

May 15, 2022  
Rev. Kerry Smith

The Beauty of the Church - Communion  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Acts 2:42-47 (New Revised Standard Version)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 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. 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.

Lee Ann Womack had a hit song many years ago called, "I Hope You Dance" and it has been playing over and over in my mind all week, "I hope you never lose your sense of wonder. You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger. May you never take one single breath for granted and God forbid love ever leave you empty handed. I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean. Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens. Promise me that you'll give faith the fighting chance and if you get the chance to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance, I hope you dance."

When I read this passage about the early church, I think of Lee Ann Womack's song because this was a community that was all in, they danced. This is right after the story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes and the Christian church is born. Before Pentecost, there were 120 Jesus followers but after Pentecost, their numbers increased thirty-fold. But what makes the ministry of the early church so compelling to me is not the number, but the spiritual practices that defined their life together. Yes, people were drawn to the powerful sermons and the wonders and signs, but what made people stay and commit was the community. The Greek word that is used to describe the fellowship of this community is *koinonia*. It means to have in common or to share. *Koinonia* is communion with God and with each other. It's more than friendship, it is a commitment, similar to what you might find in a marriage.

In this community they expressed their faith in spiritual disciplines: Scripture, fellowship, eating together, prayer, generosity. The Bible as we know it didn't exist yet, but they heard the Hebrew scriptures and the letters of Paul. They prayed together, probably the same prayers we pray today like the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms. They made sacred space in their lives to listen for God's voice. They made a habit of eating together by sharing meals in each other's homes. Sharing food can be sacred. They practiced generosity by sharing all things in common and giving to anyone in need. It was a community so devoted to each other that they would sell their belongings to make sure that no need went unmet. The early church was a community where the deepest longings for God, community, and basic needs were met in abundance for all people.

The early church wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. The disciples were trying to figure out how to keep going when it became obvious that Jesus wasn't coming back tomorrow. The community of believers were ostracized, jailed, and sometimes even tortured and executed for their beliefs. And yet the Church not only survived, it thrived!

We are in the fifty great days of Easter and we are talking about the beauty of the church. We want you to learn some Greek, so the word on the front of your bulletin says *ekklesia* which is translated as church. We come together once a week on our holy day to worship God and to support one another as we live as followers of Christ. We are looking forward to Pentecost, the fiftieth day of Easter when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a force that moves in and through us, urging us, calling us. Perhaps you have felt the Spirit calling you to recommit to daily prayer and Scripture reading. Or you have felt prompted to reach out to a

friend you have not spoken to in years. Maybe you have felt empowered to serve others in new ways.

For two thousand years, these spiritual disciplines of Scripture, fellowship, eating together, prayer, and generosity have grounded the Church. They have been the means of grace by which we encounter the living God in our midst. You may be in a season of joy or a season of grief, a season of plenty or a season of lack, but the disciplines of Scripture, fellowship, eating together, prayer, and generosity connect us to something bigger than ourselves. They feed our souls and transform our everyday living into something holy.

I love that one of the spiritual disciplines is eating together. One of the things that I love most about my husband's family is that they eat a meal together on Thanksgiving Day and on Christmas Day. Sometimes when people get married there is a compromise, one year with your family and the next year with my family. After eating with Lee's family for one Thanksgiving and one Christmas, I had so much fun that is what we do, and we invite my family to join us! I can't miss out on Uncle Mike's baked beans or Uncle Tom's chocolate pie. Uncle Tom has passed away, so now his daughter Tomiann makes the chocolate pie. We bring the corn casserole because that's what Lee's parents used to make so when they were unable we stepped in. Tomiann also brings the mashed potatoes and there must be an entire stick of butter in them - they are so delicious! One year I decided to make something new so I brought macaroni and cheese for the kids. I don't know what I did wrong but it did not taste good. It was amazing because usually no one brings macaroni and cheese and that year Aunt Lynn brought a pan too. Her macaroni and cheese was delicious and it saved the day.

In the first Christian community they broke bread together and praised God and more people were drawn to their community. We don't know if that means that they shared in Communion together or simply shared in meals together. I love Communion. When my stepbrother was twelve my mom started taking him to church and he said that he loved snack Sunday. When we share in Communion together, I think of all of the faithful saints of this church who also ate bread and drank juice to remind them that God loved them. Some people call Communion the Lord's Supper and others call it the Eucharist which comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. Communion is Jesus giving thanks. In the Catholic Church Communion is called the Mass, from the Latin word *missa* which is the word of dismissal used at the end of worship. *Ite, missa est* which means go, it is the sending or the dismissal. It is the end, it is over. Now it is time to go back into the world, now life can begin again. I like to call it Holy Communion because when we come to this table, we are communing with the Holy One, and with one another.

Just like the early church saw eating together as an essential act of Christian life, so do we here at Greenland Hills. Last week we had a Mother's Day Brunch hosted by New Church UCC, our partner in ministry. It was wonderful to see Greenland Hills people and New Church people eating together and learning about one another. We are having a potluck July 12 when we welcome the new pastor at Greenland Hills because potlucks are one of the best parts about church.

Here at Greenland Hills we are called to be people of compassion, people of generosity. We are called to be a praying church because we realize that we cannot meet life in our own strength. We are called to be a church where things happen, where we support our local food banks, or help build houses in Juarez, where we visit those who are sick and where we help other people. We are active in our communities, working to change systems that inflict suffering on people in our communities. We are a sharing church where we have a feeling of responsibility

for each other, where we care about each other and miss each other when someone is absent. We are a worshipping church, where we never forget to visit God's house. We are a model for how God wants the world to be.

Lee Ann Womack continues to sing, "I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance and never settle for the path of least resistance. Living might mean taking chances but they're worth taking. Loving might be a mistake but it's worth making. Don't let some hell-bent heart leave you bitter. When you come close to selling out reconsider. Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance and when you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance, I hope you dance."