

## Easter / Resurrection Sunday +4 in Covid Time

Acts 2.42-47

May 2020

### Acts 2.42-47

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

### Message

In the 8<sup>th</sup> week of the Lockdown...

I wondered...

### Introduction

In review of recent weeks preaching since great disruption of the Resurrection.

We have been reading how some of the first disciples experienced that.

Meanwhile within our intelligent lockdown we have been reading the news of the day and it's grim.

We are being told, and I tend to agree, that the return to normal will not be back to what was. There is talk of a 'new normal' but with a twist:

**For things to get back to how they were, some things will have to change! ;-)**

So as someone who tries to be ahead of the curve I have been considering how we as Trinity Church, with all our features and characteristics, need to consider likely change?

Last week the story of Jesus engaging and then appearing to Cleopas and companion gave us a clue about what might be essential if we want to actually recognise Jesus. The scriptures and the breaking of bread are shown as pivotal, or in other terms: 'Word and Sacrament' feature.

So these should get priority in our time together.

Today I want to push on a bit into this by sharing a few questions for you to sit with in this semi-desert experience of lockdown.

If something is going to really change we need to be awake and alert, actively discerning rather than just flowing after developments, or liking what we know and knowing what we like.

I suggest there are two lines of thought to apply:

A. is working to understand: Why we currently do what we do as Christians and as church? How come we prioritise specific things and organise in particular ways? We might label this 'Inherited Church'

B. Then while asking that how did we get here we may also go back to the roots of our faith to get clear vision on living as a Jesus follower and being church?

Let me tell a story to illustrate these two lines of thought:

This story is both about understanding what we have inherited or walked into when we came to Trinity Church AND possible rethinking on what church can be.

### Illustration

In 1940 the British Army had to upgrade its gunnery units for what was going to be the Second World War. So they called in a time-motion analyst to review how 4 men operated a field gun. The operating manuals by which gunners were trained had not been changed in half a century.

At a certain point of observing the time-motion analyst noticed one of the four soldiers standing still doing nothing. So he asked: "What is he doing?"

The reply came, "That man is holding the horse."

But there was no horse to be seen!

So by 1940 horses had been replaced by trucks and tanks, but the operations manual still required a man to calm the horse while the gun was fired!

Conservative institutions and organisations tend to pretend that some 'horse' is still there and still buy hay for it as if that's a good thing because, because... once upon a time that was a really good idea. So when the British Army was entering a crisis the time-motion analyst had to enable gun crews to focus on core business of firing guns without distraction of out-dated procedures for imaginary horses.

After 2000 years of church we are sometimes looking after figurative 'horses' that have long since left the scene. But here's a strange thing, many people like it that way. It may even be strangely comforting? Remember change is hard work.

The way forward when recognising such things has often been to go back to the roots in scripture and have a fresh look. What is following Jesus all about and what must church really focus on?

### **Text**

That brings us to the key passage we heard today.

Acts 2 is a window back to the roots of the church, where it all started. In particular one verse sets out the core business of the new-born church.

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

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the apostles' teaching  
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There is so much established in this one verse:

So after becoming church there were four things they firmly took hold of and concentrated on as the first order of business.

#### #1 The Apostle's teaching.

The Apostles taught them the faith and how to live.

Let me ask a question: If you are someone who wants 'teaching'. What do you mean by that?

- Do you want information about what to believe?
- Do you want explanation of what you believe?
- Do you want instruction telling you how to live?
  - This is discipleship.
- Do you want inspiration?
- All of the above or, Something else?

The Apostles, like elders, in future decades, formed a teaching team that instructed the church family in the Way of the Lord. This was devotion priority #1 This is directive discipleship coming from those authorised to offer it.

What the new church next devoted themselves to was their lived-out-shared life in Christ. The linkage and unity is fellowship, a shared participation in Christ as our common life.

This devotion came down to nurturing the Christ-rooted unity between and among people .

In case you wonder? Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace does not happen by accident. It takes hard work and even with hard work it may not come. The first church community devoted itself to this as an outworking of their common baptism.

So, #1 Devotion is the Apostles teaching, #2 Devotion was their relational and spiritual unity in Christ. We practice The Peace in communion services as a few minutes every other Sunday at best. In contrast they were devoted to this as priority.

The next two priorities follow and are only genuine if they do proceed from devotions #1 and #2.

Devotion priority #3 was The Breaking of Bread. Sounds familiar? This was a shared meal involving the breaking of bread in honour of the Lord. So often in church history Breaking Bread has been made a stand-alone activity but not so at the beginning. It was a meal and I suspect eating together is genuinely core activity for church.

Again I note, Breaking Bread together only has power when it follows devotion to the Words of Jesus as taught by the Apostles and an authentically lived out Fellowship among the brothers and sisters.

#4 The same can be said about The Prayers. Prayers raised from a Fellowship devoted to being one in the Lord are powerful.

#### **Conclusion:**

So consider in this time of being limited to gathering by Zoom.

What was there in our normal pre-corona mode of being Church that really makes little sense to you. Ask why? There may be a good reason to your question but there may not be, and if so we may consider retiring the imaginary horse that we still hold.

At the same time, consider this simple model we see in scripture where we may see the clean roots of what is essential and genuinely worthy of our shared devotion.