



WHERE THE DOORS OF THE CHUCH SWING OPEN ON THE HINGES OF LOVE AND PEACE

The Pastor's Portion

May 4, 2020

Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul



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BUILD THE COMMUNITY

We are living in different and challenging times. Emotions are running high, people are scared, the weather is breaking and people are getting restless. In the twinkling of an eye, our world has changed, and we have to pivot and adjust.

In this season, I want to encourage the community to BE a community. Reach out to one another! Engage in random acts of kindness. Make phone calls, send cards, zoom into meetings with no business agenda, just to check in. Our mental health and our spiritual health are as important as our physical well-being.

Mostly, I want you to remember that LOVE ALWAYS WINS. "Our survival depends on the healing power of love, intimacy and relationship---as individuals, communities, our country, our culture and perhaps as a species" Dean Omish.



Weekly Inspiration:

We are all at once both a composition and a composer. We have the ability not only to compose the future of our own lives, but to help compose the future of everyone around us and the communities in which we live.

Maya Angelou

PLEASE JOIN US FOR VIRTUAL WORSHIP ON SUNDAY AT 11AM THROUGH ZOOM TECHNOLOGY ON YOUR COMPUTER OR THE PHONE.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/268033036?pwd=b1ZoeDFYSzdFV3A5M0hSNFpTamtVZz09>

Meeting ID: 268 033 036

Password: 170245

One tap mobile
+16465588656 code:268033036#
US (New York)

JOIN US FOR MID WEEK BIBLE STUDY ON WEDNESDAY AT 7PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/506186798>

Meeting ID: 506 186 798

One tap mobile
+16465588656,,506186798# US
(New York)

Build the Community

Acts 2: 42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds^[1] to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[2] and ate their food with **glad and generous^[3] hearts,** ⁴⁷**praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

This morning I want to speak from the topic: Build the Community.

Let us pray: Breathe on us Holy Spirit! Enliven us and refresh us as we gather together to love one another, to support each other and to glorify you! Hide me behind the cross for just a little while and Speak through these lips of clay, so your people will hear an empowering word from you. Come now Holy

Spirit, come heavenly dove with all they quickening power. Kindle the flame of sacred love in this community of love and faith. Amen

The gospel and other lectionary readings today have a lot to do with sheep and the Shepherd. In the 10th chapter of John, Jesus says this:

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. **So there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

The Psalmist writes of the Lord being our Shepherd, and we already did a short sermon series about that....

But today, I decided to take a look at the text in Acts;

The Book of Acts is all about the formation of the early church. It is recounting the movement of the Way after Jesus ascended: how the disciples and the community sought to live out a new paradigm together in community. Their leader is gone. They are left with the Apostles, who had demonstrated not only betrayal of Jesus, **but fear and disbelief, and now, these men and women are called**

to lead people into a shifting paradigm, a new way of being, a new way of being in community together, a new way of seeing how God was moving in their midst.

And that alone is a word that I could go all the way into: the men and women who led the early church movement were not perfect. They were flawed, and they doubted, and they betrayed, and they fought, and they were a hot mess. But they were the leaders called to lead a people into a new way of seeing and being in community.

But that is an aside, because while it is noteworthy that leaders are flawed and imperfect and still able to lead, what captured my attention is the first and the last verses of the passage we read today.

In this early church movement, faced with the brutal execution of the leader, astonished by his resurrection and now after Jesus leaves them with the fresh wind of the Holy spirit, these men and women are called to something more radical and innovative than they had ever experienced. Becoming a community...

Let's listen again to the first verse and the last:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[1] and ate their food with **glad and generous^[1] hearts,**⁴⁷ **praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

The first thing that is striking is that the community DEVOTED themselves to the teaching of the leaders, fellowship together, meeting together and to PRAYER.

I want to be clear that no community that calls itself Christian can evolve, change, grow or flourish without prayer. Prayer is the oil that drives the life of the church, the life of the believer and indeed the world. And not just prayer alone in your closet, although that is very important, but corporate prayer. That is why in our services, in our bible studies, in our lives together, I will always stress prayer.

Now, if we just want to be a landlord, you don't need much prayer for that, if we just want to be a social club, we don't need much prayer for that, but as a COMMUNITY OF FAITH we MUST HAVE

PRAYER. We should be praying together every day even when we are scattered. I want you to imagine setting aside a common time of prayer when, even in our own homes we are all intentional about taking 5 to 7 minutes to lift our hearts and souls to God in prayer. To pray for one another, to pray for the church, to pray for the world, to pray for healing of the land. There is real power in prayer. The Apostles knew it. That is why the movement that they participated in with Jesus is still going to this day.

