One in Community

Acts 2:43-47 Kimby Young

Acts 4:32-37 February 23, 2025

Acts 9:36-42

Most of the book of Acts focusses on the importance of community. It follows the story of the community of Christians following the way of Jesus Christ. The community grows and expands and reaches out into the world in a variety of ways, trying to share the love of God as lived in Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Throughout the book of Acts there are passages like the first two for today that talk about living in community and sharing all things in common. The early Christians took care of each other. They ate together, prayed together, worked together and learned together. Of course there were conflicts – humans interacting will sometimes lead to disagreement or challenge. But as chapter 4 says, “those who believed were of one heart and soul.” They belonged to Jesus. So they tried to do what was best. This is the model for the modern church. We too try to give generously, pray sincerely, work and learn and eat together. In fact, I think eating together is one of the things we do best. Not just because of good food at great potlucks, but because of fellowship and sharing our lives. We get to know each other so we care for one another. Community. Caring. This is the heart of the church.

We have a little more trouble understanding the idea of sharing all things in common. It brings to mind the communes of the 1960s or the idea of monks or nuns in community, or worse of some kind of cult living separate from the world. Giving up everything we own and living together does not seem practical or desirable. So we think this must be a part of the early church story that we will not share. Maybe it worked in that day, but it wouldn’t work today. But I think perhaps we have misunderstood the phrase “in common.” Unlike the communes and the cults and other communities that pull themselves apart from the world, the early Christians were still very much living in the world. They worked in the world. They lived among others who were not faithful. They went to temple. They shopped in the markets. They interacted in the world in every way. They also shared their faith in that world and told other people about Jesus and the gifts of the Spirit of God. In addition, they spent time with other believers and took care of each other, as they shared the gifts and the grace of God.

The last of the readings for today, from Acts chapter 9, is a miracle story – Tabitha raised from the dead. The thing is there is a quiet miracle in this story long before the miracle of resurrection. There is a quiet miracle of daily life that you almost miss if you aren’t paying attention, that I did miss until I studied it for a class. Tabitha, also called Dorcas, also called Gazelle, lived in Joppa. Lots of people in that day had more than one name – like Simon Peter, like Saul Paul, like John Mark, like Joseph Barnabas. Often it was a Jewish name and a Roman name, or maybe a nickname thrown in – like Barnabas that means son of encouragement. For Tabitha it seems to be a translation issue – Tabitha in Hebrew, Dorcas in Greek, Gazelle in English meaning. Anyway, Tabitha was a good person doing good works and acts of charity. She was well known and well loved in Joppa. She lived her faith by caring for others. One of the commentaries I read called her the first social worker. I call her a beautiful Christian. That is actually the first miracle of this story – the quiet miracle of this story. This woman lived the way of Jesus. She lived for her community. She took care of people. She shared all things in common. She gave … love. The love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.

So when Tabitha died, the widows lined the street. They wept and cried and told stories about their friend, their protector. Tabitha had cared for the widows – the most vulnerable in society. They tried to show the clothing she had made and given. They tried to show the lives that she had touched. And if we pay attention, we see the lives that were touched not only by her life but now touched profoundly by her death – not just in loss of a loved one, but perhaps in fear of who would take care of them now. A widow in that day had to depend on the kindness of others. This community depended on the kindness and generosity of Tabitha. What would happen to them now?

Peter walks into this weeping and Peter understands. Every life is important. Every love is important. But this is about more than one person. This is about the whole community. This is about the impact of one person on a community as she shared the love of God in Christ Jesus. One person. And at the same time, so much more. When Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, or rather when God raised Tabitha from the dead thru the actions of Peter, God raised an entire community. God gave them all hope. God said I will protect you; You belong to God. God showed the entire community what love can do. God showed the entire world the power of God’s love. Resurrection power. Transformation power. The power of life itself.

Today, God’s resurrection power continues – in each and every one of you. In all of us together. God’s resurrection power is alive and thriving today. God’s resurrection power lives in you. How shall we share it? For that is what is meant by believers sharing all gifts in common. We share the gifts of God, the love of God, the resurrection power of God in Jesus Christ. How shall we share God’s power of love today?

While the resurrection miracle in this story is fantastic, that is not the most important point. Yes, God can save a life, but God can also save a community. Yes God values community, but God also values and loves the one – each and every one. Because, while Tabitha was raised in this story – so were a whole crowd of unnamed women in that community. Every single one of them was raised to new life that day. Every single one saw the power of God. Every single one understood that God would save them, that God still loved them, that they belonged to God. Every single one received the gift of God’s promise that day. Every single one received new life thru God’s grace. What a difference one person makes. God’s love is alive.

I don’t know where you find yourself in this story – with whom you might identify in this story. The point is God loves every single person in this story, and every single person in this room. We have been given the gift of God’s grace. Wherever we find ourselves, rich or poor, old or young, male or female, tired or excited. Wherever we find ourselves – God loves us and God has given us gifts to share. You have value. You have grace. You have something to offer to God. In this community God holds all things in common – as the book of Acts says. We are many. We are one in Jesus Christ. We lift to God all that we are, to the glory of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.