**A COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND LOVE**

**Easter 2B – April 10-11, 2021 – Pastor Jonathan Adams**

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our risen Lord who fills our every need. Amen.*

If you’ve ever taken a psychology course, in college, or maybe even in high school, you probably learned about something called Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Even if you haven’t heard of it before just now, it’s really pretty straightforward, and probably common-sense once you hear it explained and really think about it.

Basically, Maslow came up with this theory that all humans have the same needs. Obviously, we all need air, water, and food to survive, but he went further then that. He said those sorts of things are physiological needs, things that our bodies literally need to function. And once we’ve taken care of those lowest level needs, we can start working our way up a pyramid of other needs.

His theory said that after physiological needs are met, then we start working on the need for safety and security, after that, the need for a sense of belonging and love, then the need for a sense of esteem, and finally a need for self-actualization, for personal growth and discovery, for being all that you can be.

Now, one of the most important things to realize about Maslow’s hierarchy, is that he saw it as a pyramid, and just like any pyramid, or any structure at all, you can’t build unless your foundation is solid. If you truly don’t know where your next meal is going to come from, you certainly don’t have a sense of safety and security, and you’re not interested in big pie in the sky questions like the meaning of life. The lower level needs are the most important, and you can’t move your way to the top unless they’re squared away. Just like it’s hard to focus on your work when you really need to go to the bathroom.

Now I don’t want to take for granted that there are undoubtedly people within this congregation who are in situations that cause them to be stuck in those lower levels, worried about their physiological needs, or their health, safety, and security. But, for the most part, most of us spend a good chunk of our lives dealing with those third and fourth levels, the need for love and belonging, and the need for esteem.

Now, throughout his life, Jesus seemed to recognize these needs in the people he met. And even moreso, he seemed to understand the foundational concept that it would take Abraham Maslow another two thousand years to put into writing: someone who’s hungry, someone who’s sick, who’s thirsty, who’s afraid, they’re not living their fullest lives, they can’t take care of those higher level needs when they’re constantly focused on scraping by to live.

Jesus wanted people to be able to experience the fullness of community and the fullness of life with God, and that’s why so many of his miracles, healing and feeding, were focused on taking care of people’s lower level needs, allowing them to seek out those higher ideals.

And even after his death and resurrection, taking care of the needs of others was crucial to the ongoing ministry of the early church.

Let’s start with our Gospel reading:

It was evening on the first day of the week. John tells us that earlier that day Mary Magdalene had gone and found the empty tomb, that she had run and brought back Simon Peter and the beloved disciple and shown them. And that later, she was alone in the tomb when Jesus appeared to her.

And so that evening the disciples are locked away, hiding in the upper room. They’re still terrified over the whirlwind of activities that have happened over the past few days, and now especially afraid at what the empty tomb might mean for them, even though Mary claims to have seen Jesus himself.

So their physiological needs may be met, they have shelter, they presumably have food and drink, but they’re lacking in safety and security. You can practically imagine the tense conversations and arguments that are happening behind those closed doors, the anxiety that gets cranked up by every new sound outside.

And Jesus comes to them, inside those closed doors, and says “Peace be with you.” He calms their anxieties, he gives them a new mission, he breathes the Holy Spirit into them and sends them out to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

He builds them up, he takes care of their fear, he gives them a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, he involves them in the larger mission of God.

But, Thomas wasn’t there. This is the story we hear each year on this week after Easter. Thomas had missed the show, and he was unconvinced by the story his brothers told. He wanted to see for himself. He doubted.

And I can’t help but think what a blessing it is that Thomas felt comfortable enough to share his doubts, to share his insecurity. One of the things I always hope for as a Pastor is to create a community where people feel safe asking questions, where people feel comfortable sharing doubts. Some of my favorite theological conversations have started when someone came up to me after worship and said, “Pastor, I’m not sure I understand that passage the same way you do.”

Thomas needed the community of his fellow disciples, he needed that place of love and belonging, in order to share his vulnerability, and in order to grow in his faith. And when he did finally have his own experience, supported by his fellow disciples, he was ready to join them in their mission of serving God.

Jesus helped people in their time of need. The disciples helped *one another* in their time of need. And as we heard in the reading from Acts, the early church followed in that same example, sharing things in common, helping anyone who had any need.

And that is exactly what a church is supposed to be…

Helping people with their needs. Their physiological needs, their safety and security needs, their needs for love and belonging, their needs for esteem, and their needs for self-actualization: for personal growth and discovery.

A healthy church can do all that and more, because a healthy church is a true community of faith, and a true community of love. A community where people can feel comfortable sharing their doubts, where people can feel safe asking for what they need, whether that need is food, or prayer, or maybe needing to be able to see the wounds of Jesus first hand.

The church is not a place for perfect people, as John tells us today, “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves…” All of us are in need of something, including and especially the forgiveness of our sins, the very first thing that the risen Jesus sent the disciples to offer.

But the church is the place for regular, broken, sinful, doubtful, hurting people. For those who need to see and hear more about this Jesus fellow, for people who need to be gathered together with like-minded souls, for people who need to hear that they are loved unconditional. It’s a place for us to gather when we’re strong AND when we’re doubting.

That is what the church is for. That is what THIS church is for. So that even if today is a rough day in our story of faith, tomorrow we might believe more fully that Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!