

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 145:4, Acts 2:42-47

*(Psalm) One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.*

(Acts) ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This month is Older Adult Recognition and Celebration month. If you're not an older adult; you will be someday. If you are an older adult thank you for your contributions that made our world a better place. You are all spectacular in how you've been negotiating this thing called life, even when it's not been easy. Those younger than you continue to watch and listen to your wisdom and lessons of life, and their lives are enriched.

You've kept faith alive in our church as you worked together to be obedient To God's calling to this congregation. You built one another up through bible study, worship, and fellowship. You've shared your faith through word and deed with those younger, being mentors, helping and encouraging them to grow in their faith. The good news is that we still need you, your spiritual gifts, your wisdom, and the example of your faith.

While I'm sure you treasure many, many wonderful memories, I know you've also fought your way with grace and faith through many hardships in life, showing the rest of us how it is done in order to have a healthy, thriving and fulfilling life.

We all have people in our lives who have made a deep and lasting impression on our lives. I have family and church family members who have in some way shaped who I am. I want to share with you about one extraordinary woman who continues to inspire me, although she's long been gone to her heavenly home. I don't believe I've ever shared this before. The woman I'm talking about Don's grandmother, Sarah Rowe.

Sarah could make me feel exhausted just watching her. She was a hardworking, frugal, self-sufficient, woman of God. She was compassionate and would do anything for anyone who needed help. She could make the best apple pie without ever taking any shortcuts. Nothing she made was made without the best home ingredients and lots of love. I learned several good kitchen tips from her.

Sarah was in constant motion from sun-up to sun-down. She lived her later years in a nice trailer on the Rowe homestead property where our cabin is also located. She had a huge lawn, which she mowed herself. She had meticulous and lush fruit trees and a garden, so she would do some canning and freezing. Hanging laundry out and cleaning the trailer seemed to be daily chores.

Oh, and was she feisty. She knew how to hunt. She had her own guns and knew how to use them. One night a bear came by and started climbing her utility pole. She got the ole' shotgun out, went outside, put off a few shots, and sent the bear a running. Some people might say Sarah was quite the mountain woman.

But she was also a woman with a deep faith. You could see it in every aspect of her life. Like most Christians, every Sunday you would find her worshipping at church, the Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren. Sarah helped with many of the ministries of the church, working just as hard if not harder for the church. She loved her church, she loved Jesus, and that was obvious.

I would never be able to physically keep up with Sarah, but she has inspired me, and she continues to set an example through my memories of her to resist the tendency to compartmentalize my life.

The bible teaches us this lesson, but it is easy to slip in the fast-flowing waters of letting our work times be our work times, our play times be our play times and our faith times be faith times. That's not how God intends for our lives to be.

The text I chose to use for today from the lectionary is the Acts 2 text that takes place after the Pentecost. We will be celebrating Pentecost in just a few weeks. Those baptized on Pentecost came from different regions, speaking different dialects. Some may not have shared the native languages of others, in spite of a shared Jewish faith.

There would have been distinct food preferences and different levels of financial security. There would have been different prejudices to navigate, different interpretations of Torah and different political inclinations. Then just when one was beginning to learn the names of those seated at dinner, new faces would appear. Daily, the text says, "the Lord added to their number" (verse 47). This diversity made for a naturally unstable situation. They were going to have some work to do to bring this large group together, and keep them together as a church family.

The text tells us of five simple yet important characteristics they put into practice that helped them work at this. First, the scripture tells us, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." In other words, they were learners; they were a community of seekers who hungered to understand the fullness and depth of the mystery that is God.

Secondly, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching AND FELLOWSHIP." Fellowship is not a separate activity; rather, it is a complete picture of what it means to learn the way of Jesus. Christian faith and spirituality are not an unsociable experience for it makes sense only when it is lived in relationship to others. We learn more of what it means to live out our faith when we do it with others.

Thirdly, they also devoted themselves ". . . to the breaking of bread and the prayers." As they learned about God and learned how to share life with one another, the early Christians were moved to worship. They paused to give thanks for their new knowledge and sought first to be in communion with God.

They gave thanks by sharing the meal that united them to Jesus and to each other. This meal was the natural and only place to turn, and it was there that they offered prayers for themselves and for the world.

Fourth, "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." This is the part that makes us uncomfortable, or that we dismiss too quickly. It scares us because we love our money and our things too much. We dismiss it by labeling it "socialist," "communist," or "idealist." The point, however, is that as the early Christians learned their faith, lived in relationship to one another, and worshipped God, they became generous people. They learned that you cannot faithfully follow the way of Jesus and not be extravagantly generous. Jesus gave all—literally all—for us.

Generosity to the work of God and the work of love and justice in this world is as important a part of the Christian way as attending worship, praying, and learning. Someone who spends a lot of time in prayer but is not generous has missed the point. Someone who says "I give my time" but doesn't give a dime has missed the point.

Bible commentator, Javier Viera writes, "The early Christians were extravagantly generous. As a matter of fact, in the earliest descriptions of them by non-Christians, it was their love and care for one another and their generosity to those in need that was most striking and compelling. Their generosity was their most powerful way of evangelizing or witnessing to their faith."

Lastly, as a result, "the Lord added to their number daily. They lived peacefully, shared their lives and resources, worshipped together daily, and they had glad and generous hearts and the goodwill of all the people. What an amazing legacy. And they were growing every day! That's an astonishing reality.

This description of a healthy, thriving church is the same description that we could provide for a healthy, thriving life. If you are a devoted learner of the ways of Jesus, if you share life with other learners, gather regularly around Jesus's table, give of your time and resources generously for the work of God and the welfare of God's people in need, chances are you are on the path to a healthy, thriving, fulfilling life.

You know, now that I think about it, all of those who have been and are mentors for me today, have learned and practiced this kind of Godly living. The way I can see their faith and daily living tightly integrated stirs my curiosity and hunger to learn more from them, even if it happens as I watch from afar, or as I pull memories from my memory banks.

The members of the first church came together, the young and the old, to help one another grow in their understanding of God and their faith. All were needed, not just some, not just the young, all were needed to participate with this Godly endeavor. Nothing has changed. All are needed, the young and the "older", to help us grow into a healthy, thriving congregation, who therefore also live healthy, thriving, fulfilling lives. May we help one another do so. Amen.