

Risen Christ, Pour Your Spirit upon us, that we may see, and believe, and have life. Amen.

*... it was evening on that day... and the doors of the house
where the disciples had met were locked for fear.*

I guess we'd be afraid too. What if they started hunting down all the Christians?

What if we'd seen our bishop hauled away and killed?

What if a lethal disease came along that spread quickly
against which we had no protection?

We might be hiding inside too. Anyone remember that year?

Jesus had already sent them out with amazing authority to heal and set free.

And it worked! They had seen God do amazing things through them.

Yet here they were, huddled in a room where a few short days ago they'd
celebrated the Passover with their Jesus, their Teacher, their Lord.

And he had become the sacrificed Lamb, executed in a horrible way.

But worse... his body was gone. Some were saying they'd seen angels at his tomb,
even seen Him. What next?

What has happened to Jesus' powerful community? Hiding, terrified, on lockdown.

How did they get here? One word: fear. Maybe two: fear and trauma.

Fear and trauma can lock us in, shut us down.

But I'm more interested in another question:

How did they get from there to being the community described a few months later:

*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul,
and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,
but everything they owned was held in common.*

*With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of
the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.*

*There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses
sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.*

They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Total agreement. A sharing economy. Bold witness. Great grace. No need.

Assets held in common so all could thrive. Can you imagine?

No need for non-profits because we all make sure everyone has enough?

This passage from Acts is sometimes dismissed as being too rosy. In fact, in the next chapter we see it begin to break down, as one couple sells some property and lies about how much they got. It didn't take long for people to pull back. But that doesn't mean we throw this out as idealistic. This is a faith reality we keep circling back to, leaning into.

This amazing unity is what the early church called "*koinonia*." *Koinonia* is used in the New Testament to refer to the early Christian community; it means Christian fellowship or communion with God and fellow Christians. The root of the word is *koine*, "to hold things in common. *Koinonia* means fellowship, based on unity of heart and mind, of unity of believing. It's a fellowship of doing, an active thing, of actively doing God's will together.

I read that the Greek word *koinonia* was used to describe corporations, labor guilds, partners in a law firm, and the most intimate of marriage relationships. It is used to describe an interdependent relationship. (Bob Gillam, Th.D., at Bible.org) How does a community locked in by fear become a community set free by grace? Interdependence. *Koinonia*.

The disciples in the upper room were the same men and women we see later in Acts, holding everything in common, presiding over this amazing *koinonia* life. How'd that happen? How'd they go from this (*hunched*) to this (*arms wide open*)?

Jesus showed up, and then the Holy spirit showed up. God didn't leave them there. God showed up in the midst of the fear. Jesus rose from the dead, and no locked door could keep him out. He appeared right in the midst of their fear and doubt, and spoke peace to them. He invited them once more into intimate fellowship, *koinonia*, with him, so intimate that they could touch his wounds if they wanted to. And he breathed the Holy Spirit onto them. "Receive the Holy Spirit." And a few weeks later, when the Spirit came in power upon them at Pentecost, they were released, empowered, gloriously freed from fear to become Christ's body in the world. They preached with abandon, they healed people right and left, they stood up to powers and authority with boldness; and yes, they formed a community of grace of which we, 2000 years later, are the inheritors.

Interdependence is a hallmark of Christian community. Everyone gives as they can, as their gifts and resources allow, and receives what they don't have at the moment, or aren't good at.

It's a basic orientation towards "ours," not "yours" or "mine."
When we live this way, it works. And it does work, within the community, often.
I've seen you release so much generosity with any one of us in need.
But what about those who are not "one of us?" What if we extended this
generosity and interdependence to those who we don't even know?
Better yet, what if those who had needs knew they could be part of thriving
communities like this one, so we wouldn't think twice about sharing our gifts?

I recently met with our new head of the Department of Social Services, Aleata Dawkins – in fact, one of these days I'm going to have her come preach here. We talked about setting up a system where families at risk, whose needs outstrip their assets, might become "adopted" or enfolded by congregations in Charles County, so that our plenty and our resources and our networks and ideas might help move them out of poverty. And their giftedness would enrich our life together. It isn't charity – it's *koinonia*, interdependence, building relationships so all can thrive.

I first got this notion when I was working with groups seeking to end homelessness. Which can be done – it just takes our sharing our resources, and our being unwilling to tolerate people in our communities sleeping on the streets or in the woods. I thought about what would happen if any of us happened to lose our job and our home – we'd have a network of family and friends to support us. None of us would tolerate another member of this community being homeless. It seemed to me that if we could build relationships with people at risk of homelessness, or already there, before they "got into the system," we would ensure they had a place and got back on their feet.

What if we on Sundays people could come to our Food Pantry and pick out their own food – and have some lunch and conversation as they wait their turn? And we found out what other needs they had and connect them to resources? And we found out what gifts they have to share and want to share? To only want to be a giver and not a receiver is to deny others the chance to exercise ministry. It's limiting the flow of God's love and power to us. It's a whole lot richer when we take care of each other, rather than ourselves.

This *koinonia* life works. As resurrection people, can we to put it into action? John tells us, *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.* We get to write the next chapter. *Amen.*

Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. **There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.**

**Oh, how good and pleasant it is,
when brethren live together in unity!**

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **"Peace be with you."** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, **"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."** When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."**

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. **But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.**