

April 8, 2018

Acts 4:32-35

Pastor Katya Brodbeck – Powell United Methodist Church

“Of One Heart and One Soul”

Today is our communion Sunday and my first memories of taking communion was when I was a child in a Russian Orthodox church in Russia. They gave me a piece of bread and a spoon full of sweet church wine. I did not understand it. Nothing registered in my brain. I felt nothing in my heart. Twenty years later, I was sitting in my studio apartment on the third floor of the seminary dorm in Delaware Ohio

writing my paper on Sacraments, and tears were falling down on my bible and books and even the keyboard of my laptop. At that moment I was reading a document that the UMC published on Communion, which is called “This Holy Mystery.” This document opened my eyes and my heart that communion is so much more than eating a piece of bread and drinking a little bit of juice or wine. First thing that I learned is that the word “communion” means sharing or exchanging, especially on the spiritual level. So, communion is about sharing. And if we look at those first followers of Christ in the passage for this morning in Acts 4, it looks like they had communion between each other sharing all their possessions and everything was held in common. They sold their lands or houses and made sure that there was no needy person among them.

But would you go to this church? Not sure, huh. Larry said he would need to think about it. It reminds us of communes or cults where people are cut off from the real world, they give everything to the leaders of this commune, and often times there is abuse that is happening in communities like this. I remember when I was young, I heard a lot on the news about such communities appearing after the fall of the Soviet Union. There were lots of churches that were established during the 1990s but there were a number of those cults that took advantage of people. Hearing the negative on the news about such communes, our natural inclination when we read this passage is to be skeptical. This is so weird and strange. I would not go to a church like that. Why do they have to share everything?

I think that we might miss a lesson that this passage has for us this morning if we simply look at the actions of those first followers of Christ. What if we look at what drove their actions? What was the deeper reality behind all those actions of sharing? It says it right there, in verse 32, the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. I think that was the key to their actions of sharing and selling their possessions. When I was in the office this week, I was constantly thinking about heart and soul and how we use these words in our culture. So I found myself humming this simple piano song, “heart and soul.” There are so many songs with the words heart and soul in them and the songs are mostly about love and romantic relationships. Then our moms and our mentors always give us advice of how to put our whole hearts and whole souls into a task that is at hand. When we think about the word soul, what kind of things come to mind? Good music, deep conversations, kindness, love. In the culture that I grew up, there is an idiom that is called ‘A person with big soul.’ It is someone who is very kind, deep thinker, possibly a believer. What about the word heart? Of course not it is first meaning, a body organ. We talk about broken hearts, those who are young at heart, heartfelt. What I discovered here in the US, the phrase a person with big soul has the same meaning as a person with the big heart.

Then I looked at the definitions and I found out that these words are so interconnected and they almost mean the same thing and I don’t think they help us. So I had to do some deeper

digging. What I found that the word *psyche for soul* can mean “inner life” or emotions and feelings and life itself *and the word kardia for heart* can mean will, emotions, and also a place where God’s spirit resides. So, those first believers were connected on the levels of their inner beings and of the very place where God resides. They were connected by the very center of their beings. Being of one heart and one soul was sort of a pulse, the breathing and the heartbeat of the community. You could hear the community heartbeat.

What interesting to me is that the text does not say they were of one mind. I think sometimes our mind can divide us in our opinions and the way we think about things. Our world too constantly reminds us how divided we are. Our skin color, different upbringing and backgrounds, economic and social status, and especially our beliefs and our opinions. We always seem to put ourselves in clusters and groups and clicks. Even in the church we are divided more than ever. But you think those first followers did not think differently about things? Yes, they did. There were a multitude of them. What then was it that made possible for them to be in one heart and one soul? How was it possible for them to have that heartbeat pulse of the community, one heart and one soul despite their differences?

And the answer is also in the text. It says, “with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” What held the first Christian community together was the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and God’s grace. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, this being of one heart and one soul was possible for them. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, this communion, this sharing was possible for the members of that community. Because Jesus raised from the dead, there was no one in that community who was in need. Because Jesus raised from the dead we are here today and all of this is possible for us too.

And I will go further to say that it is already happening in our community. We are of one heart and of one soul, when we worship one Lord. We are of one heart and of one soul, when we come together to serve. We are of one heart and of one soul, when we are sharing our lives on this journey of faith. We are of one heart and of one soul when we take communion.

Remember how communion is about sharing. On that day at the seminary dorm I also learnt that communion is about thanksgiving and remembering Christ’s sacrifice for us; that communion is about healing and made being whole by the Holy Spirit; that communion is about proclaiming of God’s Kingdom that is to come and our expectation and longing to be with Christ eternally. What is more, Holy Communion brings nourishing, strengthening and affirming of our faith. And another thing that I learnt that communion is a time when we share our love towards God and one another. It is here where we are being united with each other and God in mystery, God’s holy mystery. During communion we are of one heart and one soul, one pulse, one heart beat, giving thanks to God for what Christ has done for us through his sacrifice and his resurrection.

There are so many things that divide us in this world and in our culture. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead, it is made possible for us to be of one soul and one heart. May the world hear our community’s heartbeat. May it be so today and always. Amen.