

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Easter 2
Matthew 28:16-20**

**28 April 2019
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Come and Worship, Go and Share”

“The Eleven”. What’s wrong with that word?

That’s right – it’s not “Twelve”. Why isn’t it “Twelve”?

Yes, Judas isn’t there – Judas who betrayed Jesus,

which reminds us of Peter who... did what? denied Jesus... and the other 10 who...? abandoned him.

They had watched their friend die and done nothing to stop it.

Can you imagine how they must have felt?

They must have been overcome with grief and guilt and self-loathing, feeling like utter & complete failures.

They must have been devastated.

And then some women from their group come with news that Jesus is *not* dead – he’s alive! –

and he will meet them on a mountain in Galilee.

We don’t know how long it took the women to convince the men,

or what the conversation was like, or whether they debated whether to go or not.

But in the end they went.

Maybe they went out of curiosity to see if it were true,

maybe they went out of hope that perhaps he *was* alive,

maybe they went with fear that he wasn’t,

or maybe with fear that he was and he would be angry and blame them.

Whatever their reasons, these 11 ordinary men who had failed miserably, went

because they had heard that Jesus would meet them.

That’s not so different from us, is it?

We’re pretty ordinary folk – more educated than they, and probably more sophisticated,

but as ordinary for our time and place as they were for theirs.

We too, have failed.

We fail all the time by what we do by what we neglect to do.

We fail in little ways and big ones.

We’ve failed long ago in the past and more recently

and maybe we’re feeling like we’re in the midst of a failure right now.

And we ordinary people who have failed, just like those 11,

have come because we have been told that Jesus will meet us here.

And Jesus did meet them! And when they saw him, they worshipped him. And that was huge.

Remember these were Jewish men,

and the foundation of Judaism is the Shema, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God”.

That’s what they believed, that’s what they knew, and yet they worshipped Jesus.

At that moment they realized that Jesus and God were one

and in awe and adoration, they worshipped him... and some doubted.

We, too, have come to worship Jesus. But what does that mean?

Last Monday for devotions at Council, I read from a story about an Episcopal church in Darien, CT that experienced phenomenal growth years ago.

The reason they experienced such growth was that something different began to happen in their worship.

They got a new rector, and that rector said that you could come to church,

sing the hymns, read the prayers, hear the Bible readings, listen to the sermon,

and even eat at the Lord’s table, and leave not having worshipped.

He told them that if you just went through the motions, it wasn’t worship.

Worshipping God meant loving God, and when we love God

it is to be with all our heart and all our mind and all our soul and all our strength.

When I was away in February and March I visited 7 congregations.

I didn't visit Lutheran or Congregational or Episcopal or Methodist or any mainline congregations because I know how they worship.

I grew up in the Lutheran Church, I went to seminary in order to study liturgy, and when I came here to Salem, I was about as high church as you can get.

But over the years, I have found myself hungering and thirsting for more, for something that engaged my heart as well as my mind, for something that allowed me to experience God in a deeper way.

I wanted to visit congregations where there was more than intellectual engagement.

I wanted to visit congregations where I could look at faces and know they were experiencing God.

I wanted to visit congregations where I could see love and joy being visibly expressed.

Out of 7 congregations, only 1 left me cold. In all the rest, I saw excitement and enthusiasm and joy.

I used to think the reason people attended evangelical or fundamentalist churches was simply because of their conservative theology.

But now I think that the reason they go has more to do with what they experience in worship.

The Eleven met Jesus and they worshiped him.

And Jesus said, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me".

Just think about that for a minute: "All authority in the entire universe has been given to Jesus."

Let that thought just seep into your soul: "All the power in all of creation has been given to Jesus."

No wonder they worshipped him!

And the next thing that happened, Jesus gave them a command,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

First, notice: it's a command - not a suggestion. And Jesus gave that command not only to them but to us.

If we have not been going out to those outside our church and making disciples, we have not been obeying Jesus.

Second, the word that's translated as nations is really the word for Gentiles.

In other words Jesus is saying to these Jewish men,

go to people outside your group, to people who are different from you, to people that you don't know.

Go outside your comfort zone.

Third, they are to make disciples - not recruit church members.

They are to share their experience of getting to know Jesus, of experiencing the love of Jesus, of falling in love with Jesus.

They are to share Jesus's teachings - to love God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, to love their neighbors as themselves, to not worry about tomorrow but to trust God instead, to have the kind of faith that can heal.

That's what we are to do, too.

We Lutherans aren't very good at that - at least in this country. More conservative churches *are* good at it.

And again, are used to think it was all about their theology - that they are compelled to tell others in order to save their souls.

And while that may account for part of their evangelical zeal,

I now think a larger part comes simply from their desire to share the joy they have experienced in encountering God and worshipping Jesus.

Like the 11, we are ordinary people who have failed, and we come here to see Jesus and to worship him.

And if we worship him with all of ourselves, if we encounter the holy presence of God in this place,

if we feel the Spirit moving inside our hearts, I believe that we, too, will be moved to share our joy.

Jesus has given us a commitment to go outside of this place and make disciples.

That means going against the culture & talking not only about our religion or our church but about our faith.

For us Lutherans that can be pretty darn scary, but all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus and he has promised to be with us always.

Today in worship give your entire self to God, worship and adore and praise Jesus,

and I am sure that sometime this week you will find yourself sharing that joy with someone who needs it.

We come to worship; we are sent out to share our joy, not just in service, but in praise.

Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen**