



COMMUNITY  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

MINISTERS  
DAN YEAZEL  
KIM JOHNSON, PREACHING

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*Fourth Sunday of Easter*  
*April 13, 2008*

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*Psalm 23*  
*Acts 2:42-47*

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*A Day at the Beach*

I have a thing for quotes, I love those simple sayings that inspire you, make you think, as well as the ones that down right crack you up! I have quotes cut out of magazines and taped to the bottom of my bathroom mirror, I have sticker quotes stuck the dashboard in my car, I start notebook pages of sayings during retreats and mission trips, and I even have a famous saying among our youth, "That is so going on Facebook!" It's my web-page and yes, there is a log of some very hilarious sayings that come from youth gatherings. I like quotes because of the memories, the laughter, and the inspiration - many quotes really make us think. I recently received a gift - it was a book of church signs and the many clever sayings churches post on them - one speaks loud and clear above the rest - it simply states, "Don't wait for six men in black suits and a white

hearse to take you to church!"

Our confirmation class has just finished their unit on Worship and Sacraments. In an effort to get our youth to think about worship and what it is that draws each of us to church membership, I asked them to close their eyes and picture in their minds the most perfect worship experience. What did they see, hear, feel - where were they sitting and what was happening around them? It was a great exercise that would surely lead us into a lengthy discussion - in fact, I was ready with pen and paper to jot down ideas to take to the next Worship Committee meeting. But when the youth opened their eyes and started sharing their "perfect worship services," I found myself deep in a conversation about flying monkeys and surfing on the coast of Mexico! I had been hoping for engaged, thought-provoking

conversation about the church - and instead, was called to a day at the beach. Needless to say, I wasn't very thrilled and the confirmation students were assigned a written essay to bring to the following class. They redeemed themselves, I must say, those essays were deep and brought back my faith that we are indeed giving our children reasons to love the church... But I wish now that I remembered Luke's account of the early church in the Book of Acts - Now, there's a day at the beach!

It was after the death and resurrection of Christ. The disciple, Peter, had preached a sermon, it was about the events that had just taken place in their time; How God had sent Jesus into the world to claim the mighty love of all, and the people responded by crucifying and killing this Jesus. Peter went on to preach how after Jesus died, God raised him up, freeing him from death - and Peter explained that it all happened because it was impossible for Jesus to be held in any other power but love. This realization moved the people, "wow, our fighting, our greed, our selfish ways cannot hold Jesus. But only love. Inspired that God had claimed this love for them, the people asked, "What should we do?" To make a long story short, Peter's answer was to be baptized, form a community of believers where the promises of God would be shared, understood, and

celebrated. And the people did just that - They came together and formed a church.

Really, "they devoted themselves..." "Awe came upon everyone..." And "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number..."

Can we vividly picture this early church? People were glad and happy to be a part of the fellowship of believers, they took seriously the commands of Jesus to love and care for one another. Really, it sounds like a pleasant day at the beach... everyone experiencing the same level of enjoyment, away from the stress and care of the world.

And now many, many decades later, our churches are struggling, our membership is dropping, and many of our children rarely, if ever, experience the beauty and joy of our sanctuaries. We are far from the times of the early church Peter writes about, and the metaphor of the church as a day at the beach has drastically changed. Now, it looks

more like this: Some people head deep into the water, swimming and diving, enjoying every aspect of the underwater world. While other people simply stand on the shore and put their feet in, fully enjoying the soft wet sand and the sound of the waves, but not really emerging themselves in the life of the water. Still others at the beach lay on the shore, soaking up the rays in hopes of gaining a great tan for themselves. And then there are the people who simply pass by the beach, maybe looking out their car windows with longing interest and maybe uninterested in the beach at all.

That joy, the awe, the pooled resources... is that something in history - is it a thing of the past? I mean seriously, can you imagine if Dan and I preached like Peter - if we stood up here and said something like, "Well.. We sense the Spirit is leading all of us toward a communal ethic of sharing and caring, so if you would, please cash out your savings and trade in your cars and next week we'll pool our resources to help those in the community who may have need - so we can all enjoy equally the fruits of the earth.. Oh, and we all need to gather here at CPC everyday of the week, without exception!"

Go ahead and chuckle because I'm right there with you - if Dan and I pushed for the same sort of shared giving and caring and

commitment as was present in the early church, we'd be quickly looking for new careers. Now, it's not a condemnation upon our society, it's a reality: Truly, there are limits to what we will give to the church. You and me both. We can't overlook the fact that we are facing a tough economy, frightening gas prices, bills to pay, kids to put through college.. The list goes on, we work hard for our money and we need to provide for ourselves and for our families. And we're busy.. We can't simply ignore all the extracurricular opportunities of our community - it would be impossible to gather as a church family day by day. Our lives are full - there just isn't as much time in the day to do all the church asks of us. And so.. The day at the beach the early Christians enjoyed has really become more of a individual experience.. Some people going in deep, others wading on shore, some basking in the sun, while others simply dive by and look.

Many of you are familiar with the comic strip *For Better or For Worse* following the Patterson family - and many of you saw the Easter strip: It pictured a young Patterson family attending church. Little Michael was in awe as he looked around at the beautiful windows and banners. He stood on the pew and joined in singing the hymns. He even sat listening to the sermon with a sweet smile on his face.

Then after the service as his mother buttoned up his jacket, Michael asked, "Is church open every Sunday, Mom?" at which his mother replied, "yes, Michael, it is." Then as the pastor walks up to greet the family, Michael continues, "Then how come we only come twice a year?"

Times have changed. But my friends, one thing, one common thread to our early Christian brothers and sisters has indeed remained the same: Jesus Christ cannot be held in any other power but love. It's not half-hearted, it's not just on Sunday's; no, we get all of God, all of the time.

And really, the joy, the awe, the devotion to such a God as ours should and does bring about the same amount of excitement celebrated by the early church. That lovely scene depicted in the Book of Acts, the one that represents the perfect Christian day at the beach... That scene is repeated everyday of our lives. It is repeated each and every time a child is brought to Sunday School and is greeted by a caring adult willing and ready to share their love for God. That scene happens again when our Peace and Social Justice Committee works hard to guide us in making social action happen in our midst. I see that scene in Acts repeated when we gather for dinner as a church family on Wednesday nights, and when we stay for coffee and cookies after worship. I hear that scene

played over and over again when the Deacons report about visiting homebound members, reaching out to visitors, and eagerly planning picnics for our seniors. The early Christian church is reenacted on several Thursdays when a group of women get together to do random jobs around the church, and then go out for lunch afterwards. That early outpouring of pooled resources? It will happen again in late June when this church comes together in an effort to pack 20 people into vans and send them to Gulfport, MS, to help respond to the continued devastation brought about by Hurricane Katrina.

It's the fellowship, the concern, the teaching, the care, the love... That precious scene of early Christians gathering with glad and generous hearts... it's happening here and now every time we boldly accept the fact that the church is something we need, and love, and commit ourselves too it. And while a literal day at the beach is far fetched from our climate right now... we can believe in it and we can devote ourselves to it... as a fellowship of believers, a church, where we equally share the love of Christ ... Let us come with joy - because obviously a lot happens when we gather as the People of God... with glad and generous hearts. To God be the Glory. Amen.

