

Sharing Love

The challenge of trusting God in the 21st Century

a Homily by The Rev. Andrew Downs

Easter 4A | Acts 2:42-47
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You've probably heard the story before. It's told several ways, but often goes something like this.

There was a man, living near the Mississippi River. He was a faithful man. He served on the church board and the evangelism team and was there every Sunday. One particular Sunday, the conversation at coffee hour was about the hurricane in the gulf, still a ways out, but many were making plans. His plan was to stay home and wait.

A few days later, the local meteorologist warned that the hurricane had shifted and was nearing landfall. The people should evacuate. The man decided to stay put. He had God to protect him.

When the storm hit, the river surged and flooded. His house was filling with water. A woman, rowing out in a boat, offered to take him to higher land. But he declined. He was waiting on God.

The man climbed up onto his roof to escape the flood waters. A search helicopter spotted the man there and sent down a rope ladder to bring him up to deliver him to safety. Again the man declined. God would surely save him.

Soon the waters rose above the roof and swept the man under. He died. When he met St. Peter at the pearly gates, the man was full of questions. "I'm a faithful man! I did everything expected of me in the church. I tithed and served. What more could I have done?"

Jesus came and the man bowed before him.

The man asked Jesus "Why didn't you come for me?"

He looked the man in the eyes and said "I sent your church, a meteorologist, a woman in a boat, and a rescue helicopter. The real question is what are you doing here?"

It's a matter of faith.

We tell that story as a matter of faith. The man had a certain kind of faith, didn't he? A recognizable kind. The kind we often encounter when we talk about the bad stuff. We're told to trust God, and to many, the idea of trusting God looks like waiting in your La-Z-Boy for the divine rescue.

And some of us think we know better, talking about faith and trust in God, just never giving God a chance to actually communicate with us. Not just through those good church people, but in talking back at our TVs because we certainly know better.

But what I like about the story is that it really isn't so much about faith at all. Not like that. It's about certainty and how little we actually listen for God. That's the faith in the story.

We apply the same filters to our scripture. Which is often an opportunity for rich dialogue over what Jesus really meant by a particular parable or what it means to understand the Hebraic history in light of Jesus. But rarely do we get a passage so directly at odds with our lived lives as we have this morning. For in Acts, we see the

first followers of Jesus living out the gospel teachings Jesus gave them. And it is good.

The Apostles lived it out.

It all sounds familiar. And a little communist.

But it all comes out of what they do when Jesus leaves them for good, after the ascension. They do exactly what they believe Jesus would have them do. It says

Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

These, of course are the words we say at baptism, naming the essential acts of a holy and devout life in Christ. Devoting ourselves to their teaching *and* fellowship, communing and praying together. We gather as a blessed community to learn and serve and pray together around a common table. Everything else, **everything else** pales before this.

Not just because this is what we're supposed to do. But because we love Jesus so much we do this for each other. That Jesus might be here with us.

Like they did before, found in the final words of the gospel of the writer we call Luke

"and they were continually in the temple blessing God."

But it doesn't end there. They do this together, they do this at home; they praise God always. Together. They learn together and pray together.

And here's where it gets really uncomfortable for all of us good citizens of the United States, often referred to, not as people but consumers, liberal and conservative. This is the part we want to gloss right over. The disciples throw in all their stuff together! They sell most of their junk because they don't all need their own TVs and phone plans. They buy into one

great big family plan and they give away their Amazon passwords. Talk about trust!

None of us wants to hear this and take it for what it is. None of us. And we certainly don't want to think about what it would mean if we took it seriously, to not brush it off as metaphor or explain it away. To pretend as if God isn't speaking!

Or maybe we'd rather pigeonhole this teaching into political boxes, Left and Right.

But what if we hear it with honesty and listen to what the people who knew Jesus best did after he left. To face the truth: they lived together and shared things in common. Simply. Joyfully. And people wanted to be a part of what they were doing.

Discipleship in the 21st Century is hard.

Particularly here. In the West, where we have so much wealth. All held individually. And often stingily shared because we don't trust one another to do what is best. Some of us don't trust the government and some of us don't trust our neighbors.

BUT, political ideology can be thrown out the window because we have people living in poverty and we aren't getting it done. Not now. Not 30 years ago. No matter how our governments budget, the body of Christ isn't getting it done. That's the deal. We aren't getting it done.

And yet we all have our own stuff. Our own roofs, cars, or lawnmowers. There is almost nothing recognizably Christian about us next to those disciples.

We'd rather argue about ideology than deal with our hungry. That's where most of us here are at. That's our culture.

And we marvel at the faith found in places with far more poverty, far more oppression and indignity. Be they the faithful in oppressed communities in our country or in impoverished places across an ocean or two. Where people go to church, constantly in prayer, share so much in common, and yet they are truly happy. Far happier than we are. Surprise, surprise!

We don't have to look back 2000 years ago, just at a different community than ours. And we can see discipleship. And it looks like joy.

I don't have any answers. Not any that will make a real difference. I'm not planning on selling our stuff and moving my family onto your couch. Nor am I hoping you'll move onto mine. But we can't leave this idea abandoned or explained away. As if we're expecting the answer to fall in our laps or hear the voice of God booming like at Jesus's baptism. It's almost like God's voice hasn't already spoken through those apostles! In their work and life.

Explaining away this devotion or waiting for others to solve this for us is like waiting on our La-Z-Boys for a divine

intervention. We know the flood's coming, but boy do we love our stuff. Now what did Jesus say to that pious young man about inheriting eternal life? I think there was something about selling stuff and sharing wealth.

We have God's answer. We just don't like it. So we're prone to 1) ignore it, 2) make it metaphorical, and 3) minimize it. To pretend that God doesn't really want us to work together so directly. To live together so intimately. Or to love each other so faithfully. We don't want to look deeply at what the gospel is telling us and hear its powerful message.

A message which says

Give! Love! And be filled with joy!

For that is what it means to follow Jesus.