

Rev. Kristie W. Finley
5/3/2020 Sermon
New Testament Lesson
Acts 2:42-47

This story about the growth of the early Christian movement comes after Jesus' ascended to heaven, and the gift of the Holy Spirit brought cross cultural communication on Pentecost. They are a changed people.

“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.”

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Today as I came into church, I was still expecting to see tents and dumpsters. Yesterday would have been our 70th annual Rummage Sale, and the remnants of that would have been all around us. Things have definitely changed. We are in a different time.

Today's scripture gives us a glimpse into the early church, a glimpse of how the people lived and what they valued. A people who were also living a very different life. They were sharing the lessons and teachings of Jesus. It appears that the apostles, those who struggled to understand throughout their journey with Jesus, they are now standing on his firm foundation. They were teaching and preaching and the people were following, in fact their numbers were growing. We see in their living the vision of a God radically valuing people over possessions. The people shared in all aspects of life together. This was an enormous shift in faith and practice. They shared in the apostles teaching, they shared in fellowship, they shared in the breaking of the bread and meals, and they shared in the prayers.

They shared everything, and made sure everyone had what they needed. They did not share out of guilt, no, they did not do this grudgingly, they did so out of their shared devotion to follow Christ. This may sound unbelievable, that they shared everything, but...

When we hear these words in the middle of this pandemic, they don't seem as alien as they once might have. Much of this idealized vision of the early church is taking place in our lives. We are sharing resources, we are sharing in our study of the Bible, we are sharing in the breaking of the bread, and time together. The time we share is now more sacred when we cannot psychically be together.

But we are carrying on our traditions, and I have to say I was surprised at how quickly this happened. Change in the church usually moves at a turtles pace. We took the order to stay at home pragmatically. We are living in shifting times. This coronavirus has left us on the sands of uncertainty, uncertainty on how the future will play out. We have been wrestling with diverse leadership styles, dramatic changes in employment and schooling, who would ever have thought E-Learning would be how all are learning. Truly, everything has been disrupted. We are experiencing a shared transformation; we have all been touched by it. We have all had to take on new roles and responsibilities, and we have had to let go of much that we clung to in the past. In the next several months and years, what will we let go of to allow this transformation to grow? What will we pick **back** up?

This early Christian community we read of in Acts was also going through confusing and shifting times. Fishermen had become apostles and leaders, the grief of the crucifixion and the joy of the resurrection. A messiah who didn't show up as they expected, and now they were living a fundamentally changed life. In Jesus Christ their image of God had been transformed, and transformed them. How is God transforming us?

Today, we look very different than we did six weeks ago. We worship, we study, we break bread together, and we pray. It is hard to fathom how being unable to gather physically has brought us closer, but it has. We are thinking beyond ourselves. People are calling to check up on neighbors and friends and strangers, and continue to call because they have formed a connection. So many are alone, and these weeks drag on. Many will not be able to move out into the community until there is a vaccine, how will we share with them when we move out?

I pray we build on what we are already doing, what you are already doing:

You are arranging flowers from your garden and delivering them to people who are isolated. Simple bouquets that bring unimagined joy for the kindness they represented.

Young people creating videos to help us understand the technology that is keeping us connected. And exercise videos for those who cannot get out to exercise, but still need to move. The barrier between the ages is thinning.

Preschool teachers are still teaching and reaching out to their preschool families.

Mask-makers who keep us safe and stylish.

A wonderful baker who surprise us with cookies Wednesday nights. And all the people leaving groceries and donating to the COVID Fund.

These may seem like small things in the face of massive unemployment, death, and front line workers who sacrifice so much to take care of us, to share their life saving gifts. But a small thing can be life giving to someone desperately struggling with isolation.

These are visible signs that the body of Christ continues. The invisible signs come from those of you who are helping your neighbors, and strangers, that we don't ever hear about. We are living in to loving our neighbors. We are restricted now due to the stay at home orders, so I am curious how it will be when we are allowed to move about the cabin? Will we firmly step into reaching out, will it have become our identity? Or will we forget and let the old ways creep back?

Will we share our gift of time and offer relief to those who have been working nonstop? Those volunteers delivering food are few and are exhausted. Will we volunteer to help out with our neighbor's child affording them the opportunity for self-care, after weeks of working, teaching and parenting? Will we share all that we have with those who have need, without judgement or shame? I pray that the shaming of job and financial loss is left behind. That we offer support and resourcing instead.

Earlier I mentioned our Spring Rummage Sale, it is a supportive and resourcing ministry that reaches out and connects across all boundaries. There would have been many in the pews exhausted but fulfilled from the long week of set up in preparation for the sale on Saturday. I awoke yesterday feeling like something was missing, but throughout the day as I read the reflections shared by some of

the Rummage folks I saw hope, and appreciation. They were not grumbling or complaining that the sale was canceled. I want to share a couple of their thoughts with you:

“For some reason I woke up early today. Alas, we are not heading for the tents; not rearranging our items for the umpteenth time; we are not anticipating the morning rush of customers today. Yet, I feel the Rummage spirit!!! With each day of delay, my excitement for its return grows. I know others feel the same way.”

Another adds:

“We may all be socially distanced and seriously missing the ministry of rummage, but I remain grateful for the caring, kind, and loving community that continues and keeps my spirits from sagging. Rummage volunteers are resilient and possess the amazing ability to adapt and adjust. I consider myself fortunate to be part of the family-by-affection.”

I think it is that resilience and adaptability that is a gift and helps us thrive during this time. Yes, I said thrive because I feel that is what we are doing, we have not been standing still.

Up until this week most were doing well. This week a malaise of sorts, that’s the best word I can find to describe the feeling, has descended. We had weathered the first five weeks of stay-at-home well, but we did not receive the reward we had hoped for. As the week progressed though, I have felt it lift, primarily through the continued sharing I see all around. The body of Christ staying together.

The women in the Tuesday Brown Bag Bible Study selected a book to study that is outrageously appropriate; *The Art of Neighboring, Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside your Door*, by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon. It is a rich resource that could help us as we move out. And resources we will need.

We are already hearing and seeing the rumblings of polarization. These last six weeks we were able to reach out to each other in love, we payed attention to what we had in common, what we shared, not what separates or divides us. That connection to what we have in common is one of the things I will not put down in the future.

We began a few things this year that will aid us with transformation in this next season. Just as the church in Acts came together for meals and the breaking of the bread, we can reflect on the Wednesday night Suppers we shared together, and

our continuing to share communion even will apart. How does that experience inform us? And the Great Room, that allows us to have events and meals together, and to see that we have already entered this time transformation. God has actively been at work in us, we need to stay attune to the Spirit.

Take note, literally make a note, of what you want to keep in the coming season, and what you will not pick up again. We will have to do more. Our capacity to share will need to expand. How you plan to share in the transformation of the world that Christ calls us to, because it is happening. Amen.