

“Communal Community in Christ”

Easter 4, Acts 2:42-47, May 3, 2020; 9:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Acts 2:42-47 The Message (MSG)

⁴¹⁻⁴² That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

⁴³⁻⁴⁵ Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

I. EARLY CHURCH – COMMUNITY IDEALIZED OR REALIZED?

I love this story, this early glimpse of the Early Church! The “Church of Acts”—busting at the seams with baptisms and people lining up to join! The rest of the world watching with their jaws dropping! I have to say—as much as I love the story and the picture it paints—I’m skeptical! It’s a bit utopian, dontcha think? Was the early church really that wonderful of a “communal community?” Did they really share everything they had in common?!

Did they **tithe** or turn in their IRS refund checks to their church community—if they had no need of them, and others’ did? Or is this passage **idealized** and the “good ol’ days of Church” **idolized**?

Scholars debate at lengths about this passage. It might be a “goal” or “something to aspire to” for the Early Church, but whether it actually came into fruition—was lived out in the way it’s described—well, it’s a debate!

But! That doesn’t mean it has to be a pipe dream! Not for US! We can DO this. We ARE doing this. “They devoted themselves to: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers.”

“They **held all things in common.**” Not HAD all things in common. They didn’t **agree** on everything! I’m sure they, like every church since, didn’t all have the same ideas about how to “do church!” You know, the things churches wrestle with, like:

--how the chairs should be set up in the sanctuary

--how the stewardship drive should be run

--how the kitchen ought to be organized
--what style of music we should have in worship the most

--how pastoral care and outreach ought to be done
--how many “mission offerings” special projects, building improvements ought to be undertaken at a time

“They sold their possessions and goods and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had needs.” Wow. In our day, is that even possible? Would the church be accused of practicing socialism if we did that?!

BROKE BREAD:

They “**Broke bread at home!**”—did you catch that?! We’re not so out of line, sharing our communion from home, virtually, it turns out!

And God “added to their number.” To the views on YouTube on their own Church Channel; to their Zoom coffee hours and meetings. To the number of people being **reached** in all sorts of ways and so many places. Even places around the world!

II. COMMUNITY AMONG US

In “The Jesus Path” by Steve Poos-Benson, he reminds us of how these early Christians saw themselves. The church was NOT a building.” They were the **People of the Way (Jesus’ Way)**, for they didn’t see the life of faith as a matter of “going to church,” but an altogether new **way of life**.

Another name they gave themselves was “The Called-Out Ones.” They believed they were literally *called out* of their normal lives, their everyday

existence, homes and businesses to follow Christ and BE the Body of Christ *in the world*. Not just in their own little church building or gathering.

Here’s your **fun fact** of the day: Do you know what the Greek word for “called out ones” is in English? **Church!**

Now, you might be **squirming** a little at that phrase! I know I am. We tend to think of “**called out**” as a **bad** thing! Nailed. Scolded. Challenged. Put in one’s place.

But “**called out ones**”—the Church is *exactly* what is called for in these unprecedented times! **Called out** of our comfortable circles, our personal and communal comfort zones; our recurring patterns that keep us from moving up and out and into the world in more profound ways.

III. CALLED OUT TO BE COMMUNITY DIFFERENTLY

And, do you know what the Good News is? We are **doing** it! Yes, we, CUCC and many churches and faith communities all around the world—are being called out in these times to “**be the church**” differently, and we are responding! It’s **exciting** to be a part of this New Way!

We are reaching out to one another and the wider community in all kinds of ways we maybe haven’t before, or not to such a great extent. Even while hunkering down safely at home.

Our **Council** had a very thoughtful conversation and determined *not* to apply for a PPP loan, because others have *much* greater need for it than we do. I was

proud of our Council and the ethical and thoughtful leadership and research demonstrated. There are truly many folks in more desperate need than we.

And, the next week, support for CUCC flowed in! We are in a position to **give**, not “get on the gravy train” as Bill Waldorf put it so well!

We are living the Way of Jesus, as the Church in Acts did! Bringing that scripture to life in our time and place! And, we are supporting our own church (and will keep doing so!), so that we can carry on our substantial ministry ever wider and broader.

Folks are taking meals and groceries to one another, calling on the Buddy System, offering tech support and guidance. Problem-solving with one another as we puzzle through these puzzling times. “Holding all things in common”—even recipes and bread-baking skills. Especially needed wisdom at high altitude.

This week—we watched and were there—as an entire community came around a family as a daughter and sister completed her journey on this earth.

THIS: A holy thing. A holy moment.

