

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 we'd just lost the one we loved best, and felt we'd failed him?
We might be hiding inside too – as we have been for much of the past year.

I send you out as sheep among wolves, Jesus had told them.

I give you authority, over demons and diseases – proclaim the Kingdom of God!

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.

She hasn't worked in two years. She didn't think it would take this long to get
another job when she got downsized, but then the Covid hit and the
economy tanked and she's competing with a thousand others.

She doesn't know how she's going to pay her son's college bills,

not on top of the mortgage, which she's behind on... Could she lose the house?

The stress is showing in her body – something's wrong, but she had to drop her
health insurance awhile back, so she can't get the check-up she needs.

And she's not the free clinic type. She's never been one for a hand-out.

Her car is making noises; she needs it to look for work.

Where's she gonna get another? She has friends, even a church, who have

offered to help, but she'll only accept a little bit here, and a little bit there.

She doesn't share the whole story with anyone, has to dig herself out of the mess.

God helps those who help themselves, right? Doesn't it say that in the Bible?

NO!!! It does not say that in the Bible. That is an American heresy,

and it's antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those are words of death, not the Promise of Life.

The Bible says the exact opposite of that. Jesus taught the exact opposite of that. Let's hear about life in the earliest years of the Christian church,

not long after the Holy Spirit was released at Pentecost:

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.

Listen again: ***Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, ... everything...was held in common. There was not a needy person among them... it was distributed to each as any had need.***

Can you imagine how well that works when it works?

Everyone contributes what they can. Everyone receives what they need.

Now, this passage from Acts is sometimes dismissed as being too rosy.

Surely not even the first Christians shared that well, did they?

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.

More generally, it means "communion by intimate participation."

Koinonia means fellowship, but not just any kind of fellowship –

it's 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.

The author concluded that, from the usage of the word,

it referred to a relationship that is dependent on more than one individual.

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*)?

Well, 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.

Some years ago, I got pulled over for driving with a suspended license that I hadn't realized was suspended – old address, etc.. It took several weeks to get it resolved, and during that time I was entirely reliant upon other people to drive me places. Far from feeling "dependent," I had a blast. Parishioners enjoyed picking me up and taking me to breakfast before they took me to work. Friends drove me places, and I got to have a lot of conversations that I wouldn't have had driving around in my own car. It reminded me that this is how community works. It was in a small way, *koinonia*. When I get sick, or someone I love needs prayer, I do not hold that to myself. I try to share it with the whole community, invite that active fellowship in Christ to begin working. That's how God's abundance is realized – in community.

I've seen *koinonia* at work in this community too – in the outpouring of generosity when another is in need; in the way we pray for one another at Night Prayers. This year of Covid-tide has given us a boost in living into *koinonia*. We have joined to ensure that “there was not a needy person among them.” Yet sometimes I hear people talk about “being burdens.” No! We give each other a gift when we allow someone else to tend to our needs. In fact, 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.

Koinonia is a word I want us to get to know very, very well at the Christ Churches. As we emerge from our locked rooms, I want us to be that community, fully. Let's share each other's burdens, and those of people beyond our group. Those who are going to be tutoring children in our schools – be open to what gifts they have to bring you, as well as what you offer them. How might we foster a sense of community with those who shop at our food pantry? We are not called to take care of ourselves, nor to hold to ourselves either our resources or our needs. Either one is the way of self-sufficiency—of selfishness. This *koinonia* life works. There is enough as we give to one another. And the only way we find out it's true is to put it into practice.

That woman I described about in the beginning, is a composite of a whole lot of people. I see her beginning to break out of that locked room. I see her beginning to allow a group of people to walk this hard time with her, one helping her find a car, another supporting her job search, others thinking through the health issues and how each area of need affects other areas. And as she allows community into her need, people to take pieces of it for her, her energies are allocated to solutions instead of crisis management – and she becomes engaged in helping to meet other people's needs. And it multiplies. *Koinonia*. I want to see it more.

This pandemic is not over. Racism is not over.

Economic inequity is not done with. Political divisions are not healed. But it's time we emerge as healers, peacemakers. How does a community locked in by fear become a community set free by grace? *Koinonia*. Interdependence, on God and on each other and anyone who joins 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.**