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Easter 7A
Peace, Seattle
June 5, 2011 epk
Acts 1:6-14

PEBBLE IN A POND

If you've traveled much by plane, chances are it's happened to you. You've descended from 35,000 feet and are preparing to land when your plane turns out of the approach lane and begins a circling around. You've been put on a holding pattern.

The fact that you'll be late for your meeting, or that you have another flight connection to make, or that your family awaits your arrival may send your mind scurrying, but there's absolutely nothing you can do about it.

When you boarded the plane, you gave up control of your life to the airline, to the pilot, to the flight controllers. And being placed in a holding pattern simply heightens your awareness of this fact.

Today's lessons reflect on what it's like to be in a HOLDING PATTERN. ACTS and 1 PETER in particular tell us how to wait with patience even in the midst of suffering, while we anticipate our second wind. IT'S THE TEXT FROM ACTS THAT I WANT TO FOCUS ON THIS MORNING.

Before his ascension, the disciples had one question for Jesus: Is this the time? Has the moment we've been waiting for arrived? Is this it?

Radio evangelist Harold Camping thought he knew the answer. He said May 21st was the day. **He was wrong.**

What did Jesus say?

> "It's not for you to know. What the Father has in mind is beyond your control. But I can tell you this much: you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

There's the book of Acts in a nutshell: the people of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, telling and living the Jesus story, and transforming the world.

This is one of those texts best illustrated by a VISUAL IMAGE – in this case the image is of concentric circles moving OUTWARD, in ever widening arcs, like ripples in a pool of water when a stone (in this case, the Cornerstone) is thrown in.

The energy from that central event spreads outward, rippling first through the community of disciples, then, through their neighborhood and city, and it keeps on going and going until every last shore, every land and people have been touched by it—touched by the way of living in the world God shows us in Jesus.

Last week I made an argument that "giving an account of the hope that's within us" isn't rocket science; that I learned all I needed to know about giving witness from the plumber who cleared my sewer pipe.

But in spite of the fact that "giving an account" is well within our reach, we often treat the command like a "hot potato," as if we're being asked to execute a double back flip with 1½ twist, and stick the landing!

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This week the image in ACTS suggests (at least to me) that the MOVEMENT, the WAY of following Jesus and of speaking of him arises ORGANICALLY from each Christian community. That small, vibrant congregations like ours are the very PLACES where the mission RUBBER HITS THE proverbial ROAD.

In other words, the YOU in "YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES," is Peace Lutheran, is you and me.

In his book THE JESUS WAY, Eugene Peterson writes:[1]

> The congregation "has always been the primary location for getting the way and truth and life of Jesus, believed and embodied." "There is more to the church than [the] local congregation.
>
> - "There is the church continuous through the centuries, our fathers and mothers who continue to influence and teach us.
> - "There is the church…throughout the world, communities…we are in touch with through prayer and suffering and mission.
> - "There is the church invisible, dimensions and instances of the Spirit's work that we know nothing about.
> - There is the church triumphant, that 'great cloud of witnesses' who continue to surround us.
> - But the local congregation is the place where we get all of this integrated and practiced in the immediate circumstances and among the men, women, and children we live with.
>
> This is where it becomes local and personal."

When Re/Vision Task Force members gathered here yesterday to process what you all had shared at the six congregational listening posts gatherings, one theme we heard again and again was the importance of Peace as a caring community—how Peace is, for many, like an extended family where you can know others and can be known, and, at the same time, a community that is open and eager to welcome more.

There is something about being a caring community that is being embodied here at Peace… imperfectly, of course, but none the less, embodied, enfleshed in meaningful relationships; its part of our congregation's DNA.

This, I believe, is the work of the Holy Spirit; and not a disembodied Holy Spirit, but a Spirit who inhabits the hearts and minds of persons with names like your own.

This is a core feature of our congregation and one we want to uphold as we move toward the future to which God is calling us. But (and here's the point) the ripple of welcome isn't meant to stop here or just stay here, reverberating within these walls…God's given us this gift so we can share it!

"God means to do something with us, and [God] means to do it in community." [Peterson, p.5]

So I invite you to imagine with me, for a moment, this RIPPLE we call caring community not bouncing off these walls and then back again, like an echo chamber, but rippling out beyond this space, beyond the sanctuary, beyond the patio, beyond Thistle and 39th, and into the neighborhood that surrounds us here, and not only this neighborhood but rippling out into each and every neighborhood of which you and I are a part – whether that be Gatewood or Seaview, Admiral or Arbor Heights, Westwood, White Center, Fauntley Hills, Delridge, Beacon Hill—wherever God has planted us.

[1] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways Jesus is the Way.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) p. 4, 5.

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That's the trajectory God intends, and the way of Jesus, embodied among us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, is how God intends to get it done.

Last night we went to LUTHER'S TABLE in Renton for dinner. Luther's Table is a new ministry of our church that incorporates a restaurant and music venue with a place for community and conversation. It's built on the site of RENTON LUTHERAN CHURCH, which after 50 years of ministry recognized (to its credit) that it was time for ministry in that place to assume a new, revitalized form.

We went to hear a band composed largely of members of our office manager Tina's family.
As soon as the music started, Naomi hit the floor in front of our table, and started dancing.
Song after song she never flagged, mouth grinning, eyes bright.
The rhythm had captured her and she embodied that rhythm—sending out ripples of joy to the tables around us, expressing it with an exuberance that made our hearts sing.

It's all part of God's design… "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It starts, this way of Jesus, at the font, of course. Baptism is our call, our ordination—each of us—to ministry in the daily rhythm of life, wherever that life may take us on any given day.

And it is nourished each week at this Eucharistic Table where, following the way of Jesus, we enter that great fourfold rhythm of TAKING, BLESSING, BREAKING and GIVING.[2]

But taking in that bread, that cup, is just the beginning. For once you've received it—once it's in you, the body of Christ becomes, literally, part of your body, your blood, and there's no telling where the Spirit will propel you to go, what the Spirit will propel you to say or do.

The life of Jesus is now within you! Can't you feel it—rippling within you? Eager to move through you and beyond you to everyone you meet?

"And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It's more than an invitation, or even a command; it's a commission to be Christ to neighbor and world bringing all that we have and all that we are. Amen.

[2] Ibid, p. 5