

April 11, 2021

Acts 4:32-35

Pastor Katya Brodbeck - Powell United Methodist Church

“The Heartbeat of Community”

Lent this year has been hard and weighty for me. Heavy not like any other Lent. I am sure it is because of the pandemic and the restricted way of life we all have been living and the grief that we all have experienced. I was so looking forward to celebrating Easter. And Easter was such a joyful day. Flowers, and the cross, our youth leading us in worship in such power, we saw people for the first time in our building in over a year! It is like the weight has been lifted and I could breathe in the air of hope and new life. I am so glad that Easter is not just a Sunday but a season. I am not sure if you know we call it Eastertide, a time between the first Sunday of Easter and Pentecost. In this time we are reminded of the power of Christ' resurrection in the life of the early church and our lives. And the passage that Kim read for us this morning shows us the power of Christ's resurrection at work in the early church community.

What a beautiful snippet of communal life of the early Christ followers. It's almost like someone did an instagram or a facebook story of how that community lived. The text says they shared everything and held everything in common. Some sold their possessions and gave everything to the apostles. And there was not a needy person among them. Wow! It is an incredible image of generosity, hospitality, love and sacrifice.

To us it seems a bit utopian. I am not sure many of us would want to sell everything and give it to the bishop and just go and live at a church somewhere. And certainly we would not want to live together and be in each other's business all the time. We, the people of the Western world, value our privacy and individualism, after all. That is why perhaps when we look at this passage and then look deeply at our hearts and lives, we see how easily we fall short of that ideal of life of that early church community.

This way of life was also described as a bit communist. As the one who was born in the communist Soviet Union, I could see how that might be so. it was already collapsing and so I did not get to experience living in the apartments where each family had a room but they shared everything else, the kitchen, the toilet, the shower. But if we look back in history, when the revolution began in 1917, the bolsheviks confiscated all the possessions from those who had them and shared those with others. The sharing came from a place of power and coercion. The sharing was forced upon people. Unlike what we see in this early church community. The wish of this early church beloved community to share everything with each other and make sure there was not a needy one among them came from a different place.

What was that place? Of course that place was love. But what fouled that love? What made that love possible? What was the pulse of the community that **changed people's hearts that they want to share everything with others?** What was the heartbeat of the community that broke all the barriers, cultural, socio-economic, perhaps ethnic? What was the drive of that community that transformed people's hearts in such a way that they stopped being driven by prestige,

pursuing the socio-economic ladder, and success? How did the lives of the people become a reflection of Jesus' self-emptying love?

Well, we don't have to go far. The answer is here, the answer is in the passage and the answer is in the season we are in. You see right at the center of our verses it says that "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." It was the power of Christ' resurrection and God's grace that was at work in this early church community. It was the power that transformed people's lives and hearts so they were able to love one another and build a beloved community. The power of the resurrection changed everything for them.

And the power of the resurrection changes everything for us. A year ago during the Easter season, I finally started to realize how that perhaps happens. I could never wrap my mind around resurrection and how it exactly affects my life here on Earth. I always believed how it affects my life eternally. But last year with the pandemic, with such a change in the way we were doing things, there were opportunities for being in online communities together, a webcast with Larry and a Zoom group with some of the clergy and clergy types community. The conversations in those communities inspired me and one evening all of a sudden I realized how the power of the resurrection is at work in me and in this world. The power that raised Jesus up continues to raise us up, to transform us, to widen our hearts, to give a new day and a new hope, to find new ways of the expression of God's love, to make us a beloved community.

The term Beloved community was coined by Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr and is now used by many communities including churches. Our conference started conversations around what it means to be a beloved community and they have provided a definition of what beloved community is. It is on a screen: a beloved community is where

LOVE AND JUSTICE RULE

It is a community where equality of opportunity, of privilege and property is widely distributed.

EVERYONE'S WORTH IS AFFIRMED

It is a community where everyone respects the dignity and worth of all human persons and living beings.

DIVERSITY ENRICHES ALL LIVES THROUGH COMMON MEMORIES AND A SHARED FUTURE

It is a community where one is judged by the content of one's character rather than color of one's skin.

STORIES INSPIRE HOPE

It is a community of interpretation where our stories, context, and future hope have meaning.

ALL ARE LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY

It is a community where our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity.

This is the vision of the beloved community for the 21st century!

Friends, Christ's resurrection makes this beloved community possible among us.

As a beloved community we are called to respond to those needy ones among us because the power of Christ's resurrection is at work now as it was at work then. You see the word needy reminds me of the word "poor" and we know that there are poor not only for material resources, but poor in soul, and body, and spirit.

This morning, my friends, I imagine a beloved community to be just like that early church beloved community, loving one another, sharing generously of our prayers, of words of affirmation. I imagine a beloved community sharing a welcome and inclusion of all, no matter their socio-economic status, skin color, or background, or their sexual orientation. No matter their abilities, physical or mental. I imagine a beloved community sharing our burdens and struggles with one another, sharing our time and our hearts with one another because Christ is alive and among us.

This morning the scripture presents a great challenge for us, but also presents a great opportunity and great call to continue to create a beloved community of God to open up ourselves to the transforming power of the resurrection in our lives. Let us continue to be and create a beloved community!