

## **“Six Ways From Sunday”**

### **Acts 2:42-47**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching  
and fellowship; to the breaking of bread and the prayers.  
Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs  
were being done by the apostles.

All who believed were together  
and had all things in common;  
they would sell their possessions and goods  
and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,  
they broke bread at home and ate their food  
with glad and generous hearts,  
praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

And day by day the Lord added to their number  
those who were being saved.

## **Six Ways From Sunday**

Acts 2:42-47

April 30, 2023

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

### **I.**

Today's sermon is one which will get all of us coming and going. So much so, that as it regards the story I am about to tell you, I cannot decide from which end to tell it as there really is no beginning or ending; just one long flow of coming and going, six ways from Sunday. Which, I suppose, is where we might as well begin.

The expression, "six ways from Sunday" is one you don't hear very much these days; being kind of old school and all. Hence, both Linda and I were struck by it when Ellen Grayson used it to describe all the running around Linda was doing last week as she led a "Road Maps" presentation for Hospice in Massena on Monday, Colton on Tuesday, Potsdam on Thursday, attended her "Women Rowing North" writing class on Wednesday, did a bunch of baking, and in-between all of this scurried over to the church at every free moment in between to fold and sort clothes for the rummage sale.

### **II.**

So, when Linda (slacker that she is) apologized to Ellen for not being there Saturday afternoon to help breakdown and clean-up after the Rummage Sale, Ellen said to her, "Oh honey" (which an endearing expression she often employs) "Oh honey, you've been going six ways from Sunday." When Linda related this to me, I said, "That, *right there*, is a sermon title."

In terms of the calendar, there are six days after Sunday, or six days before Sunday, depending on one's perspective. The phrase points out the inevitability of reaching Sunday, no matter what day serves as starting point. Implying there are six different ways to Sunday, or from Sunday, illustrates that virtually any subject, task, problem or situation has multiple methods of approach; that is, there are numerous options or directions, and a wide variety of possibilities, as well as a certain thoroughness in pursuing them.

### **III.**

Along with Ellen Grayson, I would now introduce into the story her partner in crime, Pat Mace. Pat and Ellen have been Co-Chairing our Spring and Fall Rummage Sales for God only knows how long. Beyond the not insignificant amount of money which gets raised at each sale (last week's topped \$1,400) the Rummage Sale is a fantastic opportunity for fellowship and community building. It is almost impossible to get to know a person if you only see them for an hour or so every Sunday. Stand next to them them all day sorting clothes, though, and people's stories start to be told, not to mention all the laughter that ensues; or so I am made to understand. Not only does the Rummage Sale, as a shared act, help us to pull together as a congregation and learn about each other, it also serves to get rid of our clutter and get much needed and very much appreciated goods and clothing into the hands of those who could use it.

### **IV.**

Then there is the Sneak Peek, held on Thursday evening, which has become something of a highlight of our church's event calendar. This is an opportunity for folks in our congregation to do some shopping at a relaxed pace, socialize, chat, and share some pizza together while kids can run around and play and, perhaps, pick out a toy or two. It is just nothing but fun.

Well, that isn't exactly true, because I'm here to tell you the Rummage Sale is also a TON of work; and for a great many people. Particularly, though, for Co-Chairs Pat and Ellen. Which is why it did not surprise me when Ellen and Pat let me know this week that our most recent sale would be their last as Co-Chairs. While there is certainly some truth in acknowledging they are "getting older" it is really more a matter that our congregation is "getting younger. Time for other people to step up.

### **V.**

Meanwhile, as this was unfolding, Linda received a short video clip from Cati Gollinger. Cati will do this from time to time, send Linda cute photos or videos of one of her kids; which, of course, Linda then shares with me. This most recent was of Audrey, who just turned 1 year old this month. In it, Audrey is holding a stuffed bear.

Now, this is no old-fashioned Teddy, but one with headphones and a record player; some kind of DJ motif. On top of that, the bear wears sunglasses and a t-shirt that says, “DJ Dreidel” which only makes sense once you realize that this is a battery operated musical bear which plays just the one tune: “Hava Naglia”; which translates from the Hebrew as “Let’s Rejoice.” The first verse of the song goes: “Let’s rejoice, let’s rejoice, let’s rejoice and be happy.” For a stretch of days there, Audrey played it over and over and over, all the while holding the bear, smiling, and swaying back and forth to the music; which is what you see in the video.

## VI.

While it was enough to drive Cati and Bill right up the wall and make them crazy, it was nothing but sheer delight for Audrey. Let us rejoice and be happy, indeed.

If you haven’t figured it out already, the reason I’m telling you this story is that Audrey got the bear at the Sneak Peek. There must of been 100 toys there that night, but this bear was *only* toy in which she was interested, and greatly so. I mean, as a parent, what are you going to do? You get the kid the bear, right? What cost is too much for such rejoicing and happiness?



At some point, in the midst of this, I started to connect the dots. Pat and Ellen take on the leadership of the Rummage Sale, a horde of people all pulled together to help (and get to know each other better in the process), a pizza party is had, laughter enjoyed, church folk get some deals and steals, a good chuck of money is raised for the church, people in the community get clothed, I get a swell sermon idea, and little 1 yr. old Audrey finds elation. Mission accomplished.

