

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from April 19, 2009

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg

“Your Turn”

Scriptures:

Acts 4:32-35

John 20:19-31



“Time for supper!” “Time for bed!” “Time to go!” As children, we hear a variety of instructional phrases from the adults in our lives, some welcome, some not so welcome, depending on the circumstances. Generally, however, there is one phrase used during playtime that is so welcome and so patiently waited upon, that the body language of children as they hang in suspense is almost comical. A lot revolves around the hands, as they either go to the mouth, or wring incessantly, or end up under their bottoms—literally sitting upon them. There may also be a lot of foot action: pacing, jumping up and down, false starts. Some children resort to the hopping on one foot while holding the other behind (which I can’t do with this robe on). All in great anticipation of hearing that phrase: “Your turn!”

Your turn to roll the dice and move your piece around the board game. Your turn at bat. Your turn to get on the pony. Your turn to ride up front in the car!

We have a special situation of “your turn” close to our family. My brother’s girlfriend Margaret holds a pair of season’s tickets to the Red Sox and has for many years. When I graduated from seminary last year, I was delighted to open a card from her and find “my turn” as a graduation gift. Doug and I were even more surprised and delighted to arrive at Fenway Park and find that her two seats were located four rows behind home plate. My son Rob got a turn once as a guest of my brother and as they were exiting the ballpark that day, Rob said to my brother, “Uncle Ed, never break up with Margaret.”

This morning we find ourselves on the night of the Resurrection with Jesus’ disciples in a house with the doors locked. They’re afraid. In John’s version of the Resurrection, Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved had run breathlessly to the tomb that morning to find it empty and had returned home. It was Mary Magdalene who had remained outside the tomb weeping and then had met the risen Jesus and subsequently announced to the disciples that she had seen him. We are not told in the Gospel of John whether the other disciples believed her, although in Luke’s version, we are told that it seemed to them to be an idle tale.

Tonight they’re locked in the house afraid: afraid of the Jewish authorities. And we can imagine many reasons why: they have been identified as having been with Jesus the insurrec-

tionist, perhaps guilty of the same by association. Jesus' body is gone. Peter and the other disciple at least had seen that much. Would they be accused and punished for having stolen the body? Just the confusion alone could make them fearful after the horror they had already witnessed. And now Mary says she's seen him and he told her things.

“Then Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’”
Your turn.

Your turn. Then he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” It is at this moment that the disciples become *apostles*.

Over these past several weeks of Lent and beyond since Christmas, as we read and studied about Jesus' ministry, we spent a fair amount of time examining what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus, over a mere admirer of Jesus. And now he stands in our midst and tells us that he is *sending* us just as the Father had sent him. We are to be apostles – from the Greek word “*apostolos*”—one who is sent, an apostle—one sent to act on the authority of another. Our turn.

I wonder if it soaked in right at that moment amidst the incredible joy felt by the disciples in that room that night. First Mary in the morning, then those gathered in the house that night, then a week later, Thomas, needing to see it for himself. “I have seen the Lord!” she said that morning. “We have seen the Lord!” they said that night. “My Lord and my God!” said Thomas the next week.

If it did dawn on them then that now it was their turn, it sounds like their feelings may have been close to our childhood experience of hearing at last, “It's your turn!” That anticipation turned to joy at finally it being our chance to play. But as we all know, our turn may not be all it's cracked up to be. The pony we excitedly mount is a lot higher off the ground than we anticipated. The base hit or the home run completely eludes us as we take our turn at bat. The ride we couldn't wait to get on as we stood endlessly in line we find to be frightening, maybe even downright traumatic.

When it's finally our turn to take the reins, our turn to get married, to become parents, to accept the promotion, to lead the organization, we may find that the turn for which we had waited was a lot more than we had bargained for. In the coming weeks and months, we will learn from Scripture the same about being Christ's apostles, about Peter and Paul and Stephen and Thomas. Being sent out by Jesus will mean rejection at the least, frequent imprisonment for many, stoning for some, and even death in his name.

Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit, breathed upon them by Jesus, through the assurance by Jesus that he is with us until the end of the age, they did go forth proclaiming the good news, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen the Lord. And as Christians today, as members of the priesthood of all believers, we are called to do the same. And each one of us is called by different aspects of ministry, some as teachers, some as healers, some as table-

turners; and we may be called to minister to a host of different kinds of people through causes dedicated to uplift and to heal them: to children, to the marginalized, to the poor, to victims of domestic violence.

Today, on this Integrity of Creation Sunday, as we approach the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day this week, our attention is turned once again to our ministry to God's earth, the planet and its creatures which God has put into our care.

And as we think about admirers and followers and apostles, and how that translates to the care of God's earth, I am reminded once again of those Peace Walkers who stayed with us here at Mystic Congregational Church in late January on their walk to Washington, D.C. As many of you know, we held a community potluck supper for them and our table was bursting with wonderful food of a wide variety. As we set up the buffet table, we set out paper plates, paper napkins, paper cups and plastic utensils for our meal. After grace, we all lined up to serve ourselves, and I noticed the walkers all holding in their hands their own ceramic bowls and stainless steel utensils and then watching them wash them out for re-use later. I have shared with many of you that before their 55-day walk, they had run the calculation of how much paper and plastic waste they would have generated as a group if they had used disposable dinnerware and decided to bring their own re-usables. Boy, did I admire that! But I used paper that night and continue to do so when it's more convenient. But many of us do try to follow their example in other ways when it comes to restoring the health of our planet. I really try not to buy plastic-bottled water and have a glass in my office to wash out and re-use. We're all trying to reduce our use of fossil fuel and admire and some are beginning to follow the use of smaller, fuel-efficient automobiles.

But it's the *apostles* for the environment who raise our awareness, who bring us inconvenient truth, who are out there spreading the word to the doubting Thomases about global warming and climate change, who believe in their message, and who will proclaim it amidst criticism and sometimes scorn. Somewhere along the line, they decided it was their turn and they embraced it.

Friends, Jesus did not give the apostles their turn without giving them what they needed: his unconditional, eternal love, the breath of his Holy Spirit, his promise for eternal life with him. They saw the Lord and they believed and they willingly went out, knowing they were sent by Jesus, their Savior, knowing he would never abandon them. They had each other, as we witnessed in our first reading this morning from Acts which read: The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul... and great grace was upon them all.

We are no different. We have each other. And we, too, have been given all those things by Jesus to go out beyond this house and these doors without fear to work for God, and God's people, and God's planet earth. It's still our turn and Jesus will never break up with us. Just tell 'em the Lord sent you. Amen.

