

May 7, 2017 – All Things in Common

Acts 2:42-47

Yesterday I was here at the church trying to figure out what I was going to say this morning and then life happened instead. I got a phone call from someone with a friend who had just had everything they owned destroyed in a house fire. When I heard this story I was grateful. I was grateful that our congregation is able to offer help through the clothing in our rummage room and also through the Coop gift cards that we buy with our benevolent fund. I invited them to come and take what they needed and they did.

I had just got back to writing this message and had completed the first paragraph when another visitor arrived at my office door. He was driving from Ottawa to Vancouver and had run out of cash. His story of struggle with addiction was long, complicated and yet, too familiar. Again our benevolent fund provided a place for him to sleep, a little gas and food to get him to the next city.

It had been nearly three months since I had offered anyone some help from our benevolent fund and I thought, "Wow, isn't it amazing that both of those people arrived this morning, while I was struggling with what to say about this week's scripture passage, a scripture passage that describes the very beginnings of the Christian church, a scripture passage that outlines what it means to live as Christians in community and in the world.

This particular passage was probably written about fifty years after the church began. So the author of this book is looking back a generation or two and recalling how it was. He describes an idyllic community that worships together, eats together and even lives together. In fact, their commitment to each other includes selling their property and goods and sharing the proceeds with one another - sharing "all things in common." In this passage the members of the church are described as having joyful and sincere hearts.

In the time of the earliest church, around two thousand years ago, the Jewish people were living under the rule of the Roman Empire. The poor were being forced off their land with exorbitant taxes and life was hard. People looked at this Christian community and thought, "Wow that looks pretty good. I'm struggling to survive on my own, so why not join this group where everyone looks happy and people take care of each other?" In this passage we hear that through their way of living and being together the people of the early church attracted others and their numbers grew.

The author of this book was no doubt using this very first church as a measuring stick for his own community of believers. He was asking them, "How do we measure up to our grandparents in the church?" Do people still look at us and say, "Hey, you seem to be doing something right, something that makes a difference in people's lives - maybe I should consider becoming part of your community?"

Obviously, we could ask ourselves that very same question. Would people say that about us? If someone on the outside was looking at our church, would they get the impression that we are transforming people's lives for the better? Would they be inspired to check us out?

Maybe, maybe not, but I'm not really sure that's the most important question.

Before we worry about what others think, we first need to ask ourselves, are we living up to our own expectations? Are we really the church that we want to be? In particular, are we following our own creed? In the New Creed we say that we are called to be the church. And included in that statement are the words, "to love and serve others and to seek justice and resist evil."

We live in a world in which our news is filled with stories of pain and suffering. There is a famine in Africa – children are dying of hunger. There is war in the Middle East – refugees continue to search for new places to live. Rivers are overflowing their banks across Canada - people are losing their homes. Here in Swift Current the poor and disabled continue their struggle to live on inadequate government assistance. And in the midst of the world's pain, politicians in Washington and Regina make policy decisions that reduce support for the poor and the marginalized.

How do we love and serve others, seek justice and resist evil in the midst of today's world? That earliest of churches chose to live communally. They chose to pool all their resources together and to share "all things in common." I'm not

convinced that we need to go that far, but I do believe that we need to work towards a more just sharing of the resources of our communities and of our world. We all know that the gap between the rich and poor continues to rise in Canada and across this planet. One way that this gap is reduced is through personal income tax and government transfers such as social assistance, unemployment insurance, old age security and child benefits. We may not like paying taxes, but it is one of the ways that we seek justice and love and serve others. It is a privilege to have the education, the skills, the health and the opportunity to earn enough that we can help those who are not so lucky.

As a church community we also have the opportunity to give of ourselves and our wealth. I am proud of our congregation's response to the Famine Relief Fund, our ongoing support of The United of Canada's Mission and Service Fund, the wonderful support that you have provided to the Etmeh family, the fundraising that we do for local charities, our monthly Loose Change Suppers, the community support that we provide through our garage and rummage sales and the money we set aside in our Benevolent Fund to help those who arrive at our door looking for assistance. So I want to say thank you, thank you to all of you for everything that you do.

And then I want to ask... could we do more? Of course... especially when it comes to achieving a more balanced economy... to seeking justice for all... to serving our neighbours here and all over the world, to finding ways we can share all things in common. May it be so.