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CONCORD SUNDAY SCHOOL

LECTIONARY LESSON 18

SUNDAY,
MAY 3, 2020

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 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, 47 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.

Background

Acts is a book of early church history. It is an example of proto-Christian* community. This is the story of a community trying to make sense of life after their beloved Christ has come, lived, died, and resurrected. The Book of Acts attempts to answer the following: What do we do after the traumatic event that bonds us? How do we pick up the

pieces? What's the best way to honor a loved one? What principles serve as a healthy foundation for a strong community? As we journey into the month of May, let's think about what makes a community work.

*Proto-Christian as in "precursor." You could say that beeper page codes are the "proto-text messages." Remember beepers? And smiley faces before emojis? :-)) While the people of this time may not have called themselves "Christian" (that doesn't come for a few more years), this history is foundational to understanding how we move as the Body of Christ.

Today's lesson will focus on **mutual aid**.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. **What makes a community strong?**

What's happening during this passage?

This passage details "a day in the life" of believers. There are images of people teaching and sharing space together, breaking bread, and praying. There is still great reverence for the temple. Notice that this new way of life did not make early Christ-followers reject their Jewish sacred space. Jewish people and Christian people are family. One does not replace the other; one is not more *true* than the other.

The writer describes this season as an incredible season, one in which "awe came upon everyone." The apostles were "imitating Christ" by performing the signs and wonders (1 Corinthians 11:1). It was an amazing season! The writer reflects on this moment with great nostalgia. Using strong and warm language, the writer says that "all who believed were together and had all things in common."

There was no such thing as "my stuff," and "your stuff." People had sharing economies that supported everyone's flourishing. There was no such thing as someone who had all the money while others starved. When there was excess, people would share with those in need. In fact,

the people would sell their possessions and distribute to those in need. The passage describes a fellowship that was so strong and firm that they spent “much time together in the temple”, “broke bread at home”, “praised God,” uplifted the “goodwill of all the people.” And in response, day by day, the “Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Anyone who has stumbled upon a surprise plate held at the family barbecue can relate; a full belly will make you feel safe and saved.

What images does this scripture conjure for you?

Do you miss being in the church-house? That’s human and valid. It’s hard to be separate from one another in these times. The word for fellowship is “koinōnia,” which has a connotation of intimacy, communion, kinship. It is an intimate word. The *fellowship* is the sound of laughter in the sanctuary before and after worship, it is the passing of cough drops when someone has a cough, it is the way a kind soul holds a new couple’s baby so that they can focus on the sermon. In the fellowship, in the koinōnia, there is a strong sense of taking care of each other. No one gets left behind. It means that we trust that our individual needs will be taken care of, even if we don’t personally have it ourselves. When we trust that the community can hold us, we are less likely to lie, steal, cheat and violate boundaries.

Why is food so central to this text?

Food is one of the few things that unite us across cultures. There’s a joke among culinary anthropologists that every culture has some sort of bread-and-filling variation. Think about it. Tacos, beef patties, dumplings, doubles, roti, burritos, sloppy joes, empanadas and more all fit this category! While every community may use their own spices and sauces to flavor their food, we all have to eat. Breaking bread in this text is an intimate act. Sharing food is a recognition that we are all human and we all have to eat. Major deals get brokered at kitchen tables and at restaurants because after all, “you have to eat lunch, and I have to eat

lunch, let's eat together!" As today is First Sunday, let us remember that "breaking of bread" is also a reminder to take the Lord's Supper. Paul reminds us that "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." If you can't do communion together, you can improvise. Toast with grape jelly counts. Hawaiian rolls and orange juice counts. Tea and crackers counts! We're going to be creative!

Eating together is a way to build intimacy. It's a way to remember why we gather. Of course, there are likely people even during the writing of this text who would not have been able to eat with the larger community. It might not have been as golden of an age as the writer describes for everyone. And today, there are all kinds of people who have been isolated in even more extreme ways. People who are chronically ill, incarcerated, disabled in ways that would prohibit them from entering or fully experiencing worship (like not being able to access the educational building or needing ASL interpretation) and others have always had a hard time being in the Christian community. We will have wasted this quarantine season if as a Church we did not learn how to empathize.

***What questions do you still have of this scripture?
How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?***

Connection to Today's World



In a live-streamed prayer on May 1, Rev. Dr. Anika Whitfield called attention to the fact that this very lectionary passage we're studying today fits very well with the remembrance of May Day.

"Today is May Day, it's the day that we honor people

who believe that workers should have equitable rights and healthcare. They should also not just have \$15 and a Union but they should have enough to live off of.”

On May 1, 2020, workers of Amazon, Whole Foods, Target, Instacart and others coordinated a strike. Workers are asking for a shutdown of infected sites followed by a 2-week quarantine, hazard pay, protections for whistleblowers, support for safety procedures, paid sick leave and more. It's never too late to amplify their demands and laments.

Until we are citizens of a world where all workers are fairly treated and valued, we will take care of one another. A silver lining in this cloud is that mutual aid networks have been reinstated and new ones have been born. Mutual aid is an effort to match people with support shared by other community members. It's not *charity*. It's a project to meet the needs of all people in the community. Or, in the words of our passage, it's an example of “all things in common.” Maybe you need a friendly call, maybe you need groceries, maybe you need someone to pick up medicine for you, maybe you need someone to walk your dog.

If we ever “return to normal,” let us pray that we never forget what sustained us.

To see a list of active New York based mutual aid supports that you can call/email to apply for, click here:

<https://patch.com/new-york/new-york-city/coronavirus-nyc-directory-community-mutual-aid-networks>

To view Rev. Dr. Whitfield's prayer, click here:

<https://www.facebook.com/sdpconference/videos/233941274555854/>

To learn more about May Day strikes, click here:

https://www.democracynow.org/2020/5/1/kali_akuno_peoples_strike_may_day

Journal: What is something you need in this moment? What is something you can offer? (It's okay if you can't think of something for both. If you're stuck, take some time to pray and listen to the Spirit's guide.)

Closing: Sing "Koinonia,"

For a video, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoWr6GPl1o8>

*"How can I say that I love the Lord
who I've never ever seen before?
And forget to say that I love the one
who I walk beside each and every day*

*How can I look upon your face
and ignore God's love, you I must embrace
You're my brother, you're my sister
and I love you with the love of the Lord."*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God who knows all about our trouble. You also know our delights and our desires. You are with us as we wait for the return of Christ. You meet us at the very point of our need.

God, we thank you for the model of this Community described in Acts. Thank you for showing us an example of people trying to get it right. Help us to keep you first in our homes and in our daily lives.

Be with every person who is in need today. Be with **US** as we are in need. Remove all shame, guilt and fear as we ask for what we need. Con- vict those who may stand in our way. We thank you for the blessing that we trust is on the way.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen