

Barre Congregational Church

May 3, 2020: A Pastoral message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fourth Sunday of Easter~

“They Broke Bread and had Fellowship in their homes”

Scripture Reading: 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.

44. All who believed were together and had all things in common;

45. they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

46. Day 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,

47. praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

I. Introduction:

It seems so appropriate to have this passage in the Book of Acts as our scripture reading this morning. We see how Luke describes the new community of believers worshipping and praying in their homes... and here we are at our homes, finding new ways to worship and come together as a congregation. Maybe this morning we can learn a few insights from this early church community that will inspire and bless us as we are hunkered down during this pandemic.

II. A small group of Jesus followers becoming a growing church community:

In the first few chapters of the Book of Acts, Luke describes the development of a small group of twelve humble disciples, finding their way from being followers of the earthly Christ, to becoming powerful and courageous leaders, apostles, and preachers. We see them encouraging and strengthening this newly formed church community and proclaiming the gospel to the crowds around them. We see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them all on The Day of Pentecost, and we see them grow from a small community into a congregation of three thousand people... and now we are taken into the intimate lives of those followers of Christ in their homes.

This new community of faith would be described by many as the “Early Church” in Christian history. They were a powerful group of people who experienced the extraordinary power and work of the Holy Spirit in and through them.

III. Many were in awe of this spirit-filled community of faith

The Book of Acts gives us a clear, concise summary of who this new community of believers were. They consisted of local Jewish people from the Jerusalem area, as well as those who traveled with Jesus from Galilee and other places. They were devoted to the teachings of the Apostles, hungry to learn about their experiences with this Jesus who inspired them so much. They were also bound together in fellowship in their homes, and with those in their immediate communities. Luke beautifully captures the ongoing praise and worship that took place in the homes of these believers. They learned from and supported one another, and broke bread together in their homes, while remembering the Last Supper of Christ with His disciples. And lastly, they devoted themselves to a life of prayer, in everything they did, planned, and hoped for.

Many were in awe of this newly formed faith community whose members were loving and compassionate and understood the needs of their communities and responded generously to the poor. They sold their possessions and distributed the income among those in need, especially the Galileans and other foreigners who followed Jesus into Jerusalem, as well as those Jewish families who returned from their journeys elsewhere. We also read about many Jerusalem believers with means who sold their belongings like houses and land and gave to the poor and needy. We see here a community of faith with a deep spiritual commitment to God and a deep love and care for those in need. It was, therefore, no surprise that many would be drawn to them.

This new community clearly did not do all these things through their own power but were filled with the Holy Spirit who transformed and inspired them to love and do good in incredibly special ways. New Testament scholar, Eckard Schnabel describes it as their “reckoning with the power of God.” Schnabel further explains that a community of faith grows where the Gospel is proclaimed, where there is love and fellowship among one another, and where the power of God is at work through prayer and worship. It is indeed true of this

community of faith here in Acts. Those who joined them were curious about the scriptures, and they wanted to pray like them. They wanted to experience this power of God in their own lives!

IV. Conclusion: The work of God in all of us, and in our congregation

Luke's account of these home churches reminds me of the spiritual gatherings in my hometown in South Africa, in my young life at sixteen years old, when I observed the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in and among those around me. I too was in awe by what I witnessed and wanted what they had! I innocently invited the Holy Spirit into my own life, and did not anticipate how the power of God would drive me into a seminary to become the first woman to eventually qualify for ordination in my church, and how I would go out into the world, away from my own family and country, traveling the world doing ministry in peace and reconciliation. Through the guidance of my seminary professors and pastoral leaders, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, my understanding of church ministry was shaped in remarkable ways, and it is that same power of God that led me to where I now find myself as your pastor.

I have learned so much from you here at Barre Congregational Church, as well. I have been part of you and all you do for quite some time now. It has been an extraordinary experience for me, and there is still much to learn.

It is therefore my prayer that we will reflect on these lessons from the early church, their devotion to the Apostolic teachings, their fellowship, the breaking of the bread, their prayer life and compassionate service to those in need. Let us ask ourselves the question: what more, Lord do you need from me, from us? What are you happy about? What else is missing? This is an incredible time in our lives today, during this pandemic, where we are home bound, where we can make the time to be a home church with our families, where we can reflect on our relationship with God, our loved ones, and our congregation.

May God bless us in these reflections, and may we grow spiritually, in love, kindness and generosity, so others will be in awe and curious to see what is going on at our church!

May God bless and keep us all safe. Amen