

## SERMON- Easter 7 (A)

Charles R. Cowherd

Acts 1:6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

May 21, 2023

Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

### OPENING:

I really like *old* things.

You should know this by now.

I love anything that's musty, or historical or venerable.

I love that our Epistle lesson (the one that Hector/ Julie read), the lesson from Peter, was read in 1607, at the Jamestown Colony, at the very first service of Holy Communion in the New World. How about that?<sup>1</sup>

I love that our Psalm is one of the oldest in the Psalter, featuring fragmented Israelite poetry from the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. How about that?

At the same time, I like *new* things.

I like newcomers, I like children/ babies, I like new programs and new ideas.

I bring this up because we are at this moment in the calendar, between Spring and Summer, between the school year being done and then thinking about what's next, In the church calendar, we are between Ascension and Pentecost, between Jesus being here and not.

It's this "liminal" (that was the big word constantly used in seminary) between presence and non-presence, this holy threshold between 'x' and 'y.'

I know I always, personally, get caught up in this because I am, at my core, still a teacher of high school seniors, standing at this precipice with them, wishing for them the very best as they prepare to end one thing and start another.

I, Charles Cowherd, also graduated high school in 1999 and so we made a big deal about being the 'Class of the Century,'

the 'Class of the Millennium,' and how—even though the world was supposed to end with Y2K—life was still ALL in front of us.

For all of us, that moment between, that threshold, is where we live our lives, between old things and new things.

(It is all so obvious, but I am still going to dwell on it this morning.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Massey Don W and Sue Massey. 2003. *Colonial Churches of Virginia*. Charlottesville VA: Howell, 7.

Someone said it this way: we actually live our whole lives on Holy Saturday, between Good Friday and Easter.<sup>2</sup> Looking back and looking forward.

Dare I say that we can apply this idea to the life of this parish:

This year will be 150<sup>th</sup> year of doing confirmations at St. Tim's, but it's also brand new, because *they* have never done it I have never done it on this end.

SO: What's next for all of us? "St. Timothy's is back"... but *where* are we back to? Where is God calling us into?

What it is about living in this moment between that we need to hear today?

### **ACTS:**

In Acts, we read about being on the threshold and the result actually turns out to sound like a little bit of *thud*. All of this energy and excitement with the Resurrection and the Ascension, and the disciples head back into the Upper Room and... what do they do...?

We find that "they were constantly devoting themselves to prayer."

The disciples decided to do *that*,

NOT launch a new ministry,

NOT start this political program,

BUT instead they decided to worship together

Again, Karl Barth called this moment "a "significant pause" because it was a recognition that Jesus was gone and the Holy Spirit had not yet come.<sup>3</sup>

But the disciples' Easter joy was such that they were compelled to be together and bask in it.

St. Timothy's: can we do that? Can we bask in it and exhale?

I am not sure, I personally would rather start something new, or talk about something old, rather than simply BE and "devote myself to prayer."

### **GIFTED:**

So let's head to the Gospel, to John.

The word "gifted" appears five times in our passage this morning!<sup>4</sup>

My mother taught Kindergarten, which is another liminal/ threshold moment that my mind is currently also on.

---

<sup>2</sup> Steiner, George. 1989. *Real Presences*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) quoted in Wilson Poon and Tom McLeish. "Real Presences: Two Scientists' Response to George Steiner" *Theology Today* (Vol. 102, 1999): 169-176.

[https://www2.ph.ed.ac.uk/~wckp/Steiner\\_Theology.pdf](https://www2.ph.ed.ac.uk/~wckp/Steiner_Theology.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Fuller Reginald H. 1984. *Preaching the Lectionary : The Word of God for the Church Today* (Rev. ed.) Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Moloney, Francis J. 1998. *The Gospel of John (Sacra Pagina)* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 460, 462.

My mother, she used to refer to the word “Gifted” as the “G” word. As in parents of incoming kindergarteners’ tendency to refer to their child as “gifted” regardless of all evidence to the contrary!

Who is “gifted”? Those disciples, despite all evidence to the contrary. Who are the “gifted”? We the people of St. Timothy’s, despite all evidence to the contrary, as we continue this long line of discipleship in that we have been GIVEN the word by Jesus, who was GIVEN it by the Father.

Likewise, the lesson has this great expression: that the Father... gave us... to Jesus... “out of this world.” Note the double meaning: we are “out of this world” in the modern sense of being exceptional and amazing, but also “out of this world” in the sense that that means we are flawed and corruptible and human.<sup>5</sup>

In this particular threshold of beginnings and ends, we are saying goodbye to a few “out of this world” parishioners in the coming weeks. This is news that is sad, but it again allows us the special ability to look ahead and back.

Robin Mullet and her husband Stephen are headed to Blacksburg, building their dream home down there.

Robin is the Editor of our WORD monthly communication.

She is an Usher at 8 am and one of the kindest people you are going to meet.

She is also, of course, Herndon royalty and St. Tim’s royalty as the daughter of Tom Rust, former mayor of this Town, and longtime parishioner here.

I was reminded of that because this last week, we deconstructed the gigantic metal mailbox in the hallway outside the offices.

Now I love old things, but this old thing was ugly.

I loved it as we are taking it apart and it kept spitting out these metallic, magnetic nameplates of various “out of this world” St. Timothy’s parishioners of yore.

“Tom Rust” was one of them.

“Michael Cook” of blessed memory was another—Linda happened to be there when we found that one. It happened to be their Anniversary.

“Michael Colie” was another nametag this thing emitted—the Colies are long time parishioners who live in North Carolina, Hollis and Michael’s granddaughter will be baptized here in 2 weeks.

---

<sup>5</sup> John 17.6 (NIV)

Hello and goodbye. Arrival and Departure. That's what a Christian community does: it greets you, it bids you farewell, and holds you tight in between.

By the way, I put those metallic name tags in my shirt pocket as we were cleaning, and as I was carrying this awkward cabinet to the dumpster, the magnet from the nametag would stick to this piece of furniture, not letting me let it go.

Talk about liminal space. I really wanted to throw this thing away, but it also pulled me back into those memories.

One more set of "out of this world" parishioners:

Hector Coronado and Lester Johnson.

Hector and Les are also faithful 8 o'clockers. Lester has sang in the choir, Hector has been a LEM and lector, bringing to us his delightful sense of the liturgy as a child of a Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines.

Les and Hector are making their way to Nebraska for their retirement and the next chapter in their lives. They leave a remarkable legacy here as one of the first gay couples to be married at St. Timothy's.

"Behold I make all things new." God says in Revelations in the last book of the bible, can we bear it in between?

## **CONCLUSION**

I will leave you one image, one coping strategy, for this threshold and precipice and for living in this moment.

"Conspiring to be the church"—one scholar refers to it that way, talking about John's gospel and what the disciples were going through, writing:

"The only way to keep the faith amidst this kind of daily struggle is by sharing in a community of intimacy in which one's pains can be poured out and compassionately received and healed, enabling the return to the world in further witness. This rhythm of 'breathing in' (receiving Holy Spirit through community prayer, celebration and Bible study) and 'breathing out' (witnessing to the world) is the conspiracy, the 'breathing together' that is intended to be the church."<sup>6</sup>

What a gift in this moment of in between, that all we need to do is breathe in and breathe out in order to be the old church, the new Church, and God's church.

**AMEN**

---

<sup>6</sup> Wes Howard-Brook. 2002. "John's Gospel's Call to be Reborn of God" in Howard-Brook Wes and Sharon H Ringe, eds. *The New Testament : Introducing the Way of Discipleship*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 95.