

4.7.24 50th Anniversary Service Sermon

50 years ago we started the journey that brought us to where we are today. And a couple years ago I started my journey to bring me here today. And we were in the middle of the discernment process so I am meeting with Sue, Gary, and Ron Eppert and the pastor at Ankeny at the time and I am getting ready to do this service and I am nervous. I am really nervous. It is the Sunday after Easter and for some reason in my mind I am thinking everyone is going to start coming back after Easter. Covid is over. We all had a great time during Holy Week, and then people are going to be here. And Pastor Nathan laughs. He says "Don't worry, this is going to be the one day that nobody shows up." I am like well that takes a lot of pressure off me. But we did still have a good number of people show up that day much like today.

I had many people ask me if we did today's celebration because it is the Sunday after Easter and nobody shows up. And it is not, it is just coincidental that it showed up that way. Going through the history of St Pauls I have notes saying we were formed on April 2nd, April 7th, April 9th, and April 11th. So this works out fine.

But I started to wonder. You know, the Sunday after Easter, people don't want to come to church. This morning I heard four times. We've got communion again? We could have skipped it. Now you guys clearly are not Catholics. But we do. We have communion again because we are celebrating again. We continue to celebrate this life. We are continuing to celebrate the love that God and Jesus have for us. And it is fantastic.

The scripture reading is a little off today because it is talking about Jesus's ascension. And we know that when Jesus was resurrected that he walked on Earth for forty days. But it is a good reminder, the rest of it. If you're at the second service last Sunday we read the long ending of Mark. And in that ending when talking about the descension, it mentions directly the eleven disciples and not the twelve. And today's reading lists those disciples and says, "Carry out my mission. Go out and share the story. Tell people about what I have done. Tell people I have been born again."

And that is what we have done, 50 years ago. Two churches continued to share God's story, Jesus's story. The love, the resurrection, and the rebirth. So it is fitting today that we are talking about this because we know that Jesus died for our sins. We know that he gave himself so that we can live and be a part of the afterlife. We know that he continued to preach and has asked all of us to preach and share that light. Because we are the light of his life, of his love, of his

affections. We're sharing that everywhere that we go. And as many people that have tried, they cannot put out that light. They can not stop us from being who we are and what we try to do.

And today shows. So many churches shut down after covid. So many churches have two to five people showing up each week and we have 30. I was talking this morning about other UCC churches in the state. They are lucky to have 10 show up a week. They have no Sunday school. They have as much as they can to keep spreading God's word the best they can, just like us.

I don't know what happened. I don't know when it happened, but people stopped coming to church. We obviously know it happend with covid but they never came back. But all of you did. You have taken the Sunday that is least likely to have anybody in the pews and you have come to help celebrate that love. You have all come to be reminded that we are all God's light. That we all share his teachings. We know the love that he has given us. That he has ascended into heaven and that one day he will come back down on that cloud and he will tell all of us that we did a good job. And he will share the next part of our life. But for now we get the pleasure of getting to share that love with everyone w so. Everyone that we see. Everyone that we meet on the street. Everyone that we talk to tomorrow. Jesus's love is a light within us that we refuse to let go out.