

Acts 4:32-35

April 6, 2018

Preached at Springdale United Methodist Church

*32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (NRSV)*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Those are the words of Easter morning Christian communities of faith around the globe proclaim confidently, boldly, and loudly. They are words we spoke together at the beginning of our service this morning! This is the good news of Easter that we are called to proclaim each and every time the church gathers. Praise the Lord! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Clearly, I wasn't with all of you just a week ago; however, from my own experience with your brothers and sisters in Christ at Bethany and from worshipping at other congregations on Easter morning throughout my own journey of faith there is just a different energy in the air come Easter Sunday. Perhaps, it's the anticipation to sing some glorious Easter hymns. Or maybe it's the fact there tend to be more people at worship Easter morning gathered to

celebrate that Christ is risen. Whatever it is, for that hour it captures us, moves us, energizes us and empowers us. Easter Sunday is our fuel for the journey. It's the spark to our fire. It's the cool water for our parched souls.

When I was younger I remember many hot, humid summer days when I would gather with several friends day after day. Often we would find ourselves at Jason's house, which was several miles south of Marshalltown on an acreage of land surrounded by acres upon acres of trees. So often, we would wear ourselves out playing football, shooting baskets, or trekking through those woods discovering new hiding places or trees to climb. So often, our journey through those woods would finally lead to an opening in the trees where you would see the summer sun shining and fields of green pasture leading us to the soothing, cool waters of a stream whose waters cascaded across rocks and brought the sound of sweet music to our ears. We would arrive hot, sweaty, and tired and then jump in, wade in those waters and be filled for the journey back home.

We must have made that trip dozens of times and with each one and every step we took I would long to see that clearing in the woods and hear the sound of those running waters. That's what Easter is for the church. It's our clearing in the woods from our Lenten journey. It's the light of a new day after the darkness of Good Friday. It's the water of life, love, and grace that will never run dry, cut off,

or bottled up by the damn of hatred, prejudice, injustice, intolerance, ignorance, and death. Easter will prevail. Life will gush forth. Love will have the final say.

Yet, then something happens. We find ourselves back in the wilderness trapped in our fear. Struggling to see the light. Searching for those cool waters once again. Maybe some of that energy from Easter morning wears off. The anticipation of the day is gone and over with and it's onto life as usual. Or it's gathering for worship this Sunday after Easter, which statistically is the least attended Sunday in the church year. Some of the energy of Easter morning is gone. I was feeling a bit like that this past week. The ups and downs of faith.

I was fresh off Easter morning. Filled with the good news and anticipating the opportunity to come and worship with all of you. Yet, then I read that passage from Acts. The story about everyone selling their property. Sharing everything together. Making certain no one was needy among them. And sadly, I felt as if the hammer of the law had slammed down upon me. The weight of guilt lying heavy upon my shoulders. Why? Because so often this passage is used as the model of what church should be. It sets a standard that, in reality, is probably unattainable and even unrealistic in our context. Yet, then I saw verse 31, which our lectionary fails to give us. Hear that verse:

*When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.*

While we simply can't dismiss the characteristics of this early worshipping community as no longer applicable to the church today; yet, at the same time it is helpful to see this church as what it is. A community gathered and filled with the Holy Spirit. Troy Troftgruben, Associate Professor of New Testament, at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, states:

The utopian quality of Luke's vision bars it from being a simple yardstick for measuring all forms of Christian community -- a recipe for a host of failing grades. Instead, Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35 read best not as blueprints for today but as glimpses of dynamic experiences by a community enlivened by God's Spirit. And so, these texts say less about model church practices and more about the dynamic power of God among believers.<sup>1</sup>

A community enlivened by God's Spirit. I love that phrase he uses. Because at least for me, it moves beyond the initial angst this text brought me into seeing it through the lenses of how this community lived into and lived out the good news of Easter through the pouring out of God's Spirit upon them. It begs of the church yet today to ask the question, how do we embody the message of Jesus by our life together?

That's one of the reasons I love being with you today and every year we do this pulpit exchange. It's why I so cherish the shared services of Ash Wednesday,

Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday we do together and wish more people would join in those worship opportunities. Truly, these are signs of Easter. Of how jointly we are a community enlivened by God's Spirit and embody the message of Jesus. We come together as that early church did - believers of one heart and one soul. For those moments in time our differences don't separate us but rather the love of Christ unites us. Abundant love that pours over us once again and fills us with great grace just as it did to those first followers of Christ as together we give our testimony to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2387](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2387)