

## **All in Together**

A Sermon by Rev. Karen Burger

May 3, 2020

Texts: Acts 2: 42-47    John 10: 1-10

I want to focus mostly on our reading from Acts today. This is a description of the **early church**, when followers both Jewish and non-Jewish came to believe that Jesus was anointed by God and had risen from the dead and that his death and resurrection have saving power. And it was a time of **rapid growth** in the faith community, when “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” People were being drawn to Christ and to those testifying to Christ.

What drew them? Teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayers, wonders and signs, and also the **generous spirit of sharing** among those who believed. They were essentially creating a new living community where no one owned anything, but all shared their goods in common. This was countercultural even then, just as it is today when people join a community and give up private ownership of goods. It calls to mind the Franciscan monks and nuns who take a vow of poverty and live together. It is sad that at this present time communal living is not as safe as it was. Please keep the Franciscan brothers and sisters at Maryknoll in Ossining in your prayers, as some have transitioned to heaven.

**All of these tasks are what the Church is called to in our time too.** There is much good teaching online and in books as well in conversation with others. If we are simply together but are not hungry for teachings of Scripture, we at some point cease to be Church. If we neglect some form of fellowship, even online, and just do our own private devotions, we cease to be Church. Online does count because we are talk to each other. If we do not pray together or share with one another in need, we cease to be Church. If we don't share beyond our Church to community in need, we cease to be Church. So here in Acts we have the blueprint for what the earliest followers of Jesus believed following Jesus as a faith community was all about. **Note: they did NOT have a church building!** Church

was a community and also carried over into how they lived at home, giving God thanks over their own meals!

**What a powerful encouragement for us in these times!** We aren't in our building, but we are therefore closer to New Testament Acts 2 Church! We are actively seeking to help those in need around us, whether by donating to the feeding program of schoolchildren through St. John's Episcopal Church Larchmont, or organizations making masks or making masks at home or shopping for neighbors who are most vulnerable.

Jesus says in John's Gospel "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." **Abundant life for Jesus did not consist in the amount of one's possessions, but in the love in one's heart.** It was an inner reality that connects us to others in the spirit. That love can flow between those on earth and those on earth and those in heaven. There is no geographical boundary that stops its flow!

So the early Church "had the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2: 47) Clearly, that is a figure of speech, as we know from the New Testament that this was not entirely true. There were many who also opposed the teaching of the apostles as it interfered with their commerce and belief systems. But the point Luke is making in Acts is that there were **many who were drawn to the love and generosity** of this new community of faith, followers of the Way, as they were called before being called Christians. Those of the early followers of Jesus who were Jewish still thought of themselves as Jewish, but following Rabbi Jesus as Messiah. The non-Jewish believers were welcomed into fellowship with the Jewish believers as God revealed that Jesus' ministry and the Resurrected Christ's work was extending beyond his own people, and they were loved as brothers and sisters and made a break with their former beliefs.

**As we look around us in the world today, what signs and wonders are we seeing? How are we seeing people saved? How are we spreading the love of Jesus even when we are physically distancing?**

Signs and wonders...not something Jesus encouraged us to look for particularly. He said that his generation sought a sign, but the sign of Jonah had already been given. He recognized that people like the dramatic and miraculous and have more difficulty with ordinary signs or signs given in former times. And yet we do see signs of God's presence, and they can be encouraging.

At various times in my life, I have been led to personally help people with financial needs or other needs. Whenever I have set out to help another, I have never dreamed how much they would help me in return, with a far more precious gift than gold or silver: spiritual support. New perspective. New ways of being in the world. Personal growth. Always. We receive as we give of ourselves to others.

To me that is a **sign and wonder**. God brings people into our lives for a reason and a season and we don't even know why but often we look back later and marvel and have "awe" like the early faith community at what God just did.

What does it mean to be "saved"? The classic answer is "saved from death and sin by Christ **saved from being utterly alone and.**" This is true! **But we are also saved from being without love.** We are saved by being part of faith community, connected in spirit. Even on Zoom!

And of course there are times that the generosity of people of faith literally saves someone by providing them with food, shelter, medicine or other need. **Thank God for the work God can do in our hearts and in the world as we follow Jesus! Amen.**