

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

**Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> Easter**  
**May 16, 2004**  
**Fr. Bill McGinty**

**“Rise Up Christians”**

Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. Easter is that long feast of celebration that seems to go on and on! Central to the feast is the Risen Jesus!

As my seniors prepare to graduate on June 4<sup>th</sup>, and leave the school for the big world, I try each year to leave a thought to take with them. This is not easy because at the moment their heads are full of mustangs, cars, the prom, the shore, making money, and drinking.

As a teacher and a Christian, you want to tell them about all the pitfalls, all the things that are important, things to avoid, how to live, how not to live, and at the end of the day, when life's dust settles, family and true friends matter more than anything. But Alas! No one is listening! They are out the door and on their way!

Lately, I have abbreviated every thing I want to say to them to four words. I reckon if I'm wasting my time with speeches, warnings, and books of advice, most kids could still remember four words...and the words are “you have a friend.”

They are the words of a Carol King and made famous by James Taylor on his first album in the early 1970's, “When you're down and troubled and you need some love and care, and nothing, no nothing is going right. You just call out my name and you know wherever I am I'll come running to see you again! Winter, spring, summer, or fall, all you've got to do is call, and I'll be there, yes I will, you've got a friend!”

And of course the words are really the words of Jesus in John's Gospel: “I am your friend – call on me!” If the same total of four years in theology in high school is the same knowledge that one thing is certain in life; that is every disaster, every low or every situation, you have a friend and his name is Jesus. I would settle for that – to use that would be a job well done.

And of course it is a message that we adults need in our lives also. “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them!” The words of today's Gospel! What if – what if because God is Spirit, not finite matter, what if God needs a place in which to dwell! God needs to dwell in our hearts and in our homes. To me this is a neat idea. We are so used to thinking of God as being out there or up there, but God in union with his Son doesn't want to be out there in the cold and dark, God wants to in-dwell with us. Where it is warm! Among the things He had created – among the ones He loves – where there is love – there you will find God!

We are also so accustomed to the idea of building a home. We put so much time and effort into the enterprise! Maryann and myself have been so involved with it in recent weeks! How do you turn a house into a home!? How do you make what once belonged to

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someone else yours? It can be fun as you know, but it's always going to be hard work. Building areas for rest, or placing a chair and lamp for a reading space. Years ago we used to have zoned areas where the kids played or zoned areas for heating. Now we have zoned television areas – her “American Idol” - his “English Premier Soccer.”

Today's Gospel invites us to put together a home and build in God! Allow our God to come live with us!

50 years ago in Ireland people would say the words as they crossed the threshold – “God be with this house!” and back would come the reply: “and God be with all who enter here!”

God has and must have a place to dwell and His home must be among us. Perhaps in a real sense that makes us the mystical Body of Christ. I love that concept – that you can destroy or burn down this Church and the Church goes on because we are more than these bricks and mortar – we are the living and breathing and visible staff of God. God's Kingdom is here because we are here; God's word is here because we are enacting it on a daily basis; Jesus salvation continues because we are his hands and feet – the embodiment of his Spirit and teaching!

On Ascension Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, in our Great Christian calendar, Jesus returns to the Father, to his Father and our Father. Salvation is left in our hands. Jesus passed over the reigns of power and the reigns of his kingdom to us and he said “Go out and do it now: feed the poor; visit the prisoner; heal the sick; reach out to the lonely; console the sufferers; comfort the widow; free the slave; stand by your neighbor; resist the bigot; hold the hand of the leper; educate the children; lift up the handicapped; and resist the oppressor!” Speak the words of peace, forgive the unforgiven, and love the desperately unloved. Then you will be my friends, then you will be my disciples, then you will be my apostles, then you will be my body living, breathing the cycle of my life – my being born, my ministry and teaching. You will walk through my trial and suffering with me. You will stand at the cross with me. Then I will give you my spirit and you will receive grace and great power. Then the Father and I will dwell in you.

That my dear people is the theology and belief of our Church! That is what we care about. But we cannot be half hearted about it. There is no such thing as a part time Christian. Evil does not take time off; neither can we.

Ascension rolls around every year to tell us. As apostles you may have run away from the Cross of Calvary – but now is the time to stop running. It is time to turn around and make a stand. It is time to commit to Christ in your life – say it quietly to yourself now “I commit myself to you Jesus, you are the Lord of my life, each day your love fuels my love; each day your spirit energizes my work and yes I will be apostle to your Gospel, I will teach your words with every breathe, every gesture of my being – you are my God, my King, you make my life rich!”

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I want you to mean that today! Walking with Jesus through the liturgical year is serious business. It hurts because it demands our time and our effort. Time is something we value so much. It hurts bad to give it up.

This year we budgeted in the Church for \$52K dollars. We raised \$59K dollars. But I have to tell you as my people I would give every penny of that \$59K up to have had more people make a different kind of pledge and commitment this year. To have had more people in our church come and stand together, to shoulder with the 20 souls who came on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and on Easter Saturday Vigil, I would have swapped all our pledge money. Because where Jesus says to his disciples “will you not watch one hour with me,” he speaks to us. And I am not even asking for you to come all three nights and some people did. I am asking for people to come one night. “Pledge one hour of your time – one night and feel the pain.”

And why, why do I ask you this? Because these three nights are the heart of our faith. The love of our Creed, that God’s Son died and sacrificed his life that we might be God’s children. And all of us who live and breathe his Gospel should stand with him for that one most sacred hour, because the grace from the hour will rock your life and rock this world.

Salvation is serious business for serious people. Let’s say to ourselves, “This morning I will not be a part time Christian for my Lord placed me on the hilltop and he has chosen me to proclaim his kingdom with every tear and sinew, every laughter and joy, every ache and pain, breathe and sweat, every love and heartache of my being, till the day my cold dead body rests in His arms. And He cries out “rise up Christian soul to Resurrection and the Glory that awaits you!

Amen +

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