

A Table That Provides for All
Acts 2:42-47
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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The apartments on campus were small and basic. Linoleum tile had been laid decades earlier. Feet were kept warm with socks or throw rugs. The walls were painted some shade of builder beige and you trusted that they got repainted between residents. Cleaning was a must when you moved in - at least in my apartment. I was amazed by the quantity of cat food my mom swept out from underneath the appliances. I don't recall if cats were allowed but it seemed at least one had had residence there before me. The apartments were nothing fancy. But once my low slung couch and pressed board desk (after all, I wasn't fancy either) got moved in...once my pictures and artwork got hung on the walls...once all of my other possessions settled into their new places, my apartment quickly became home.

But what was more important than the *stuff* that lived there were the people who were invited in. Wendy, who became a fast friend and would sometimes spend the night rather than driving the hour back to her home outside of Lexington. Jolin, who lived across the hall and with whom I would share hours of conversation as we worked through a piece of scripture upon which we would both be preaching the next Sunday. Laura, with whom I could just be me...no pretense needed. Friends and family from other places, happy to sleep on my well used couch when visiting. Yes, it was people who really made that space home and who brought it to life.

I remember one day in particular. I suspect it was a Saturday because I know a number of us had been to the Farmer's Market. We decided that the best meal was a shared meal though we hadn't made a plan for this ahead of time. So people came with whatever they had. I prepared corn on the cob - what else would an Iowa girl bring? One friend brought fresh tomatoes - I actually believe it was the first time I realized that eating a slice of tomato could be an experience of pure joy. Someone else brought peaches...someone a salad...I think there was some bread. I do remember that there was no meat...it was really a meal mostly made of freshly grown produce in the peak of summer. We took our places around my little living room, on the floor and the furniture, gave thanks for the food that had found its way to us, and ate with appreciation for every fresh flavor and the people who shared what they had.

And that wasn't the only time we shared meals. No, in seminary, shared meals were common. Sometimes they took place in people's apartments, sometimes in the seminary's Fellowship Hall. Over those years I collected recipes - Sammy shared the potato soup recipe I continue to make today...the thought of Dr. Kinnamon's spoon bread still makes my mouth water...Alan's meatloaf recipe has inspired my own...and my grandmother's corn and noodle casserole is now a staple in many other people's homes. But sharing food wasn't just about the pleasure of the moment or the collecting of recipes.

Sharing food was and is an act of kindness, an act of love, an act of stewardship. Sitting together at the table offers an opportunity, yes - for us to eat, but even more so for us to come to know each other, to slow down and see each other, and to discover the gifts each person brings. It also allows us to have and experience far more than we could on our own.

And this isn't a modern discovery. Did you hear today's text? The early church knew the value of the table. They knew the value of the table as a place to learn together...to grow in faith. They knew the value of the table as a place to eat together...to feed their bodies as well as their souls. They knew the value of the table as a place around which to build relationships, to come to know each other, to care for each other, to pray for each other.

When I read this scripture, it truly does bring to mind my seminary days because those were the same things we were doing together as we lived in community with each other, a group of folks from all over brought together because of a common calling.

Maybe those things were easier then...after all most of us lived on campus together, most of us were pinching pennies as we worked our way through school, most of us were away from home and living in this place for three or four years knowing that it was really a temporary location. Maybe that made it easier to rely on one another.

Because in my life experience, I would say it seems it is easier to lose this focus on community, on sharing, on slowing down and seeing one another, than it is to keep it.

After all, we have so many conflicting messages. While we can affirm statements like "it takes a village to raise a child," we more often live into the realities of striving to be a "self-made" person or to "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps." While we are happy to help others, we are often hesitant to accept and certainly ask for help ourselves.

And yet the early church gives us a model of what it can be like to live in community, to care for one another with a deep and abiding care, to even give up our own things for the good of another.

Of course, we modern people are often quick to point out when hearing this text that there is no evidence that this was a long standing practice of the early church. Especially that part where Luke writes, "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" (Acts 2:44-45, NRSV). That makes us nervous, doesn't it, friends?

As Professor Matt Skinner says, "This Sunday's reading describes a state of affairs that looks extremely attractive, yet utterly unrealistic or beyond our reach. Its hopeful vision of justice and service can look more like pie in the sky if we are not honest about the

struggles that are part of our efforts to proclaim and embody the gospel in our living”
Commentary on Acts 2:42-47 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary

Friends, our faith is practiced in the ordinary moments of our lives and in the midst of relationships. It is practiced in the midst of our real needs. In the midst of mundane and miraculous moments around the table. In the midst of taking care of one another, even giving up our desires in order to do so.

We have been talking for the last several weeks about this theme: From Bread and Cup to Faith and Giving. We have been asking questions about how the table experiences we have shape our living. And we, the leaders of the church, have been asking you to pray about how you will participate in the ministry we share in the coming year.

And all of this grows out of the commitment we have to the table. Whether it be to the communion table around which we gather to remember and be sent forth each week in worship...whether it be at the Bible study tables where we learn and grow together...whether it be at the board meeting tables where we catch and share a vision for who we are called to be not only inside these walls but out in our world...whether it be at the Free Lunch Tables where we share food with those who are hungry - no questions asked.

All of these table experiences shape us and call us to continue the work of building community, inside these walls and out in the world.

This is really the work we are invited to share in together. When we invite you to make a financial commitment to First Christian, it is a commitment to be part of this movement of building community that makes our world better for all. When we invite you to indicate ministries you are interested in and ways you will serve, it is an invitation to not sit back at a safe distance and observe, but to embody the ways of Jesus, serving and sharing with others.

While our version of Christian community might not look exactly like that of the early church represented in Acts 2, this picture reminds us that we are called to live in community - that we are really created for it. This picture reminds us that it is when we are together that we have the best opportunities for learning and growing, for developing relationships and supporting one another. This picture reminds us that we are each the other's keeper, that we do have a responsibility for one another and for the work of kin-dom building in order that all may be whole. This picture reminds us that there isn't only room at God's table for us, but for everyone. May this be our commitment.