“Together Apart”

Acts 2: 42-47

The Rev. Katie Day

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42 They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. 43 And everyone was filled with awe; the [apostles](https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=933) worked many signs and miracles. 44 And all who shared the [faith](https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4554) owned everything in common; 45 they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. 46 Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the [Temple](https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=11357) but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; 47 they praised [God](https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the [Lord](https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5217) added to their community those destined to be saved.

This story is out of order.

We’ve just had Easter, and it’s four more weeks until Pentecost. Jesus hasn’t even ascended into heaven yet, but here we are reading a story that takes place *after* Pentecost. As Hamlet says, “The time is out of joint” (1.5.207).

The time is out of joint. That’s how I feel, preaching to you virtually, pre-recorded, instead of meeting you all face-to-face. It seems as though I should have greeted you in person already, run into you in the office as I move my books, my robes, seen you around town as my family and I explore, at the very least had the opportunity to see your faces as you see mine this morning, celebrating what God has done in bringing us together, what God will do in our future. But that didn’t – and couldn’t – happen, and here we are, connecting in this new way, this marvelous and amazing miracle of technology way, but it still feels somewhat like time is out of joint, because so much hasn’t happened yet.

Which makes it altogether appropriate that our story today hasn’t happened yet.

So, a story from Pentecost in the middle of Easter – what could this mean?

“Christians make their most marvelous claims during Easter,” writes Matt Skinner, professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, whom I had the pleasure to hear at last year’s Festival of Homiletics preaching conference. “Christians make their most marvelous claims during Easter. But what better time than Easter to proclaim what God is capable of bringing into being?” (Skinner).

Today’s story is marvelous: a description of the early church filled with devotion, awe, wonder. Prior to our reading, the gift of the Holy Spirit had arrived, wind whooshed around, tongues of flame appeared on people, everyone spoke in different languages, don’t worry, we’ll get there in a few weeks and you’ll hear all about it.

Peter preached a fabulous sermon that day, and 3,000 people were baptized (Acts 2). Can you imagine? I wonder what that early church membership committee was thinking …“I’m not sure we’re going to have enough swag bags….”

I don’t know about you, but I’m just thinking about 3,000 people, period. Gathering in large groups almost seems a distant memory, now.

Now, most of us spend our time in small groups – tiny groups, really.

The members of our family, a handful of people in line at the grocery store, maybe your group is just me, myself, and I.

So, here’s my question – and it’s one I’ll ask a lot, so get ready: **where do we find ourselves in this story?**

We aren’t gathering all together, no Presbyterian church I know is celebrating 3,000 baptisms in one go in the best of times, much less now. I don’t see a lot of miracles and signs being performed, nor radical redistribution of wealth in the selling of personal possessions, and sharing everything in common – we aren’t even allowed to share a sidewalk, much less *all things.*

So where do we find ourselves?

I have to admit, I was frustrated and sad when I read this text, realizing this would be my first Sunday preaching for you as your new pastor.

A story about togetherness when we have to be apart.

But, my wonderful husband Kevin, I can’t wait for you to meet him –

Kevin is an excellent idea-generator and editor, and he helped me reframe, and start to see where we might see ourselves in this story. Verse 44 reads, “All who believed were together and had all things in common.”

Kevin pointed out that what we have learned from this pandemic is that we truly do have all things in common. This virus spread around the world so quickly and so easily because we are so connected to one another in ways we might not have noticed before. It has revealed the complexity of community, the ways that we are in relationship with one another, and accountable to one another, whether we like it or not. We are connected – through droplets, through physical proximity, through virus particles passed on by touch, from surface to surface. We didn’t want to discover that we are so deeply connected in this way, but we know now that we are.

And so, we’ve had to try to break those connections – this goes against everything we Christians stand for and believe, right?

We believe in the power of connection, of relationships, we believe in the power of community gatherings – meeting for weekly worship, prayers with laying on of hands, holding hands to unite in praise and thanksgiving, showing up to feed hungry folks, share a meal– I mean, Jesus himself said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). We believe in personal, face-to-face community. And now we have to give it all up for a time.

But maybe that’s not the way to be thinking.

Kevin’s colleague Scott Fujita, a former NFL linebacker turned head of a preK-8 school shared recently with his students and faculty the idea of moving from “got to” to “get to.”

Christian community is all about *“get to”* – caring for others is a privilege, rather than *“got to”* – caring for others is an obligation.

It’s not that we *have to* give it all up for a time – it’s that we *get to* give it all up for a time. We *get to* close our church building doors, change our plans, disrupt our ministries and our social lives welcome your new pastor virtually after 2 years of searching, 2 years of diligent and faithful work from the PNC, from the rest of your staff and your multiple interims and we get to *because* we’ve learned we do have all things in common.

The Early Church in Acts 2 sold “their possessions and goods and distribute[d] the proceeds to all, as any had need,” and that is what the Church today continues to do, except instead of giving up our physical possessions, we are giving up our habits, our traditions, our preferences, our practices – and the proceeds are the protection and health of the vulnerable among us.

The text continues, “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 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.”

We are not gathering in our beautiful sanctuary, but friends, make no mistake, we *are* together in God’s Temple.

When the original Temple was built during the time of King Solomon,

it was meant to be a place where the presence of God would reside. But our God has never been one to be confined to a building.

Rahab confesses in the book of Joshua, “The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below” (Joshua 2:11).

The psalmist writes, “Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (Psalm 139: 7-10).

The author of the first epistle of John writes, “If we love one another, God lives in us, and [God’s] love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).

God’s Temple is where the presence of God is found, and we confess and believe that God is God of all places, there is no place God is not.

And in just a few moments, we will, just as those first Christians did, break bread in our homes, to eat with glad and generous hearts.

We will celebrate the sacrament of communion, and in so doing will be in community, in union, connected with God, and with the family of faith throughout history and around the world.

This, too, is something we *get to* share in common. Our bread may look different, as well as what fills our cups. Share a photo on Facebook if you want – and see what everyone is eating and drinking this morning.

And *our* breads and cups will look different from believers celebrating the sacrament in Honduras, Haiti, Guatemala, Brazil, in China, Italy, Korea, Ethiopia. In Palestine, Kenya, India. But we all have bread to break, a cup to drink, celebrated at home with glad and generous hearts.

Glad and generous hearts – not because we have to, but because we get to.

We get to see what God can do when we give up everything we have for the sake of others. We get to trust that God is God wherever we may find ourselves. And, we get to fervently hope that day by day, God is *still* adding to our number those who are being saved.

And I, for one – with Kevin and Elijah alongside me – I am so glad to get to give it all up with you in order to taste and see again that the Lord is good.

We are glad to get to learn anew how we hold all things in common – even now.

# Works Cited

*New Revised Standard Version Bible*. 1989.

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