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Sermon for Nobleton/Schomberg United Church

By: Carol-Ann Chapman

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

The disciples have locked themselves behind closed doors in fear; but closed doors do not prevent the Risen Jesus from making an appearance, and through this appearance, he makes believers out of them...those who doubted in his resurrection. Those like Thomas who needed to see to believe. And in this encounter he reminds them that the work he began continues..."As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21) And as he says this he breathes on them...a breath that signifies his life has been resurrected and with this life there is the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them along their way.

Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them stressing the importance of forgiveness...it is not time to hold grudges against those who had persecuted him until death...No...now it is their turn to take over where he has left off. The work of Jesus is not over in fact it is just beginning. The Gospel story does not end ...there is more to come...Jesus will ascend and he promises his return. And in the meantime the followers of Jesus are commissioned to live out this resurrection in their everyday lives. The disciples and all of the believers must find ways to express what they have learned. And how they respond is to live collectively, they give up ownership of private possessions, sell what they own and share it amongst one another.

Can you imagine if you went to your sister or father or child or friend and said...I've decided to sell my car, my home, all of my valuables...Can you imagine the response if you told them "I'm giving up all of my worldly possessions so that I can live and share what I have with a group of people...Oh and by the way we all believe in this guy who was murdered on the cross...and then came back to life. Ya...he really came back to life...I know because my buddy Thomas felt the holes in his hands where they nailed him to the cross. Oh but that's not the end...he flew up to heaven, but he'll be back to check up on how we've been doing."

I imagine if anyone of us were to have that conversation today, we would be told we were mentally ill or that we were joining a cult and I'm sure there were many who thought the exact same things when early Christian communities were formed. However I think today it would be even more difficult...difficult because in our culture it is much more accepted when we try to better ourselves through accumulated wealth. It is much more common for people to look out for number one and then maybe help one another. It is a fearful thing to live from day to day, not necessarily knowing what tomorrow will bring or how you will survive, so rather than live in fear of being without, we accumulate just in case.

That day when the disciples hid in fear behind locked doors and Jesus appeared, fear was something they needed to put behind them. Jesus showed himself so they would believe...so that they would believe and continue to live out the world he started...a world of forgiveness and acceptance, a world that provides for all those in need. And how the early Christians respond to this is by forming inclusive intentional communities where everyone shared what they had.

On June 1st I have a field trip planned. Nobleton and Schomberg United are invited to join some of the people from St. Mary Magdalene Anglican in Schomberg and together we will travel to Richmond Hill, have a meal and attend an evening service at L'Arche Daybreak. "L'Arche Daybreak is a group of people with and without intellectual disabilities who share life in community. Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of their journey together. They celebrate unique values of each person and recognize the needs of one another."¹ There are 147 L'Arche communities worldwide. It began in France in 1964 when Jean Vanier realized that he could offer a home to two intellectually disabled men who were living in horrible institutional conditions. As people got wind of what he was doing, they volunteered to help and today there are communities in 37 countries. Vanier named his small house "L'Arche" after Noah's Ark. Visiting and participating in the Daybreak community in Richmond Hill has been one of my deepest spiritual experiences. It is difficult to describe what is like to have a deep connection with someone who can neither talk nor care for their own basic needs, but it happens. It happens in a smile or a glance, and sometimes just being in the other's presence. It is difficult to express what it is like to see able bodied people serve and care for those who need assistance. But something special happens when a group of people live and work together, sharing their God given resources, their gifts and talents. L'Arche is an example of community at its finest.

There are different communities that one can be a part of and there are many different ways that one can be intentional about being a participant in that community. We as United Church people are part of a wider Christian community...a community that is rooted in the very one we read about in Acts

¹ Taken from the L'Arche identity statement.

today. And like the early church, there are different groups who come together to live out their lives as followers of a faith, rooted in the faith of the Messiah we call Jesus. Over the years since the time of Jesus, one of the things that evolved was this idea that we separate ourselves by denomination. Denominations allow us to come together with others who have common values and beliefs and have a place in our world...but we do belong to a much wider group...a group of resurrection people living out the Gospel...a group commissioned to do the same work that the disciples were commissioned to do 2000 years ago. At a time when main-line churches are experiencing decline in membership, there is more reason than ever for our denominational communities to come together so that we can share resources and join forces with others who have similar beliefs and interests. This is one of the reasons we are joining the Anglicans to go to L'Arche. It is an opportunity for us to get to know one another, to share in community and a spiritual experience. Since Schomberg United has been sharing space with Mary Magdalene, we have worked on projects such as the completion of the driveway and making Palm Crosses together. We joined them for a Blanket Exercise, and worked together at a Pancake Tuesday Event...and coming up our own music group Joyful Spirits will participate in their talent show and I will be working with the Reverend Sheilagh at their Bible Camp in Kettleby as well as next year's Ash Wednesday program. As we work collectively and share our gifts talents and resources we are expressing what we have learned as a resurrection people. A group who live in the promise of a hopeful future, where we take care of one another, respecting differences and bonding through a common desire to live out the ways of Jesus.

The community we read about in Acts today was a community of believers responding to the Resurrection... once they committed themselves to living fearlessly, “great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33) and each person had what they needed. Today as we come together as a community of believers, the question becomes how will we demonstrate our understanding of what a life in Christ looks like? What ways will we participate in community. Are we prepared to live fearlessly and give all we can to build up a community that shares our inclusive faith and loving hearts?

May the Holy Spirit breathed upon the disciples that day behind locked doors, breathe life and courage into you, so that you may open the doors and live in the hope of the Resurrection through the sharing of all of your gifts so that you may live in a community that loves and serves one another fearlessly.

Amen