



Together

1 Peter 2:19-25 & Acts 2:42-49

Easter 4 - April 26, 2026

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In a culture that seems to stress the notion that religion or faith is something best expressed in individualized and privatized ways, we are confronted this morning by two texts that beg to differ ...

The reading from Peter's First Epistle emphasizes the value that might be found in suffering, but it is a suffering that is shared with others. Peter wrote to a congregation or a series of congregations and all that he had to say to them is couched in the sure certainty that the gospel is not a privatized or individual call, but a call to life in community.

The second passage, which recounts the aftermath of Peter's inaugural Christian sermon on that Pentecost Sunday, indicates in almost straight forward reporting, the communal nature of the early Christian church. Luke reports that the people were all together, they ate together, prayed together and shared all things in common. It is obvious that these early Christians understood that the gospel was best lived out together, in community, under the public eye so to speak, and for the world.

As I have reminded you recently, it was the great Presbyterian preacher, P.C. Ennis who said rather strikingly:

God is eminently personal, but never private.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred because of the public nature of his faith, spoke to this as well:

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. ... The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength for the believer.

This is the season of Easter and the texts all through this liturgical time point us to consider the aftermath of the resurrection. If God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, what does that mean for our lives and the manner of our living? If Easter is true, what now? What is God calling us to do and what is God asking us to be in this world?

I am convinced by the witness of scripture, that God's action in Jesus Christ is a proclamation of God's ultimate solidarity with God's creation and with us as human beings. God did not allow us to

linger in our sin of separation and our own desires to live lives as if we ourselves were gods; rather, God has plainly demonstrated his love and grace in the person of Jesus Christ.

Stephen D. Morrison writes of this in a marvelous book on Karl Barth's theological perspective:

Many imagine that God is a cosmic 'hammer in the sky' just waiting for them to mess up and strike them with hot-blooded fury, but this is not the God and Father of Jesus Christ; this is a mythological projection of our greatest fears. Jesus Christ relieves our fears. God is not God against us, God is and forever will be God for us.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has demonstrated God's solidarity with humankind; God has shown that he is God for us, seeking to share in the life that he has given us and asking us to respond to him with love and obedience.

In so doing, as well, God provides the answer to our Easter season questions of 'What now?' and 'What does the resurrection mean?' It means, among other things, that we are called to be in solidarity with others and all of creation just as God has demonstrated that he is in solidarity with us. This means that the problems and the concerns of others become our problems and concerns; the joys and celebrations of others become ours as well. We are called to be bound to one another in care and concern for one another, in our being in solidarity with others.

And this solidarity extends beyond the doors of our church building. We are called to be in solidarity with all human beings; all whom Christ lived and died and rose for, we too can offer grace and love, hope and new life in the very manner of our compassionate concern for what is right and just. But it starts here, within the congregation and moves outwardly.

William Willimon tells a wonderful story about such things. He was asked to officiate at the baptism of a young teen-ager in one of the churches that he supervised as a Methodist bishop. The pastor of the church called Willimon and asked him to perform this sacrament in their small, rural church and noted that he had told the young boy that it was quite an honor to be baptized by a bishop.

Here Willimon picks up the story:

Well, we had a wonderful service that Sunday. I preached on baptism, the choir sang a baptismal anthem, then the whole congregation ... gathered around the font. I went through the baptismal ritual. Then I asked Jeremy if he had anything to say to the congregation before his baptism.

'Yes, I do. I just want to say to all of you that I'm here today because of you. When my parents got divorced, I thought my world was over. But you stood by me. You told me the stories about Jesus. And I just want to say to you today, thanks for what you did for me. I intend to make you proud as I'm going to live my life the way Jesus wants.'

For me, this is a powerful illustration of what God intends for us as the church, as God's people in this world. The passage from Acts bespeaks this early in the life of the church, but it is an essential tradition and quintessential purpose for us to be the church in the world; that we might openly and deliberately care for one another.

In Jesus Christ, God demonstrates that he is for us and for all humankind; that he has solidarity with his creation. In life after Easter, let us demonstrate the same care and concern, the same solidarity with others that we have learned of God in Christ. Let us do this and we will be the church ... thanks be to God.