## VII.

Today's scripture reading from Acts 2:42-47 represents a crucial moment in the history of the church; both as an ideal of church as the body of Christ and spiritual entity, but also as a newly coalescing institution inseparable from human endeavor and real world circumstances. Given this, our passage represents the turning point from reactive to proactive endeavor. A healer, teacher, prophet and, if one is to believe, the Messiah comes onto the scene and folks have all they can do just to keep up; to respond to miracles, the fulfillment of prophecy and a widening of scriptural understanding brought on by a deepening of theological thought. Jesus' three year ministry, and subsequent death and resurrection was a heady time for the church. Now, though, the real work of the church begins to set in; with visceral meat needing to be put to cerebral bone.

## VIII.

And so we read:

*All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Today, on New Member Sunday, it is certainly the case that the Lord is adding a goodly number to our congregation. Not that *they* might be saved, as our very correct theological understanding is that that they, along with all of us, are *already* saved but, rather, that through them the body of Christ, the church *itself*, might be saved.

## IX.

One of the great regrets of my life, is that I never really spent much time studying scripture with my Grandmother, Adele, who was a deeply spiritual woman, filled with an abundance of grace and a relentless compassion. At so many points in my career as a preacher I longed to know her perspective on some passage or another.

That said, I have a pretty keen idea of what she thought about *this* passage: she didn't care for it one bit; particularly the idea of selling one's possessions

and goods to distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. To her, that sounded too much like *communism*, and to a person of her generation there was no greater evil.

All due respect to my grandmother, however, she kind of missed the point. When this passage speaks about those who believed being together and holding all things in common, it wasn't just their possessions which they were sharing, they were sharing each other's lives; they held *themselves* in common.

## **X.**

As you might imagine, I spend a significant amount of time and mental energy considering what it means to be the church; both as an institution, in general, and our particular manifestation of it here on the Park, in specific. Obviously, the past 50 years have seen a *significant* decline, nationally, in the number of people who go to church, belong to a church, and espouse a faith. Though there are a variety of reasons for this, some having to do with changes in our culture and society and some having to do with egregious missteps and an absence of boldness on the part of the church, I think the most significant reason is that there has been too much focus *on* Sunday, and not enough on the six ways *from* Sunday, which then becomes the six ways *to* Sunday; one long flow of coming and going.

## **XI.**

While it is certainly true that this one hour of worship every Sunday is the touchstone of our faith and the blessed tie that binds us one to another, today's scripture reading reminds us that what really constitutes and defines the church are the *other* six ways from this one hour on Sunday: devoting ourselves to the lessons we find in scripture, endeavoring to engage in fellowship, breaking bread together (yes, potlucks and eating cake counts), praying *for* each other and being prayed for *by* others, being compassionate in helping to meet the needs of those around us, spending time together, cultivating glad and generous hearts, praising God not just with words but with thought and action, keeping the goodwill of *all* God's children in the forefront of our minds and, especially, enjoying the awe that comes upon us by simply being together and holding each other and our lives in common.

## **XII.**

Beginning now from the *other* end of the story, a 1 yr. old child finds untold joy & happiness clutching a bear because her parents took her to the Sneak Peek, because there was a Sneak Peek to take her, because so many people toiled to transport and sort items for a rummage sale, because there was a rummage sale, because people donated their rummage (including a DJ Dreidel, who gave that!?! ) because Pat & Ellen chaired the rummage sale, because it is our work and mission to support the church and get goods and clothing to those who need them, because that is what a church should do, because these are the wonders and signs that can happen in a church when we are together and hold each other and our lives in common.

None of this has anything whatsoever to do with Sunday and, at the same time, all of this has absolutely everything to do with Sunday. And this is but one story, one example, of the six ways we go from Sunday, and the six ways we get to Sunday.

## **XIII.**

Believe me when I tell you, similarly, there are a great many more such stories unfolding every day and each week in our church. Stories about sending cards and emails, making visits and calls, praying for others, preparing and delivering meals, offering rides, sitting with people, celebrating milestones and occasions, donating time, serving on the C&CP board, putting on a ham dinner or cabbage roll sale, doing odd jobs around the church, feeding and clothing others, listening to another, serving on committees, singing in the choir, directing the choir, providing a playground next to the church which is used all the time by community kids, remembering those in need at Christmas, helping each other in our daily lives, being role models and caring adults for kids, having the courage to have hard conversations, Book Group, Women's Circle, Church School, welcoming community groups to our building, providing leadership, solace, forgiveness and healing, and, yes, coming to church for Sunday worship, either in-person or on the live-stream.

## **XIV.**

Today we have welcomed Carolyn, Rob, Doug, Julie, Andrea, Christy, Nick, Emily, Judy, Dan and Mary Grace into the membership of this church, and at the end of next month we will also welcome Joe. These 12 people (and I love

the symmetry and significance of that number) will now add to the multiple methods of approach to being a church, bringing with them a wide varieties of possibilities, as well as a certain thoroughness in pursuing the numerous options that God might set before us in being *a* church, in being *the* church and, especially, in being *this* particular church. We stand in awe at how the Lord is adding to our number, seemingly day by day; those who, having been saved by Christ, now, stand ready to save the church, the body of Christ. And to do so *any* way we can, *every* way we can, six ways from Sunday. Let us rejoice and be happy, indeed. Amen.