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**“A LOVING, LEARNING, WITNESSING,
AND WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY”**

Acts 2:41-47

In his letters Paul speaks of the Christian Church as “the Body of Christ.” That metaphor tells us that early Christians lived in close community, had interdependent relationships, and functioned with an unusual sense of unity in heart and mind, and that unity was demonstrated by mutual caring.

Our text today begins at the end of Peter’s Pentecost sermon. Luke then gives us a short portrait of that first Christian community. Acts 2:41-47 found on p.120 NT in your pew Bibles.

Luke describes the church as a loving, learning, witnessing, and worshipping community. Let’s explore those four facets of the church’s life.

First, Luke describes a loving church. *Koinos*, a Greek word meaning “common or communal” appears twice in these seven verses. The word “fellowship”, in Greek *koinonia*, appears in verses 42 and in v.44, Luke says they “had all things in common” (*koina*). *Koinonia* or fellowship is a way of speaking

about the close and caring relationships that existed in the early church community. All that these Christians did together contributed to a sense of connected-ness, that they served Christ together, and weren't trying to live out their discipleship on their own, but in community with brothers and sisters in the faith. The term "fellowship" might describe any activity Christians did together which build a deeper sense of community. Notice Luke says that at least some of them met together daily!

How did they spend time together? Attending temple worship, and meeting in their homes for prayer, worship, learning, and common meals. The depth of their mutual caring is the focus of v.44 and 45. "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." This is the very same kind of caring in which our Deacons with their Deacon Fund are involved as they help indigent persons in Novato and support individuals and families in our congregation who have special needs.

Some have used this text to conclude that the early church outlawed personal property and required members to live in a communal environment, as for example did the Essenes in Qumran. That wasn't the case with the early church. In today's text we hear that the church met in member's homes. So they didn't outlaw personal property. Nor was the selling of assets mandatory, but voluntary and sporadic as need arose. That is illustrated for us in the story in chapter 5 of Acts involving Ananias and Sapphira. Their concrete financial commitment to caring for one another is impressive indeed!

How closely do you feel connected and committed to our church family? How are you caring for your sisters and brothers in the faith? Many American Christians have an individualistic outlook and view the Christian life as a solitary existence, when the NT clearly presents the faith as something designed to be lived in community!

How might you build supportive, caring relationships with other Christians in our fellowship? Perhaps by joining a Church Small Group, the Wed. morning Men's Group, or a Dinner Group.

The second way Luke describes the early church is as a learning community. We hear in v.42 that these first Christians devoted themselves to “the apostles’ teaching.” This included first hand eye witness testimony to Jesus’ words and deeds. In fact the apostolic tradition is what the 27 books of the NT were designed to preserve. Anglican pastor John R.W. Stott wrote, “Since the teaching of the apostles has come down to us in its definitive form in the New Testament, contemporary devotion to the apostles’ teaching will mean submission to the authority of the New Testament” p.82; The Message of Acts; c.1990; Downers Grove, Ill; Inter-Varsity Press). We believe all the NT documents were written during the first century either by apostles or individuals (like Luke) who had direct access to apostles.

How might you grow in your understanding of the Christian faith? Our congregation offers numerous learning opportunities. Bring your children to Sunday School and Seeker’s encourage your Middle School and High School students to attend Youth Group. Adult learning opportunities include Carol Dacquisto’s Thursday morning Women’s Bible Study as they continue their

study of Proverbs this September. Carol also teaches a 9 a.m. Sunday Class, 8:30 on summer Sundays beginning on June 21, which at present is working on the OT Prophets Amos and Micah. In the Fall I'll offer a Bible Study on both Monday mornings and evenings on chapters 40-66 of the Prophet Isaiah, a portion of Scripture often cited by Jesus and NT writers.

Third, Luke also describes the early church as a *witnessing community*. Virtually all of Jesus' disciples spoke about God's deeds of power in Christ on Pentecost Day, miraculously enabled by the Holy Spirit to do so in languages in which they had no knowledge or formal training. These were the native languages of numerous Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks. Then Peter bore witness to Christ through his Pentecost sermon, to which about 3000 responded with faith, repentance, and baptism, and received the Holy Spirit. This outreach ministry continued as in v.47 Luke tells us, "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." And when Luke says the early church met together in

the temple courts one purpose was in order to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

Immediately following in Acts chapter 3 we hear the story of the miraculous healing of a man who had been lame from birth. This tells us that the church's witnessing ministry did not just involve words about Jesus Christ, but caring deeds, some of which were miraculous, which confirmed the truth of the gospel!

Later in the Acts narrative we'll discover that this outreach impulse, this mission mandate led to missionary travels for the apostles Peter and Paul and others as they sought to witness to Christ and spread the faith. We are privileged to have two of the Presbyterian missionaries we support present with us this morning – Gary and Marlene Van Brocklin, who serve Christ in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

How can you bear witness to Christ? While not many of us may be called to serve Christ as overseas missionaries, we are all called to be in mission for Christ here in our own community. Christ wants us to join God, who is already at work in our

neighborhoods, as we seek to promote peace and justice, offer compassionate care for the poor, and spread the gospel.

The fourth way Luke describes the early church is that it is a worshipping community. This is emphasized numerous times! Luke mentions Christians “praising God” in their homes and in the temple courts and engaging in prayer in both contexts. In Hebrew tradition, times for prayer in the temple courts were linked to the three daily sacrifices – early morning, 3 p.m. in the afternoon, and near sundown.

The phrase “the breaking of bread” likely references a common church potluck in homes during which the Eucharist was celebrated as these Christians looked back to give God thanks for Jesus’ redemptive death and his triumph over death in his resurrection, and looked forward to the coming banquet in God’s eternal kingdom! The Risen Christ was believed to be particularly present during such times as the church was called to “remember” the crucified and risen one. So these Christians regularly worshipped and prayed together!

How committed are you to regularly attending corporate worship, reading and studying Scripture and praying (daily devotions)? Consider joining the Monday morning Prayer Group Amanda leads at 9 a.m. for half an hour, and get your week off to a good start as you share that prayer time with others.

Today we celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Twentieth century theologian Karl Barth writes, “The Lord’s Supper ought to be more firmly regarded from the Easter standpoint, than is generally the case. It is not primarily a mourning or funeral meal, but the anticipation of the marriage feast of the Lamb. The Supper is a joyous meal . . . We are guests at Christ’s table and so are no longer separated from Himself” (p.155;Dogmatics in Outline; c.1959; New York; Harper & Row).

Let us pray: Gracious God, by Your Spirit allow us as a community of faith to become a loving, learning, witnessing, and worshipping Church family! Through Christ our crucified and Risen Lord we pray. Amen.