this season, and on April 22 we’ll be hearing from Dan and Sharon Buttry, who have been called to international mission work for peace and justice.

We’ll also hear on April 29 from Jeni Pedzinski, who works in Thailand with an organization that provides resources to at-risk teen girls. You’ll hear more about that by email and next week in worship.

The book we call Acts is part two of a longer work. Part one is known as the Gospel of Luke, but we could call it “The Work and Teaching of King Jesus, Part 1.” And the book we call “Acts” might be called “The Work and Teaching

of King Jesus, Part 2” or simply “The Acts of Jesus.”

Even though Jesus only makes an appearance at the beginning of chapter one, everything that follows is what happens when people follow Jesus as their King and work alongside the Holy Spirit to grow the Kingdom of Heaven as it breaks into our world as the Kingdom of God.

The beginning verses of this writing indicate that the work of Jesus is continuing through his community.

This book is a page turner too, perhaps more than any other book in the Bible! Each scene draws you into the next. I highly recommend reading Acts it in the coming weeks whether you have read it 50 times before or never at all. There is something to find in its pages as we learn and explore the beginnings of Jesus’ Kingdom on earth, called the Church.

And this book is not something that we can read simply as a history book about what happened way back when, after Jesus’ resurrection. This book compels us to join in as part of the story ourselves. So, as you read, pay attention to how things develop, how things move forward. What is

the spirit in which things are done, so that **you** might better fit into the narrative. Keep on the front of your mind, how God is calling you, and us as a congregation, to be part of **this** unfolding ongoing story?

Read Acts 1:1-8

After Jesus' resurrection, not much geo-politically or socially had changed, and yet a revolution had begun. Jesus had risen.

The message and spirit that forms a new community was about to spread throughout Jerusalem and Judea and then beyond to the ends of the earth.

Jesus' instructions to his disciples were to build a kingdom without borders — a community that included all people. They knew this, but how it was to be done eluded them.

The disciples, who were scared and huddled in the upper room together, were confident of Jesus' resurrection and would soon emerge boldly with a message to change the world, but not yet ...

For now, they were huddled with instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit to provide for them both the

wisdom and the power to live as Jesus' kingdom people.

They knew that a radical change was coming. They knew that they would be challenged to live differently, not by the patterns of the past, not by the script that they grew up with, not by the structure that had become familiar and predictable to them.

No, they were charged with carrying a message that would seem backwards and upside down to the masses.

They were charged to foster humility, not pride; forgiveness, not arrogance; and be armed with service, not political power. They were to wield not swords, but love.

This was not only the way of life in God's kingdom, but this was God's intention for all human beings from the beginning of creation. It was not an overlay of religious practice meant to accent the rest of life. No, this was the primary way we were made by God to live.

But people got off track, **we** got off track and went into a deep winter of sin and separation from God. We set up all kinds of idols that fog our vision and distract us from living as God intended for us to live.

Our idols include money, power, affluence of position. We have set ourselves up to worship entertainment, and are addicted to the news cycle.

So easily are we swayed to worship something other than God, but we don't call it worship. We call it "enjoying life." We call it "priorities." We call it a "values." We call it "our right."

God called it idolatry.

It only took a matter of a few weeks for the Hebrews to get distracted by idolatry. God freed them from slavery by Pharaoh in Egypt, and walked them through the Red Sea on dry ground, then guided them with a pillar of fire in the desert, and produced for them water from a rock.

All of these grand demonstrations of God's presence and power, and it only took a few weeks, while Moses was gone up the mountain, for them to turn their gaze and begin worshipping a golden calf.

How easily we set up false gods to worship and are distracted from who we really are as human beings.

But Jesus has come and restored our relationship with God through forgiveness from our sin of idolatry.

Jesus said "Forgive them for they know not what they do." We also do not understand what we do when we have set up idols in place of God — and yet God offers forgiveness.

God is doing something extraordinary, revolutionary by making us into a new creation, a new Eden. God is restoring us as image-bearers of God — that God's glory, revealed on the cross, is now available to us as a forgiven and restored people.

This fulfills the message of the prophets, was sung about in the Psalms, and was promised to Abraham and the Patriarchs of old.

This is not a picture of a corrupt humanity who is saved by a wrathful God who demands justice so that people might escape and go to Heaven. That is not what is found in the Bible.

Instead, the message of the prophets is a love-filled divine rescue and renewal of humanity within the world.

This is good news not only for the Jews, but for all people!

In the story of Acts, the disciples are beginning to piece this together.

The disciples watched Jesus embody that message and be crucified. What awaits them? Are they up for this work? Do they have what it takes to carry Jesus' banner — to carry the cross that Jesus bore?

Followers of Jesus found new life and forgiveness, along with a new hope and true power opening up among them like spring flowers after a long cold winter.

A new age had begun in which the living God was doing new things in the world — beginning then and there with the individuals who were afraid and weak huddled around a table in the upper room.

Jesus said that there was a message that needed to go out, not only to their family and relatives, or those they know and love, but to those far and wide, people of different nations, cultures, religions.

This good news was for everyone! God desired to build a kingdom without the traditional human created borders. In Jesus' day, the

borders were: Jew, Greek, Samaritan, Roman.

What are the borders or divisions in our world today? Shout them out.

U.S. citizen Immigrant
Refugee

Russian Syrian Iraqi
Kenyan Arab Somalian
Puerto Rican

Democrat Republican
Green Party Independent

Rich Poor Middle class
Those connected to people and
resources and those who are not
Education Mental wellness
Prisoners

Which side of the tracks you live on
City or neighborhood of residence

Christian Muslim Jew

The disciples struggled with divisions and fear. They didn't always believe these could be overcome. They lingered in fear and doubt. It was easy to simply hang in the upper room and talk about what the future might look like.

We, as a congregation, are in a similar way sitting in the upper

room talking amongst ourselves about what moving forward looks like.

We also might be fearful or doubt that the future will be bright.

We are now discussing what kind of Music Director to hire. Will he or she play the kind of music that we like? Will he or she be able to use the breadth and depth of options on the excellently modified organ we house here in this sanctuary?

What kind of second pastor will we call? Will that person be prepared and able to start something new that will be both of interest to and give renewed life and hope to the people of this community?

What kind of plan do we adopt for our Intentional Restart, and how do we set the stage for the new thing that God is growing among us?

All of these are important questions to ask, important dimensions to consider. We are being responsible when we focus on these questions and forms of ministry.

And yet ... in Acts, there is this introduction to the book that includes waiting on the Holy Spirit

to provide the wisdom, the courage, and the power to move forward.

As we read Acts, we consider the part we play in this unfolding story. If we are listening to how the narrative rolls and where we fit, we will want to pray for God to empower us through the Holy Spirit. When we do, it won't be us leading, but God leading us into the next chapter of the life of this congregation.