



Billy Graham, in his book Nearing Home, starts by acknowledging that he didn't think he would live this long (he is 94). He says, "All my life I was taught how to die as a Christian, but no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die."¹ I admire and support Billy Graham in many ways but I find that particular statement most interesting.

In the Acts of the Apostles we have instance after instance of the disciples, apostles and other followers figuring out how to live until they die. Their example is one we should consider while we live on earth.

For example, on that very first Pentecost- the day we celebrate as the birth of the Church- the Holy Spirit descended and touched all those gathered and they were able to understand the Gospel – the good news of Jesus the Christ- in their own language. God through the Holy Spirit spoke to everyone (Acts 2: 1-21).

Indeed, the event was so moving, that about 3,000 persons were baptized that very day (Act. 2:41-42). Those who were newly baptized were devoted to teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer. This is how life is to be lived here on earth.

The Crawfordsville Strawberry Festival and what it symbolizes are part of how we ought to live in the years before we die. We are not -for the most part- raised to be "lone rangers" in the sense that we pride ourselves on our ability to care for ourselves, to make our own decisions, to be the ones handing out rather than accepting hand-outs.

We live in community- it may be large or it may be small- but we each live in relationship to each other. If there had been no disciples, who would have heard and then carried on the message and mission of Jesus? The value of our community comes, in part, in how we care for one another. Not all is doom and gloom, though. Caring for one another includes having fun together. It includes, as the Psalmist says: "Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord, bless his name" (Ps. 96:1-2). We are bound together – with our similarities and our differences- in this place and time to have some fun, to hear some music and to enjoy some food – let alone "ooing and awing" over the cars.

There is a children's finger game that asks "where is the church, where is the steeple, where are all the people." It's fun and it teaches some dexterity. It also may keep us tied to old ways. What

¹ Billy Graham. Nearing Home (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2011), vii.

we focus on becomes our reality. If we focus on buildings as church, then we may limit our ability to see God and God's saving message in those outside our doors.

If we focus on declining attendance at Sunday morning worship in our wonderful buildings, then we may miss those outside our walls who hunger for the message that God loves us and God desires our good. That the one who lies in the ditch is just as worthy of God's love and mercy as the owner of the big fancy house.

If we focus on church being only on Sunday morning and held in our beautiful buildings, we miss the many opportunities- like today- to be part of a community of faith that is not bound by building or numbers in the pews or people who dress and speak just like us. God's love is for all.

The Gospel appointed for today is from Luke. It is the story of the woman anointing Jesus's feet with costly perfume. Bathing of feet was a sign of hospitality in a time when roads were not paved and the climate was hot and dusty. Bathing of feet was something a host was expected to do when guests entered the house and before they sat for dinner and conversation.

We tell our children: go and wash your hands before you come to the table. Similarly: go and prepare yourself to join with the family for a meal. Today our concerns for clean hands and faces at a meal may be more related to hygiene but the concept of hospitality remains.

In the Gospel story, the owner of the house, the host for the meal, is astounded that Jesus would let a woman, a sinner, wash his feet. Jesus reminds those present that she has shown great love and thus her sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you, Jesus says. She goes in peace- having loved much, she is made free to rejoin her community with sins forgiven.

God calls us to be in community with one another as we live our life. A meaningful life includes time with community, good food, good music, a car show, and enjoying the laughter and love as parents and grandparents and friends watch children play. The Crawfordsville Strawberry Festival gives us a chance to be and to do these things together –to make some meaning out of this life graciously given to us, even as our lives include some sorrows and some hardships. It is up to us to find ways to live a meaningful life during the journey and as we, like Billy Graham, are nearing home.

May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and give you peace. Amen.