

Simple and Basic
United Church of Broomfield
May 3, 2020

Acts 2:42-47 (CEB)

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. 43 A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. 44 All the believers were united and shared everything. 45 They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. 46 Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. 47 They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

Today's reading describes the life transforming worship of the very earliest Christians. It comes from just after the day of Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2, beginning at verse 42.

This passage comes from a time of change. It is a time of creativity. Genesis 1 tells us that God is creator and it also tells us that we are made in God's image --- therefore we are called to be creative. For the earliest Christians, as the church was being born, they had no worship pattern to look back to, so they had to create things from scratch.

As we look at these early Christians in Acts, we see a formula that is simple and basic. As the sense of awe came over everyone and God performed many wonders and signs, they didn't just "try out this church thing," but rather it tells us that they devoted themselves to it. With enthusiasm and zeal, they poured their hearts, souls, minds and actions into the teachings, into the community, into their shared meals and their prayers.

- Teachings
- Community
- Shared Meals
- Prayers

The church of Pentecost was basic and simple. Its rudimentary nature led to its growth, its success and allowed it to be healthy. For us, our two-thousand-year-old pattern of church – our worship - has been thrown into chaos by COVID-19, so we are having to re-think and reinvent worship; we have to be creative too. But, in our creativity we remain rooted in the rudimentary principles of the church born at Pentecost.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

The Apostle's teaching – that knowledge which Jesus Christ shared with them and commissioned them to disseminate to the four corners of the earth – was simply the gospel. They taught about the way in which Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament scriptures in order to bring people to salvation through his sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection. They also taught how salvation in Jesus Christ was to be worked out in the life of the believer. The New Testament scriptures reveal to us their teachings.

Teaching (and learning) is probably the easiest thing not to lose out on during this lockdown. I don't say that lightly, as I know that for parents at home trying to work and now part-time teach, it's anything but easy. It's easy for us to provide you with a children's message and a sermon each week - whether via Facebook LIVE or for those who don't have the internet - a mailed a copy of the message. We can reflect together on God's word and how we can apply it to this strange current situation. We are also gathering in small groups weekly via Zoom Meetings on Wednesday evenings to share our feelings, hear the good news and perhaps share some personal insight that might help others --- how we've experienced the Gospel ourselves.

Some people are working harder than ever, yet some are finding a bit more time, newly created or re-shuffled time; so why not read a devotional or some Christian books? Learn and teach from the gospels through the UCC's daily devotional or the many wonderful books out there by CS Lewis, Henri Nouwen, Brenee Brown, Philip Yancey and so many more writers. With an onslaught of information on social media, perhaps it's easier (or even healthy) to read something OFFLINE; some established works from verified authors and theologians. Then share with us, what's you've read, what you've learned and how you've been changed.

They devoted themselves to the community

"All the believers were united"

"Day by day, as they spent much time together"

"they sold property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to everyone who needed them."

They devoted themselves... to fellowship

This is by far harder than teaching.

I've talked with many of you who have said you miss the hugs, the handshaking and the touch shared during the passing of the peace. I feel the same way.

Mother Theresa once said, "loneliness is the leprosy of modern society." Church can be fantastic at bringing people together. In our lonely modern world, some people can go for days without seeing or touching another human being. And now all that has to be reinvented. Created anew. We're devoting ourselves to community in ways we hadn't thought we might need to.

You know, some people are refusing to refer to it "social distancing" - replacing the phrase with "physical distancing but social closeness." I like that. I also like the fact that so many people are offering to do shopping and run errands for so many who are vulnerable, heck for anyone who asks. So many people are offering themselves selflessly to others. It does feel that this terribleness is turning us into better people.

At times like this we need to be staying in touch with one another. I could say that back in the day when things were normal, we took for granted that we could invite people to our homes. It was always something we were going to do, but often something we didn't actually get around to doing, because...you know...life! But COVID-19 has made people rethink their priorities - to long for those opportunities to simply be physically in community.

We are calling people, email-ing, and randomly driving by people's houses more than we have in a long, long time. I haven't phoned this many people in my life compared with before COVID-19 struck. Even though it doesn't feel like enough --- and even though it is a little exhausting at times, I am finding it is really positive

and fulfilling. I'm hearing the same from many of you, also. We are getting to know each other better and forming stronger bonds through these phone calls and connections. So, I encourage you – connect to one other. Try phoning someone you have never phoned before. It is worth it.

They devoted themselves to their shared meals

“they spent much time together in the temple.”

“they broke bread at home and shared their food with gladness and simplicity,”

These earliest Christians met in the temple to ritually worship together. These earliest Christians met in small groups in homes, to break bread together and eat – as family. They remembered Jesus and the blessed ritual of eating together. In the temple / in this sanctuary...in our shared meals...our worship and faith becomes physical and real. That collective worship – that coming to the table together – has changed.

Some lament that communion just isn't the same. We miss the gathering. We miss THAT table and THAT meal....

Many of us long for the time when we'll be together to break bread and eat TOGETHER. I encourage you to embrace your pain. It is an extended Lent - a time of enforced sorrow. A time to reflect on the simple and the basic – and how we long for it. We've returned to a rudimentary meal at home. It's different. It's good. It is blessed for Jesus is certainly present. We know that when we get back into church, we're going to look at communion differently – perhaps more fondly, with anticipation and with greater depth. For sure, we'll never again take for granted, the profound importance of the Lord's table and being able to gather there.

They devoted themselves to their prayers

“A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the Apostles.”

“They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone.”

What makes people of faith different from people with no faith? We are no better people than those with no faith, although we often think we are. We are broken, hurting people whom God has lifted out of the mess through the death of Jesus.

Churches do many good things - run preschools, food banks and support many people and groups - but churches are not the only people to do those things.

The one thing that people of faith have that other people don't is that we can pray.

William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury, famously said “people often say that answers to prayer are just coincidences. But what I find is that when I pray coincidences happen. And when I don't, they don't.”¹

We pray. We lift up prayers of joy and prayers of concern. We email and share prayer requests. During this time, it feels like we're praying a little more and a little differently. How can I say that? I can't prove it, because it's just a feeling – but it's a feeling I get when I talk with you. As I hear you share your own joys and concerns, your daily lives, and your relationships with others...it's different. It's elevated. It's more valuable.

¹ Cargill-Thompson, Fr. Mund. *The Mass is What we Miss*.

While we're missing worship together, prayer is something we can do more of, especially during these uncertain times. Ask for prayers. Offer to pray together, however brief it might be. Be it extremely important or somewhat minor – devote yourself to prayer.

The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved

We may be locked in our homes, but I am encouraged that many of you are being outward looking in your faith. I've seen -- and several of you have shared --- how family members or friends who haven't engaged with faith for years are now asking questions or casually dropping into virtual worship. The simple truth of Jesus' gospel is attractive and inviting.

In this storm we are going through, faith gives us an anchor. We're focusing (re-focusing) on those things which are the basics of the church – teachings, community, shared meals and prayers. We are ROOTED. Rooted in love, rooted in faith and rooted in community – the basics that the gospels embodies. Because of that, we are still growing and we are staying healthy. Let's share it with everyone, far and wide.

Amen