

Finding Clarity in the Midst of Chaos

Ezra 3:10-13
Acts 2:22-32

April 23, 2017
Faith Community

Sometimes you can learn a few things about a person or place just by knowing the name. For example, what do you suppose life is like at these places of worship?

- *Boring Seventh Day Adventist Church* goes the extra mile because the name of their pastor is Elder Dull.
- *Battle Ground Baptist Church* that ought to give you a clue as to what you might expect.
- If you go to *James Bond United Community Church* in Toronto, you can count on being shaken, not stirred. On the other hand if you try *St. Martini Lutheran Church* in Milwaukee, you might go away with an olive or a twist of lemon if you prefer.
- *Original Church of God, Number 2.*
- *Hell Hole Swamp Baptist Church* in South Carolina doesn't sound like the most welcoming place in the world.
- You snow birds might want to check out *First Church of the Last Chance World on Fire Revival and Military Academy* in Dade City, Florida.
- Last but not least, *Hell For Certain* is a church in Kentucky that worships on Sundays at 10:00. Now you can not only remove all doubt as to where you're headed but you can also be clear as to the day and the hour.¹

It's good to be clear about certain things.

The New Testament book of Acts tells of the young church in action, shortly after Jesus' resurrection. Things were fresh, new, exciting and vibrant back then. They were demanding as well, since much of the growth that happened took its toll in a big way.

Here's a point of clarity: everyone is challenged in the book of Acts instead of just a few individuals or groups.

¹ <http://cole-slaw.blogspot.com/2009/10/naming-your-church-part-1.html>

Everyone is challenged.
Everyone has to struggle with values and priorities.
Everyone is uncomfortable at one time or another.
No one comes away unchanged.

In that sense life in the early church had something in common with today.

There was incredible change back then. Just like today.

There were countless questions as to what was going on and what might happen next. Just like now.

One of the key roles for leadership back then was for people to understand the times, explain what was happening, and point people to God honoring priorities and values. Just like today.

Can someone speak clarity into the chaos?

Old Testament Israel had been overrun by a foreign power and the people forced out of the Promised Land. After years of living in exile they were allowed to return. Part of the task of resettling was building a new temple, the place that would serve as the center of worship for the Hebrews.

When the foundation for the temple had been completed, there was an emotional worship service that the book of Ezra describes this way:

Many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of the new temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away. (Ezra 3:12-13)

All that racket makes you think of a health care debate or whether or not to change the color of the church carpet, doesn't it? Someone had to speak clarity into the chaos.

In the book of Acts, crowds of people had come to Jerusalem from all over the world for the festival of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit ignited a spiritual fire and people spoke in languages they'd never heard of. In the midst of all that confusion people wanted to know,

What does this mean? (Acts 2:12, TNIV)

Friends, the number one job of leadership: define reality. That's what Peter was about here, as he seized the perfect opportunity to tell the story of Jesus in a reasonable and compelling way.

As often happens, however, that led to a second question. First it was, "What does this mean?" Now it was,

What shall we do? (2:37)

Peter went from defining reality to defining direction. He said to them,

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (2:38)

He told them they'd have to change. Big time.

The noun form of the Greek word "repent" is "metanoia." It's where we get our word "metamorphosis." Just as a butterfly emerges from a caterpillar, repentance suggests change that's even more dramatic.

In its mildest form it means to think differently or to reconsider. Here it's much stronger. Peter speaks of a "change of mind." "Conversion" is what he's after. The call to repent is a total requirement, involving every part of life.²

When the people asked what they should do, Peter gave it to them straight:

Repent.

Change.

Not just the other person or people with whom you disagree.

You.

Change.

The biggest test of your life.

You don't just give something up.

You don't just turn away.

Instead, you complete the cycle.

You turn towards something else. You turn to Jesus for your own metamorphosis, the most extreme makeover you can imagine.

² Strong's Concordance, Thayer's Greek Definitions, and Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged.

I love how C. S. Lewis put it:

*If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you are on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all.*³

Friends we're committed to helping you with that. You cannot do this alone. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, so also it takes a community to raise disciples. We have no greater calling.

³ C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, as quoted by www.dickstaub.com, accessed October 15, 2009.