This all was done—not as an *organized* “Pastoral Care Team” or appointed **committee**, or even with the Pastor *directing* the program. But was a grass roots effort—the priesthood of all believers! As the church **should** be. We are *all* the Prayer Care Team now! And not just here, in our particular congregation, for:

“**The whole world is our parish.**” As one hymn puts it so well. And another line from a song! The “church is not a building.”

IV. NEW DAY TO BE CALLED OUT!

CUCC has surely begun a new chapter. Not just because we are online now, and being joined in worship throughout the whole world, but because of our desire to Be the Body Of Christ; Be the Church in these divisive times with a coming together, One in the Spirit, One in the Lord. In spite of our different perspectives and opinions about how things should be done. Even with many Different parts of the body and Differing gifts and traditions and faith stories and backgrounds, (and technical know-how or interest!) we have come together in a new way. That’s how God the Creator designed the Body to be and called us together and called us out to be People on the Way! Here, in this place and this expression of the “Church,” and throughout the world—the whole wide world that God so loved. Loved enough to lay down life and power. Loved enough to **incarnate**—become Emmanuel—God with us. In flesh AND in continuing Spirit and presence.

V. KELSEY’S STORY:

Our niece, Dr. Kelsey Poos-Benson, PT, works at St. Anthony’s Hospital in Lakewood. She is truly on the front lines always—but especially in these COVID times. She brought us a story—begging to be shared—about true community and loving one another together in these times.

this was posted with the permission of my patient

This is a picture of me and my wonderful patient. I am a physical therapist on the COVID + rehab unit. A unit

full of patients who are COVID positive and require daily therapy because they are too weak to go home.

Today he discharged from our rehab unit back to the family that he had not seen in WEEKS. He was the first patient to discharge since the unit was created.

He wanted me to share his story and quite frankly I wanted to as well, because he FOUGHT HARD to be able to walk out of the hospital doors today. Also, because his story pulls at my heart more than anything in this crazy pandemic thus far.

He wanted a picture of us and we decided on one that did not show his face but would represent his strength and the strength of everyone else that is forced to fight COVID as well. Patients, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, therapists, and families.

He went from slightly sick to his wife saying goodbye via phone call because he was not improving on the ventilator. He was taken off the ventilator that night with the assumption that he would not survive. The next phone call his wife got was not the one she expected. He was breathing on his own. Now came the next fight. He had to re-learn to move, swallow food, think, shower, put clothes on, stand, and walk on his own. Small tasks that we all take for granted but are incredibly hard or impossible for someone who has been immobile for weeks.

Today he was able to do each of those things and embrace the ones he loves...alive, happy, full of tears and on his own two feet.

Each and every one of us played a part in his recovery and he will be the first person to tell you that. From the moment he entered the ER to the person that held the door for him as he left.

We all truly do make a difference.

Working on the COVID unit is every emotion bottled up in one day. But on this day, I am damn proud to have fought this fight with him.

I am also damn proud to stand amongst my amazing colleagues who show up to work every day and pour their heart and soul into what we do.

He may have been the first, but he is most certainly not the last. So we hold tight to these amazing memories and we fight on.

VI. CONNECTED AT THE HEART

A friend recently dropped off a community board. She had some “tech frustration”—didn’t like Zoom for meetings and data usage, but it was more “my heart wasn’t in it.” I grieved, because I knew she wasn’t feeling connected in a meaningful way.

This Covid time has taught us so much—not just a crash course in Zoom and YouTube and all sorts of technology, but about what we NEED as human souls. How to make sure we “keep our hearts in it.” How to stay connected—even connect more deeply—with our Maker, our Source. With our neighbor and fellow community folks. With our circles and ourselves.

Isolation and social distancing has taught us a lot about connection and community for sure!

Brene' Brown, a social researcher, after decades of studying human beings and our social interactions, landed on this simple but profound truth:

“We are wired for belonging.”

And belonging *can* happen—even in these times. For truly, we are physically distancing, but **not** social-distancing, when it comes right down to it.

Let's plunge into this month of virtual worship with great **intention**. To reach out in *every* way we can. Not letting the different levels of “government dictate” about safe or safer or economy vs. safety and health dictate to us how WE will be the church, how we will go about being the Body of Christ—in this place and in our worldwide parish.

We can call people, teach them how to get on Zoom, encourage them to join in, send cards, send letters, smile over the masks, drop food at their doorstep. Share all things in common with financial support. Let the world know that we are the “called out People of the Way of Jesus” and let them “**know** (without a doubt!) that we are **Christians by our Love!**” Amen.