

Taking a Chance on Love

1 John 5:1-12
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

May 6, 2018
Faith Community

Did you ever notice that churches can be very much like people?

There's the First Church of Saint Eeyore: there's always something wrong, something to worry about, hopes will be dashed and dreams unfulfilled. They may or may not have good reason to feel that way, but it's their reality nonetheless. You want to tell them, get a life.

There's also the Head in the Sand Pollyanna Fellowship of Sweetness. Zip-a-dee-do-dah, everything's swell all the time, nothing but sunshine coming my way. There are churches like that. You want to tell them to get real.

Then there are those with a winsome, adventurous spirit. They have their share of hard times, sometimes even more than their share, but they have a wonderful chutzpah nevertheless. They have a firm grasp on reality, and they also love to dream. God centered risk is a way of life. There are churches like that. To these people I want to say, how can I become more like you?

Every year our denomination publishes a Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study. Different mission sites and projects are described, there's a list of people to pray for, and Scripture readings are included for each day.

One day the reading was about a church I know. It's one of those winsome, adventurous kinds.

It had all the reasons why it should be struggling like the others in its area. That part of the world hadn't recovered from the lousy economy, and the population base holds steady in a good year but usually more people move out than move in. Folks around there talk about the way things used to be, and don't have much good to say about now.

Right in the middle of all that difficulty is this thriving, booming congregation. It's growing. New programs are popping up all over the place. Their buildings are state of the art, and they're pacesetters in how they use technology. They work hard at maintaining a culture of God focused possibility. And it's one of ours. It's Presbyterian! This bumblebee should not fly. And of course they get criticized, especially since it seems that all the breaks come their way.

Everything they touch turns to gold. The Eeyores know it'll never be that way for them, and the Polyannas have no clue as to what it takes to function at that level.

One day I spoke with the pastor of that church and he said that however it might appear, the reality is they fail at more things than they succeed at. They're just not afraid to try. To take a chance. To dream great dreams and then act on those dreams. While negativity may be all around them, they choose otherwise. There's a realistically rugged faith at work there. People come to Christ and lives are changed.

Here's something I've learned: luck favors the well prepared. Sometimes there's a reason why certain people get the breaks they do, while others don't. Sometimes there's a reason why certain churches succeed in dramatic ways while others in the same setting miss the boat.

There's a model for us in today's passage from the book of Acts. It's post resurrection. There are eleven disciples now, not twelve, since Judas is out of the picture, and Peter says they need a twelfth guy.

There's every reason why this group should pull back awhile.

- Their leader was executed, so they'd do well to watch their own backs.
- There are just a few of them. It's a big world out there, and what can such a puny bunch accomplish in comparison?
- Persecution is right around the corner.
- We'd be tempted to say, chill out guys, and wait for a better time. But that's not what we see.

Instead, here's Peter casting a vision not just of what could be but what should be. And he does it with such passion that people are ready to go.

So they do what any decent HR department would do. They screen candidates and come up with a short list. A real short list. Two.

Then they pray. This is good too. A faith-based organization should be all about prayer.

Then they get gutsy. They review candidates. They get their short list. They pray. Then, they draw straws. Check this out! It's a huge decision. And they draw straws. The

text actually says they cast lots. It's how they figured who got what property when the Children of Israel made it into the Promised Land. It's how Christ's clothes were divided by the Roman soldiers at the crucifixion. And here in the book of Acts, just before Pentecost, it was how a twelfth disciple was chosen.

What I want you to see, friends, is the godly guts, the Christ like courage, and Spirit filled strength at work. That's exactly what we need to be about here. Without courage like this, the church of Jesus Christ, this church, will drift into irrelevancy.

Listen to how John puts it in one of his letters. He unapologetically issues his call to live a life of courageous love, and he gives us one guarantee. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 Jn. 5:13)

It's amazing what you can accomplish when it doesn't matter who gets the credit. The same applies when the ultimate issue, the matter of supreme importance is in the bag. Step out. Stake your claim. After all, we serve the one who put it all on the line, so that we could do it too.