

Psalm 23, Act 2:42-47

Together

The devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Sounds rather idyllic. It is a picture of the community of faith after the resurrection of Jesus. This story of the people gathered comes as part of the story of Pentecost, when the gift of the Holy Spirit came upon the people and many were baptized. In fact, we are told that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (v47)

One might think that this was the picture of what the church was supposed to be and that we have messed it up. But really it didn't last long at all. People, being imperfect, got it messed up fairly quickly. Still, this was a glimpse, if even for a moment of how the church at its best might look. It was a little like the garden of Eden where all was provided. The needs of people were met by people sharing what they had and possessions and goods were distributed with the proceeds going to all as any had need. Some might say this is socialism, but really it is about God's people providing, caring, and being community with everyone being considered valued and worthy.

This vision did not last then and it is not sustainable now, but that does not mean that we throw out the ideal, but rather finds ways to strive for it. To show that people matter. In this case the story is about the community of faith, about how we can be in community with one another. It is about healthy relationships and care. It is about supporting one another, learning together, spending time getting to know one another, breaking bread together, whether it be in our homes, at a potluck lunch, or over communion. All of it and more held in prayer.

Just the other night as the choir met together, we spoke about the fact that almost no one is going to just walk into the church just because, but they may come because we have spent time in the community as people of God helping and spending time with them. Then, with an invitation to join together with us in worship, someone may accept, but what will they experience if they choose to come to worship?

This passage of scripture is about our health as the church, as a community of faith, as a congregation. Are we healthy? Are we as welcoming as we like to believe we are? I believe we are well on our way, but this welcoming hospitality does not come naturally and working toward this never comes to some final conclusion. Each Sunday we need to check in with each other, learn about each other, and make sure that someone who does choose to dawn our doors finds a healthy, vibrant, welcoming people of God.

What were the marks of a congregation that is truly together? Let's break that down again. First is being devoted to the apostles' teaching. For us that is the New Testament. This is not to say that the Old Testament does not have meaning for us, but the Christian faith is based in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus which is told in the Gospels and the letters of those who lived in those years following Jesus' life, those who were witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit. Spending time reading, learning, and reflecting on the scriptures is essential to understanding what we are called to be and do. It is an important part of our worship services, but goes beyond just Sunday morning.

And speaking of the Holy Spirit. Remember this scripture is part of the bigger story of the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to the people. All of what they did they did because of the work the Spirit was doing in, among, and through them. That is still the case for us. The Holy Spirit is still at work in believers as individuals and in community. So as this message is shared and heard today, remember all of this is done together in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the church because of God's love shown to us through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.

So the church spends time in scripture and in learning. The church together also devotes time to fellowship and breaking of bread. Those coffee hours, potlucks, activities, including the shortbread sales, flea market, and even when just a few are gathered around a dinner table but are part of this church together, all of it is about fellowship. It is about caring for one another, learning about each other, spending time getting to know and trust one another.

Those times of gathering to work and worship, meals and conversation are as important as reading scripture. These opportunities to be together build our bonds of trust. It is about relationship building and when we are good together, people who join us, who may not know us, can sense our love for one another.

It is important that our bonds of trust and community do not become closed and insular. Christian community is about welcome, and just as the love between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit outpoured into the making of creation, so our love cannot stay bound but rather overflow, just like that cup that runneth over in Psalm 23. Overflowing love that extends welcome and hospitality to anyone that enters these doors.

Finally, the mark of a healthy community of faith is one that prays together. If there is one area that we can and need to strengthen our congregation it is that of prayer. Professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Rolf Jacobsen writes, "In prayer, we...do several things: Give ourselves to God, receive God fully, praise God, plead for mercy and justice, express trust, and listen for God's voice in our lives."¹ Prayer is the

¹ **Jacobson, Rolf.** [Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread, and Prayers - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

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connector and the connection to God. It is vital for the health, well-being, and future of our church.

Everything about us hinges on prayer. We are called to pray as individuals, but certainly as a community. We pray in worship, and we can be more diligent about our prayers when we come together for all the other activities of the church along with devoting specific times for pray throughout the month and year. We can hold each other and this congregation in prayer each day or as often as you think of it. No prayer goes unheard and each one is answered. It may not be answered as we hoped, but prayer is answered and it is always with the understanding that God knows, sees, and understands what we cannot.

As I write I think of the many sports stories we have seen where a number, slogan, or symbol is placed on the team's jerseys to show solidarity. In January, NFL player Damar Hamlin collapsed during a game. Some weeks later, the NFL showed support for the 24-year-old on his road to recovery announcing that on a particular week all 32 teams would be encouraged to read a special message before kickoff as a unified show of solidarity for Hamlin, who remained hospitalized in the ICU. His own team, the Buffalo Bills have been wearing his Number 3 to show support.

As Christians we are not always so overt about our support of one another, though we can choose to be. But to have that type of team connection, that when one is down and out others know it and are there to support, or when it is a time of celebration we celebrate together, when it is time to work or worship, we are all in. This is something to strive for. It is a witness that will be undeniable in the community. If word got out about our love for one another and any one who connects with us that would be amazing and would speak with and without words about who we have become and are becoming because of God's love, the power of resurrection and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

The power of "together". Together we are the church. Together we can transform lives and community. Together we break bread, eat our food with glad and generous hearts, praise God and have the goodwill of all the people. And maybe, just maybe, the Lord will add to our number those whose lives are also being transformed because together we work, worship, praise God and share our lives with one another.

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.