

# **“EASTER PEOPLE LIVE IN COMMUNITY”**

**April 19, 2009, Sermon for Second Sunday of Easter  
Based on Acts 4:32-35**

**The Lord is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!***

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Our text for today is taken from our first lesson, from the book of Acts, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter. Let me read it to you once more:**

*<sup>32-33</sup>The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them.*

*<sup>34-35</sup>And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need. (The Message translation)*

**The opening verse of this text indicates our topic for today - <sup>33</sup>*The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind!* Let us pray. Lord God, we come before you at this moment in time to pause and reflect upon your holy Word. Fill us with your Spirit to hear this word, apply it to our life, and transform us to be Easter people who live in community. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

**As a pastor, I have visited many people in the hospital due to various illnesses and surgeries. I have spent many hours with members in waiting rooms, awaiting the outcome of surgeries. I have noticed and experienced a common bond of the family members and friends who are waiting for results. They group together and give support by encouraging one another. I have also experienced being in Intensive Care waiting rooms. It's quite different than the general waiting room. In the ICU waiting rooms, people support each other. They get involved in each other's situation and comfort one another. They are there to assist each other – asking even how they can help. At times meals are shared. Prayers are offered up for the healing power of God to intervene.**

**In the ICU waiting room the world changes. Vanity and pretense vanish. The universe is focused on the doctor's next report. If only it will show improvement. Everyone knows that loving someone else is what life is all about. Could we learn a lesson from this? Could we learn to love like that if we realized that every day of life is a day in the waiting room?**

**All too often we are focused only on our own life and our own life's situations that we overlook or neglect to hear or see how others are living. Especially today we are cognizant of people struggling because of the economic turmoil – but we are more focused on how it is effecting us personally – not how it effects others. I have to confess that there are times I neglect to think about this. It's human to neglect and forget and only focus on our own needs. And that's the crux of the problem. We need to have a new or renewed vision of the divine focus. We'll come back to this.**

Comedian Imo Philips use to tell this story:

In conversation with a person I had recently met, I asked, “Are you Protestant or Catholic?” My new acquaintance replied, “Protestant.” I said, “Me too! What franchise?” He answered. “Baptist.” “Me too” I said. “Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?” “Northern Baptist,” he replied. “Me too” I shouted. We continued to talk and then I finally asked him, “Northern conservative fundamental Baptist great Lakes Region, Council of 1879 or Northern Baptist conservative fundamental Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912?” He replied, “Northern conservative fundamental Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912.” I said, “Die, heretic!”

How true this is. It happens within churches all too often. It also happens in the same congregation over issues like Page 5 and 15 or Divine Service Four; contemporary worship of traditional worship; worship at 8:30 or 11:15; at this site or the other site. It is as if one is better or less worthy than the other. Again the focus is on our own human likes and dislikes rather than the divine focus. We’ll come back to this.

When Charles V stepped down as the Holy Roman Emperor some 400 years ago, he spent much of his time at his palace in Spain. He had six clocks there, and no matter how he tried, he could never get them to chime together on the hour.

In his memoirs he wrote, “How is it possible for six different clocks to chime all at the same time? How is it even more impossible for the six nations of the Holy Roman Empire to live in harmony? It can’t be done. It’s impossible, even if they call themselves Christians.”

Today, we know it’s possible to have clocks in perfect harmony, when all are powered by the same source and all are calibrated to the same standard – Greenwich Mean Time. Likewise, unity in the church is possible, but only when all are calibrated to one standard – Jesus Christ.

This is the divine focus. Last week we paused to experience a glimpse of what our Lord experienced in that last week of His life. We shouted the “Hosannas” as we paraded into the sanctuary on Palm Sunday. We experienced the water and the towel that dried our hands as if Jesus, himself, were serving us. We tasted the very body and blood the disciples received at the Lord’s Supper. We went to the cross to hear the words our Lord cried out and the anguish He experienced. Last Sunday we experienced the early morning announcement: “He is risen” as the sun was rising. We experienced the joy and gladness of Easter as we worshipped together shouting that same echoing pronouncement: “The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!” It was the unifying message of Jesus Christ that united us and all Christians around the world into the communion of saints – the holy Christian Church – the community of believers.

As Luke writes to his friend Theophilus in the book of Acts, Luke shares what effect that message had on the followers of Jesus. <sup>33</sup>*The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything...* <sup>35</sup>*And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need.* This all took place because the followers of Jesus were Easter people who lived in common unity – community.

What about us = you and me? Are we Easter people who live in community? Are we people, sitting in the waiting room for Good News from the doctor, who encourage and support each other, praying with and for one another – helping out in times of need?

**Or, are we like the comedian's illustration of being in community only if we are in complete agreement and in the same straight-jacket? Does the illustration from Charles V identify us as being like six nations that can't get along? Or, are we like the clocks that are set to the standard?**

**Is our standard Jesus Christ? Are we Easter people who are not only spectators but participants of the Easter message? Are we Easter people who have transformed hearts and minds because of the joy-filled message of the resurrection? When God's grace is received it changes the way we think, the way we speak, the way we live. Our thoughts, words, and actions are no longer focused on us – "what's in it for me" – "It's all about me." Transformed by God's grace, Easter people respond with "how can I help others? How can I share what God has blessed me with so others can also be blessed? How can I reach out to others? How can I encourage and support others?" A member shared with me the other day that they try to do one good act of kindness to another person every day. Sometimes it is buying extra food and sharing it with neighbors. Sometimes it is helping a person out who needs help. Whatever the situation, Easter people are to be kind to other people.**

**Living as Easter people in community is caring for one another, encouraging one another, sharing what we have with one another. I've received and I have given. Many of you have also received and have given. God places us into the community of believers to be Easter people, here at Bethany, in Vacaville - Dixon – Fairfield – Winters – Woodland – Vallejo – and in other places. Wherever God plants us, we are to grow and bloom – bursting forth in the glory of God's redeeming love and blessed assurance.**

**In these next weeks we are going to focus on the divine and view what it means to live as Easter people. We have lots of challenges – wonderful opportunities to live as Easter people. We have our wonderful preschool and school that touches children with the love of Jesus and the many opportunities of outreach through FISH and other community groups. We are blessed as Bethany Lutheran Ministries with worship, study of God's Word, and acts of service. As Easter people we can take bold steps as the early Christian followers did upon hearing the resurrection message. The commitment of our time, talents, and resources can be like the early Christians' response to the same Easter message. Life has no meaning or purpose without the blessed assurance of eternal life through Jesus Christ. God's act of grace delivers us from all that destroys life – the devil, sin, and death.**

**We are Easter people by God's grace. We are Easter people who have heard the message of the resurrection. We are Easter people that are called to live in Community. May God's resurrection message transform us to live as Easter people. The Lord is risen! *He is risen, indeed!* Alleluia! Amen.**