

4th Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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, 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.

Yesterday, Tricia and I turned on the air conditioning at our home. As those of you who live in Lexington know, yesterday was one of the few days we've had so far this year where the temperature got up into the 80's. And as I'm very particular about the temperature in my home, I went to turn on the air conditioning. But nothing happened. I checked all the necessary things, I made sure that our air filter had been changed recently and went to the fuse box to make sure I didn't trip the breaker. But everything looked fine. The last thing to do was to see if the batteries needed to be replaced in the thermostat.

I went to the garage to get my flat head screwdriver and then back to the hallway to insert it into the little holes to release the front cover of the thermostat. I replaced the batteries and, then after a few seconds of prayer, nothing.

Finally, I noticed a little button that can only be accessed when the cover of the thermostat had been removed. It simply said "reset." I pressed it and the air conditioning, in all its cool and refreshing glory, started immediately.

The moral of the story? We all need to press the reset button from time to time. Who knows how long it had been since that reset button had been pressed. Perhaps it was long overdue for the system to restart itself to get back to the basics of what it was meant to do.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a forced "reset button" for all of us. Right now, whether we wanted it or not, the reset button has been pressed and we are reminded of what is truly most important in our lives: our family, our friends, roofs above our heads if we're lucky enough to have them, food, fellowship, a job if we're fortunate enough to have one, laughter, joy, nature, safety. You know, the basics. And, hopefully, recognizing the importance of those things in our lives has made us equally passionate about making sure those things are realities in other people's lives, too. That's what reset buttons do.

And these reset buttons tend to come in moments of crisis. And, sometimes, pressing the reset button is exactly what we need.

It doesn't take a very detailed look in the history of Christianity to notice that the Church tends to be most faithful to its Gospel calling not when the going is easy but when the going is tough. In other words, when the status quo has been in place for a lengthy period of time, when being a Christian was the socially accepted thing to do, when you couldn't be a successful business person unless you were a congregant at the local downtown church, those were the moments when the Church tends to get lazy and distracted. Those are the moments when the Gospel gets turned into something that's more about convenience and privilege than what it's really about.

But in the moments when the going is tough, in the moments when danger abounds and people are really struggling, *those* are the moments when the Church has been most true to its Gospel calling. In those moments of disorientation, the reset button has been pressed and the Church abandons a gospel of convenience and privilege and shares the Gospel of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, and caring for those who are suffering. That's what the reset button does. It reminds the Church of what's really important. It forces us back to the basics.

Now, friends, please hear me. I in no way mean to make light of our current circumstances. People are suffering. People are dying. The COVID-19 crisis is perhaps our generation's biggest challenge. However, what I mean to say is this: it is in our human nature to search for meaning in the midst of suffering. And I do believe that there is meaning to be found in our current circumstances. I believe that the COVID-19 crisis is forcing congregations such as ours to get back to the basics by answering the following questions: do people have food? Do they have clothing? Do they have companionship and support? Do they have a job? Do they need comfort? Now, these questions are important at all times but sometimes we get so bogged down with the building and the business as usual that we forget that they are the heart of the Gospel.

Today's passage from the Book of Acts describes what the early church looked like. The early church was in a time of crisis. We tend to sometimes make this passage into a hallmark card as if everything was nice and rosy but the fact is that what the early Christians were doing was dangerous.

It's ironic (and sad when you think about it) that there are Christians these days protesting at the capitol building saying that Christianity is being oppressed by the Governor's ban on mass gatherings. Folks, that's ridiculous. Those protestors need to read the Book of Acts to learn what the oppression of Christianity *really* looks like. These early Christians were living under constant threat of economic oppression, arrest and detainment, and even death.

And yet, in the midst of this disorientation and despair, the early Christians gathered to follow in the footsteps of their Risen Christ, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for one another.

The early Christians did so by doing what for the Roman Empire was unthinkable: they sold their possessions and goods, distributed the proceeds to those who needed them, and held all things in common. They broke bread together and ate with glad and generous hearts, as the text tells us, and shared concern for the common good.

Friends, let us take a moment to appreciate just how radical this was, and indeed *is*. The Roman Empire was concerned with two things: A) getting bigger and stronger and B) taxing its conquered citizens to the max in order to finance their greed.

In comparison, the early Christians shared what they had and made sure everyone was supported and nurtured. And, here we are, under very different circumstances, enduring a very different kind of hardship, but finding ourselves, like the Early Church, getting back to the basics.

So, my question for us this day is this: how can we resist the urge to “go back to the way things were” and instead position ourselves to become something new, renewing our focus on the basics of what it means to be a Christian community.

Sonya Renee Taylor said the following recently: “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate, and lack. We should don’t long to return, me friends. **We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment.** One that fits all of humanity and nature.”

Friends, we have been given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. What shall we weave together? Shall we go back to the old structures of privilege and convenience and economic disparity and racism and sexism? Or shall we move forward and weave a different kind of garment, a kind of garment that the early Christians so brilliantly wove together in the midst of such hardship and trauma?

Let us come today to this table, the Lord’s Table, to renew our commitment to get back to the basics of the Gospel. A pure and unadulterated Gospel where the weak are strengthened, the sad are comforted, the oppressed are freed, and the broken are welcomed and restored.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us God’s children, say: **Amen.**