

Pumped Up on Jesus

Acts 4:32-35
John 20:19-31

April 8, 2018
Faith Community

Our Scriptures this morning are filled with stories of energy, passion, and commitment that we would do well to take to heart.

For example, in our first reading, from the New Testament book of Acts, we have a story of the early church. This is post Easter, and instead of a letdown that we're used to, this is a portrait of what life was like:

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.
(Acts 4:33-34)

Imagine being part of a group like that. You don't get that way through a life of good intentions. Neither does it happen purely by intellectual assent or legislative lobbying. Instead, in order for authentic life change to happen, you need to be impacted, moved, and made new at the deepest level.

Case in point is Joseph whom the disciples renamed Barnabas, the 'son of encouragement.'

He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (vv. 37)

I want to be part of a community that recognizes no boundaries around its commitment. I want to be part of a group that counts its time together as a high point of life because they come together in praise and in pursuit of something that enables them to grow, empowers them to act, and that will outlive them, indeed, something that forms the foundation of life itself, don't you?

Have you heard about Emma Gonzalez? One of the survivors of the shootings at the Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, she and a small group of fellow students were at the forefront of the massive demonstrations that took place throughout the country not long ago.

Whatever your position on gun control, there's something you and I would do well to pay close attention to, and it

happened on that Saturday, March 24, at the “March for Our Lives” rally in Washington.

Emma was one of the speakers. She talked for a little less than two minutes, during which time she listed the names of the seventeen people who died. Then she stopped.

And she stood there and was silent for four minutes and 26 seconds. In front of a crowd of 500,000 people, and a television audience of who knows how many million, she stood silently as the seconds ticked by, not saying a word.

If you aren’t a public speaker, you need to understand how incredibly difficult that is. It probably felt like four hours to her, but she nevertheless held her ground. The New York Times described it this way:

“She stared straight ahead, breathing deeply while tears streamed down her face. At times, the crowd of thousands cheered her name and chanted, ‘Never again,’ while she held a powerful silence at the podium....until a timer beeped.”¹

Her total time was six minutes and twenty seconds, which was how long it took for the shooter to take seventeen lives.

Someone called it the “loudest silence in the history of US social protest.”²

I want to have that kind of courage. I want to be gripped by that level of passion.

And Barnabas,

....sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Look with me now at the gospel of John, our other Scripture reading for today. It’s one of what we call the ‘post resurrection appearances’ of Christ.

¹ “What Emma Gonzalez Said Without Words at the March for Our Lives Rally,” by Louis Lucero II. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/24/us/emma-gonzalez-march-for-our-lives.html>

² “Emma Gonzalez is Responsible for the Loudest Silence in the History of UN Social Protest,” by Ari Berman <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/03/emma-gonzalez-is-responsible-for-the-loudest-silence-in-the-history-of-us-social-protest/>

Even though they'd heard the stories, the disciples were so confused and terrified that they had come together behind locked doors. Somehow, somehow, Jesus shows up in the midst of them anyway, turns Doubting Thomas into a confirmed Christ follower, and then comes this timelessly eloquent passage from the apostle John:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 21:30-31)

God may never place you in the midst of a national tragedy like he did with Emma Gonzalez and her eloquent silence. God may not turn you into an author of timeless literature as he did with John. God did, nevertheless, wire and equip you to serve him in some special way, and you may never discover it unless you develop the disciplines that lead to transformative discipleship. And remember,

Disciples are people who are becoming more like Jesus in their character and emotional and spiritual development.

Friends, nothing will change unless we get beyond the antiseptic life of religious routine. Showing up in church and then living like the rest of the world will not change the world.

A team or an army is not mobilized by good intentions or catch phrases.

Listen to this:

"I am part of the 'Fellowship of the Unashamed.' I have Holy Spirit power. The dye has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals!

"I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, lean by faith, love by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

“My face is set, my gait is fast, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

“I won’t give up, shut up, let up or slow up till I’ve preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

“I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go until He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops.

“And when He comes to get His own, He’ll have no problems recognizing me...my colors will be clear.”³

³ Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois