

# **“The Goodwill of All”**

**John 10:1-10 and Acts 2:41-47**

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The Easter Season lectionary always includes the Acts of the Apostles. Today we're given a picture of the early church after the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you remember the Pentecost story, this is the immediate effect of that Pentecost moment. The assembled crowds hear the disciples speaking in different languages and think that they're drunk but Peter makes a speech explaining everything that's gone on regarding Jesus – his life and ministry, his death and resurrection. Apparently In the power of Holy Spirit, Peter is quite persuasive and those listening are “cut to the heart” and ask him, “what should we do?” “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” he says. And then continues, “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls” And continues the narrator, “Those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.”

Read Acts 2:42-47

When was the last time you felt caught up in something you were doing with a group of people? A time when you felt simply banded together and swept up in something bigger than any one individual involved? I'm still of an era when team sports weren't for everyone and definitely not for uncoordinated girls, so I don't have that experience, but I imagine that playing a team sport, at its best, is like that. If you're a Ted Lasso fan that's how Jason Sudeikis depicts team sports at their best. (If you're not a Ted Lasso fan and you have Apple TV – check it out!) I've done a lot of theater and a theatrical production, at its best, becomes something greater than the sum of its parts. A sense of energetic joy is present and a desire to see each person involved rise to their best selves so the group can offer something to other people.

These five short verses in the early part of Acts depict the church at its best. And it's simple. Learning together and fellowship, sharing the Lord's supper and prayer. These four disciplines underlie everything the church does. I wonder if we gloss over the simplicity of that too often. When reading this passage we move quickly to the *next* few verses, that utopian commune like community which seems to result from these disciplines and we say something like, “all things in

common? Sell our possessions and distribute the proceeds to any who have need? Well nice idea but did you read Orwell's *Animal Farm*?"

Derek and I had a seminary colleague who said she and some friends tried living together this way. They modeled their living arrangement after Acts 2. Everything in their apartment was free to be used by anyone. One person had a car, the key was hanging on the wall, all could use it. The entire contents of the refrigerator were available to anyone who was hungry. Clothes in closets were up for wearing. It started off well and lasted for a few weeks. Which is astonishing that it lasted even that long. Soon enough the car got scratched and no one would take responsibility, it seemed the gas tank was always empty though everyone said they filled it regularly. The fridge was similarly empty, dirty dishes piled in the sink, favorite pieces of clothing gone missing. You can picture it all, I'm sure. But this isn't the kind of living to which we're called by this text or any other Biblical text. And even if it is, most of us are not going to drop our current living situations to go in for communal living.

The sense of community though, that's worth thinking about. It's something we long for. Social scientists will tell you that but there's plenty of anecdotal evidence as well. Just this past week we had a membership committee meeting. Our chair graciously gathered us in her home for dinner. People brought a dish to share and someone said, "this has been so nice to be together, to break bread together." And we all agreed. I got my haircut on Friday and the woman who cuts my hair was telling me about her upcoming dance recital and about the dance studio where she takes classes. She said, "I just love being there. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't be there." The question we most often ask students trying to make decisions about college – besides the money aspect – is "in which community do you sense you'll feel most at home? The place where you'll find your people?"

It's to creating *this* sense of community that this text from Acts calls us. A community in which people learn and fellowship together, share around the Lord's supper and pray with and for one another. In doing so, they put more emphasis on people and less emphasis on things and they live with ever more generous and grateful hearts. Biblical scholar, Charles Williamson writes, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, believers began to think about *things* in a new way, to see that the common good of the community was more important than their own individual wants and needs." And he asks, "Can there be a more remarkable evidence of the Holy Spirit's transforming power? To build a community devoted to one another, to create hearts that love, to inspire persons to sacrifice self for the larger good – these are genuine marks of a new life."<sup>i</sup>

When the text points to "signs and wonders" my mind goes quickly to the kinds of miracles that Jesus was doing in his ministry – healing, casting out demons, multiplying loaves and fishes – but I believe that the signs and wonders were actually these simple ones, the gracious, generous, and grateful communal culture and values which resulted from those four disciplines. We tend to gloss over these because though they're simple, they're not quick or easy. They're not flashy or

showy or attention getting. They take real work and discipline. Every relationship takes real work and community takes more.

But it's this kind of community that garners "the goodwill of all" and it's this kind of Spirit empowered community that provides the foundation for everything else the church does. Our service and our advocacy arise when we know there's a place we belong and are loved for who we are. A place where people are praying for us and with us. A place where our hearts and minds are comforted and challenged by conversation and study. A place where we remember not what, but *who* it is that unites us, our Savior. A place where we are all equally fed and strengthened by his love poured out in the sign of bread and wine. It's God who adds to the number of people being saved but it's the life of the church that provides a place where people to learn to live in the fullness of that gift of salvation.

This kind of community doesn't just happen. Everyone who wishes for that type of community has to participate in making it so. And every church community needs to be intentional about ordering its life in these four ways – learning and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. We continue, especially during this interim time, to think about how we're doing that. When the officers gathered on March 25<sup>th</sup> there was a sense of energetic joy in having an opportunity to be together and intentionally reflective. You've got good leadership in those who have said "yes" to being ruling elders, deacons, and trustees. We hope to bring some initiatives for you to reflect on before the summer season kicks in; communal work is by nature slow and deliberate.

Our good shepherd promises abundant life. Abundant life isn't about possessions or worldly success. Abundant life is about being called by name into the sheepfold, it's about being in grace filled community with other sheep, and about being led by our shepherd out into the world and safely home again. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Charles C. *Acts*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. Interpretation Bible Studies Series. p20