But here is the rub, the movement still is going, but it has been transformed, and in some ways watered down. After the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the state, it lost much of its spiritual power. It became a tool of the Empire, and started adapting the ways of the world, ignoring the ways of God, and the essential teachings of Jesus. So that what we see here in the Acts of the Apostles bears little resemblance to what we experience in churches around the world today.

Over the ages, the practice of Christianity became in large measure an endeavor designed to promote individual soul salvation and personal piety. With the injection of politics and money, it became less a communal community minded

endeavor, dependent on the community efforts to survive and thrive, and it became an individualistic enterprise. This is where we get much of our rugged individualism from...once faith and empire married each other, it became all about ME; my little pond, puddle and pond, and less about the community. And even if it was about community, it was about OUR community, neglecting all the others and competing for members, donations, attendance, notoriety and whatever else was the flavor of the day.

But look at where that has gotten us: Unlike in the days of the early church where as the text says: The people shared and gathered with glad and generous^[1] hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Unlike that model or paradigm, our numbers have dwindled. Fewer and fewer people are coming to church, churches around the world especially in America are closing their doors, the number of people who profess as "nones" meaning they have no religion, or who are practicing witchcraft, or who

are atheists and agnostics has risen dramatically.

And our rugged individualism has transmuted into rugged narcissism. Instead of just me first, and every man woman and child for themselves, now we have gone to the extreme of me first and ONLY me first, even if it hurts you or others. Because all that matters are my needs, my wishes, my prosperity, and if it hurts you—too bad...oh well.

That is where we are now, and that is why you are seeing so much suffering, so much division, so much grasping and grabbing for power, money, material wealth and all those other things that go poof...especially in the midst of a global pandemic. That is how and why we can minimize and mistreat the essential workers who pick, process and stock our shelves with food and other essential items, why we can mistreat and minimize truckers and farmers, and meat processing plant employees, and waiters and dishwashers—because they become viewed as lesser than the doctors and lawyers and professional class...yet we need them now more than we need any of the others...

But look at how God works; in the Jesus paradigm, the last shall be first, and the first shall be last. In the Jesus paradigm,

the empire was de-centered, and the people were made whole in relationship with one another in love.

No matter how human beings try to distort and twist the plans and the designs of God, God will always win. Love will always win. **The corona virus did not break our world, rather it has revealed what was already deeply broken in our society and in our churches.**

We twisted the model of the early church and built memorials and monuments to our egos, and now, despite how many of us really did not want anything to change, **it is changed.** In the twinkling of an eye, our world has changed, and we have to pivot and adjust. And we must. We do not know how long this season will last, but we can weather the storm if we put our hearts and minds to it and if we become willing to change and grow into it. And we must by necessity grow until the day we die

In the early church, they met in homes to gather together, to pray, to eat together, sing hymns and hear teaching...

Oh, isn't that what we are doing now? Yes! we are gathered thanks to modern technology around our computers or phones, and we can replicate what the early church did. We must do this

because we need each other, we need to draw strength from God and strength from each other. This enables us and empowers us to have courage to carry on. It helps us to lift each other up and express the love of Jesus Christ by showing small acts of care and compassion. This is the love of God that is spread from heart to heart and breast to breast. So, let's build on what we have. I urge you to invite people to connect with us on Wednesdays and Sunday's as we Build the Community.

In these times, people are hungry for community and connection any way they can get it. All over the world, people are gathering around computer screens to get a word from the Lord, to hear a word of hope, to connect with each other via technology, phone, in any way possible because we now understand more than ever that we are a relational people, we are a people meant to care for one another, we are a people who are here to share the good news of the resurrection power of God.

So, if you know someone who is disconnected, let us find ways to connect them, lets reach out to them and get them involved in this community of faith and love. Remember Jesus' words in John 10 when he said: ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong

to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. **So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

This is an opportunity to return to the model that was birthed by the Holy Spirit! The Spirit can move among us, the movement of God has shifted us in this season, so let's make the most of it. Let's build a community of connection! Instead of sitting in our homes waiting for things to change, let us be the change we wish to see and that our current times demand. Amen!