

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
April 11, 2008

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. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

A Community of Faith

About a month ago, I invited all who were present to make 2 lists. On the first list, I encouraged you to write what you “can not” do. On the second list, I asked you to write what you “can” do. The idea behind that sermon was to first help us realize that there is always something each one of us “can” do. It was also to reveal to us that when we felt overburdened by something you just “can’t” do, there would be someone else who “can” do it for you. The object lesson – as it was – was highly successful! As you saw from the list in this month’s newsletter, there was someone who “CAN” do just about anything! What you didn’t see, because I promised you I would keep these confidential, was the list of “can’t”s. Being the people you are, many of your “I CAN” lists stretched much longer than your “I CAN’T” lists. I appreciate your willingness to focus on the positive! But herein also lies the problem – if we are not willing to honestly communicate what we need or desire, if we aren’t willing to tell our brothers and sisters in Christ what we CAN’T do, then how will others know how to share their “I CANS”? How will others be able to be a blessing?

For example, I believe that 27 people wrote that they would be willing to drive into town for groceries or medical appointments! In the past month I have heard people complain about the cost of gas, but I have only once seen anyone ask for help getting into town. Here are 27 people wanting to help, but if no one will admit their need, these 27 blessings lie dormant. Is that what the Kingdom of God is all about? “Oh, but Pastor Katie,” you might say, “we don’t want to be a burden on anyone else!” God never says, “Do not burden one another with your troubles!” Rather, the scripture says, “Bear one another’s burdens!” (Galatians 6) A faith community is a cooperative whereby we help one another, but to do so, we must first admit what we desire, we must first make ourselves vulnerable so that someone else may be a blessing. Our time to bless them or to bless someone else will come.

In Acts 2, we learned last week that 3000 were converted to this new religion that named Jesus the Messiah and Lord. And after that happened, we learned that all of these people began helping each other. As we read today, they began selling their possessions and their property. Why? So that they could distribute to everyone who had a need.

That’s my point. They shared with everyone who had a need. Who had these needs? Other believers, for one. They shared everything that had in common.

Now before you pass this off as my rendition of a Christian commune, read Acts 2 for yourself, because that is exactly what the first church was – it was a commune where friends at together and shared everything – it was a church grounded in CANS and CAN NOTs that balanced each other out. When one had a need, another met that need. And when that person had a need, someone else was able to help. Had the early church a book of Order, it would have spelled out that joining the church meant joining the communal life, including giving all that had to the “collective” to be shared. Can you imagine requiring such vulnerability from new members? Yet, 3000 were saved after Peter’s sermon and the Lord kept adding to their number daily!

When the Holy Spirit comes into a church and breathes life into it so that it becomes a Community of Faith, it can't help but giving entirely of itself for others. And in fact, if we're honest with one another, that's the kind of community we want, isn't it? We want a community of 'faith that gives so generously to others that there are no burdens, for when one is down, another helps that brother or sister right back up.

I watched a show a week ago that expressed all of the feelings wrapped up in making oneself vulnerable when we have a need and when we hope to give generously of ourselves for others. Frequently, what we lack when we have a need or when we share with others is simply TRUST. A man was walking down the road when he was approached by a homeless man who asked him for some change. The man said he didn't have any change and tried to walk on by, but the homeless man was persistent. Well, then give me a dollar. I don't have a dollar! How about a 5 or a 10! Finally, exhausted by the beggar, the man gave up the only thing he had with him – a 20 dollar bill. Upon giving it up, the man had a point of conversion for he realized that his life was not about himself, but rather about others. He immediately set out to help others accomplish their dreams.

Like the man approached by the beggar on the street, we frequently resist sharing because we don't TRUST – we don't trust others to use what we give wisely; we don't trust others to help us when we are down (And why should we? We ask. We got ourselves into this mess); but ultimately in not trusting, we don't trust God to provide for us and we don't trust God to work in the lives of others through our gifts. The truth is, we all use our gifts unwisely at times and we can not judge others for how they use what is given to them anymore than we can judge them for how they got into their messes. As a community of faith, we acknowledge that we are all on this journey of following Christ together. We also acknowledge that no matter how low we are, we always have something we can give to someone else. In the story above, the man convinced the beggar to give HIM some money to help someone else and in so doing the beggar's life was also transformed! In giving to each other and in sharing with others, the Holy Spirit is able to breathe life, making us a community of faith.

A couple of weeks ago, a friend asked me what I needed. I chose to be vulnerable and to trust her instead of saying, "Oh, everything's fine." I opened up to her and told her what I needed and what I desired and then she gave it to me, asking me how she could help more. Then, I thanked her for being Jesus to me. She didn't know how to respond. No one had ever said that to her, but I truly believe God was providing for me by working through her. In fact, my becoming vulnerable and her generosity led us into a wonderful discussion about what we believe and how that plays out in our lives. And the Lord added to their number daily.

The early believers were vulnerable with each other – or maybe I should say they were "real" with each other. They didn't pretend that everything was OK when it wasn't. There were no pretenses. The community of faith knew who was living on less than was humanly possible; they knew who was lonely; they knew who was despised by society; they knew who was hurting or sick; and in response they shared and shared and shared and broke bread together, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, and sang praises to God. And when that happened, when they put down their TRUST barriers and shared their lists of CANS and well as CAN'Ts, God added to their number daily.