
Why We Disciples Tend to Shout

An Evensong homily by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith
Easter 7 – Year B

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Why do Christian disciples tend to shout? That's the question that arises for me from today's scripture reading from the Book of Acts; The Acts of the Apostles: Why do Christian disciples tend to shout? Of course not all Christians are the shouting kind. But considering those who are, why *do* they? Now I'll explain in a few minutes why it's a relevant question based on that reading. But first, from another religious tradition entirely we have an answer to a more general question; an answer that has a little humor in it, maybe. Let's see what you think.

A Buddha, one of the Buddhas—there are dozens or more in that tradition of people who become enlightened themselves by emulating the original Buddha; a Buddha asked his disciples, 'Why do we shout in anger? Why do people shout at each other when they are upset?' That was the question.

Disciples thought for a while, one of them said, 'Because we lose our calm, we shout for that.'

'But, why to shout when the other person is just next to you?' asked this Buddha. 'Isn't it possible to speak to him or her with a soft voice? Why do you shout in anger at another person when they're right there next to you?'

His disciples gave some other answers but none satisfied this Buddha.

Finally he explained—and here you might find a little bit of humor, or some wit or witticism in his answer; as he explained:

'When two people get angry at each other, their hearts grow so far apart that they are at a distance from one another. And in order to cover that distance they must shout to be able to hear each other. [Laugh] The angrier they are, the stronger they will have to shout to hear each other through that great distance.'

Then the Buddha asked, 'What happens when two people fall in love?'

They don't shout at each other but talk softly, why?'

Because their hearts are very close. The distance between them is very small...'

The Buddha continued, 'When they love each other even more, what happens? They do not speak, only whisper and they get even closer to each other in their love.'

Finally they even need not whisper, they only look at each other and that's all. That is how close two people are when they love each other.' (<http://beyondtheopposites.com/2011/12/17/why-shout-when-angry/#sthash.LHHZUZt5.dpbs>)

Well, the way I like to say something similar is that people who love one another have their hearts in each other's keeping; each one has the other's heart in their keeping.

And here today we can appreciate that story from our Christian perspective. It's especially appropriate alongside today's gospel reading from John, in which our Lord prays that 'his disciples may be one, as he and his Father are one' (John

17:11). Here I'm also reminded of one of the favorite hymn of our church, "They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love; yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." And that's how we go about having our hearts in each other's keeping, "by our love."

Well, today's reading from the Book of Acts makes me tend to shout. Because here, I'm sorry to tell you, I feel a great distance from these apostles in today's reading. It's because these are the very disciples who abandoned our Lord on the night that he was betrayed. And in today's reading where they choose Matthias to take Judas' place among the twelve chosen disciples of Jesus, they completely ignore the fact that they were among those who also abandoned him. Judas was the active agent of our Lord's betrayal, but they were passive agents of our Lord's betrayal. They did not choose to be arrested with him, as some of them professed they would do. Rather they all abandoned him to his fate, so that he was captured friendless while they remained at a distance.

And what about their brother and fellow disciple, Judas? Well, instead of having his heart in their keeping—his own passions, his own vulnerabilities and weaknesses—he was scapegoated by being made to stand alone as the only one who was guilty of so great a betrayal.

Also I'm particularly grieved by these apostles on this Sunday of Mothers' Day. Today is notable because it's our mothers in particular who do for us what these apostolic brothers of Judas failed to do: have his heart in their keeping. In this connection perhaps you know the proverb:

A mother holds her children's hands for a while but their hearts forever.

It's a powerful sentiment, isn't it?—worthy of treasuring: "A mother holds her children's hands for a while but their hearts forever." Now if a mother's love can be so unconditional, that she might be capable of never being alienated from her child no matter what, how can we expect anything less from God's own heart of care and concern for each us—no matter what?

Well, that is the love that our Lord calls us to in this Christian life and journey. In particular it was the calling entrusted to those first disciples and witnesses to his resurrection. And like those first disciples, we also need to take the measure of our own complicity; to fathom how much we are also at risk for abandoning love; at risk for betraying one another. In that spirit of conviction and contrition we must embrace others who are also at risk—people who also chronically abandon and betray others.

Yes, we are among those who are called to embrace those who are also at risk so that we may be disciples to others in Jesus' name. Before we can be such disciples we must take the measure of our own complicity, our own tendencies to abandon and to be disloyal to the Lord of love; to the way of love. And then, precisely in the midst of that awareness, that conviction—that's when we must receive and accept the forgiveness of a loving Lord who says to us as Jesus did to the twelve, 'I take you back anyhow! And I make you my agent of good news and of loving-kindness and forgiveness,' that we can shout in euphoria, "Thanks be to God!"

Now, church friends, please be careful here. Too many of us accept the conviction of our betrayals and abandonments without also, simultaneously if possible, receiving the more awesome awareness of God's lovingkindness and conviction. So be certain that you both, rather than one without the other; both the conviction and the euphoria of it all.

Yes, thanks be to God, that God's love 'closes the distance' between our betrayals of him and the good news that we belong to him anyhow. He goes the distance between us, and so we shout in euphoria, "Thank goodness! Thank you for such grace, thank you for such forgiveness, that no matter how far we are from the truth of love, and from the debt to love that St. Paul said we owe to all people (Romans 1:14). So no matter how far we are at various points of our life from that, our loving Lord goes the distance and draws us back; brings us back into loving fellowship.

That's how we can go from shouting in anger when we are distanced from one another, to shouting in joy that we have been rescued from enmity—our own and others. And that's why we invoke a number of different Psalms appointed in diverse churches around the world today, on this Seventh Sunday of Easter—the Sunday after our Lord's Ascension. One of those Psalms is Psalm 103, where we invoke in verse 12:

as far as the east is from the west,
so far [God] removes our transgressions from us.

But that's only one of the reasons why Christian disciples tend to shout in joy, when we do shout; because we're overjoyed and elated that 'as far as the east is from the west, so far God removes our transgressions from us.

Then finally there's Psalm 47 appointed in our church for today. It celebrates our Lord's ascension that we observed last Thursday, and it reads:

⁵ God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

⁷ For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.

Yes, our victorious Lord has ascended to the throne of God with a shout, and so we too must be shouting!

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.