



March 2024

Theme: Passion for our Communities

Scripture Passage: Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35

Let's talk about something that feels a bit revolutionary, yet it's as ancient as it gets: the early Christian community's approach to faithful living. In our world where individual pursuits and personal achievements are prized, the ideas of community and the common good often fade into shadows and silence, overcome by louder voices prioritizing and preaching the pursuit of personal gain and the glory of the me-first -- even within the church. The early Christian church offers an alternative vision of life lived with a passion for the community, not as something idealized, but as a tangible expression of faith, love, and commitment to the well-being of all people.

The Book of Acts offers us a window into a time when community wasn't just a concept but the essence of daily living for the early Christians. Acts 2:44-45 is a powerful example: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." This wasn't just about sharing a meal or a helping hand; it was about sharing life itself, making sure no one was left in need. This wasn't charity; it was a way of life, a testament to unity, and love, and justice, not just within the church but beyond. It's a radical approach to community that challenges contemporary norms, and is built on the premise that true fulfillment comes from collective well-being, and that caring for the community is the way to serve God.

Acts 4:32-35 tells us that "No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them."

Imagine a community where everyone's well-being is everyone's business, where the concept of 'mine' is replaced with 'ours.' It's an ideal of unity and mutual care that patterned the living, breathing reality of the early church, and a testament to their desire for equality and dignity for every person, rooted in the teachings of Jesus the Christ.

Thirty to fifty years after the book of Acts was written, the Christian philosopher Aristides crafted a Christian "Apologia", or defense, addressed to the Emperor Hadrian. In it, he describes Christians' continuing commitment to caring for the others. He wrote this, (and I have taken the liberty of expanding his pronoun language):

Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from [one] who treats [them] harshly. And [the one] who has, gives to [the one] who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take [that person] into their homes and rejoice over [them] as a [sibling]; for they do not call them [siblings] after the flesh, but [siblings] after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to [their] ability gives heed to [the deceased] and carefully sees to [the] burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted [...], all of them anxiously minister to [that one's] necessity, and if it is possible to redeem [that one] they set [that one] free. And if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the needy their lack of food. They observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care, living justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them.

Fasting for the sake of feeding others! This demonstrates a community that prioritized the needs of its most vulnerable above personal comfort. That's not just generosity; that's solidarity and sacrifice. It's a community saying, "If you're not okay, then I'm not okay," and living out its faith with every meal shared and every need met.

What does it mean to have passion for our communities? The early Christians believed it meant more than just being there; it meant being all in, all the time. They show us that the heart of community is not just shared space, but shared love, shared responsibility, shared resources, and shared lives. That shared life within their community invited others to join in.

Across two thousand years, they invite us to envision how our own communities might be transformed by a passion for collective care and mutual support. They invite us to move beyond mere acquaintance with our neighbors to a deeper, more committed form of communal living, where we look out for one another with genuine concern and sacrificial generosity. Their passion for their community is a timeless reminder of the power of collective action and the profound impact it can have on the world. It encourages us to cultivate a deeper sense of responsibility towards each other, inspired by the justice, compassion, and love that guided the early church.

So, what if we took their invitation personally? What if we looked around and saw not just neighbors, but family? What if we chose to live a bit more like the early church? Imagine the kind of world we could create: A world where no one is left wanting, where we're all in it together, truly together. A world that norms uplifting every person, even at a cost to ourselves. A world that recognizes the transformative impact of collective action and collective compassion rooted in spiritual convictions. That passion can still transform the world today, and it's as revolutionary now as it was in the world of the early church.

Amen.

Prayer for the Month

Holy One, we come to you longing to embody a passion for our communities. Grant us the wisdom to see beyond ourselves and to recognize the value of sharing life and love with those around us. Help us to cultivate a community where no one is in need, and where our possessions and blessings are not just ours but a means to serve others. Teach us to live with hearts open to giving, hands ready to serve, and eyes that see your presence in every person. May we become the community that reflects your love and justice, making every act of sharing and caring a testament to our faith in you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer Queues or Breath Prayers for the Month

- March 3 – Lord, unite me/us in making our community a true reflection of your realm.
- March 10 – Spirit of Love, help me/us amplify your boundless generosity.
- March 17 – God of wholeness, open my/our eyes to the needs of our neighbors.
- March 24 – Good and Gracious God, teach us a life where resources and community are woven together.
- March 31 – Embracing God, guide me/us to foster connections that embody your love and care.

