

## Second Sunday of Easter, Cycle B

Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35, 1John 5:1-6 and John 20:19-31

This passage from Acts is just too wild to be believed. "The community of believers was of one heart and soul." No disagreements or competing interests; everybody had the same goals. And if that was not impossible enough, Acts continues, "No one claimed that any possession was solely theirs, but they held everything in common." Who does that? I used to think that I was good at "living simply so that others might live," but of late I have come to admit that I like my stuff. I am willing to give a lot, but I have a limit. Acts says the whole Christian community did this. Maybe Christians were holier back then.

We hear another quality of this exemplary community, "With great power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great favor was accorded them all." There is a connection between their proclamation and the χάρις, Greek for favor, grace or undeserved kindness, which God shows them. They were commissioned to proclaim. When they did, the early Christians were empowered to do the impossible, like be of one heart and soul and have no one in need.

And why not? Isn't the resurrection itself impossible? Yes, but we have all gotten used to it and it really does not have much to do with us here and now. Aha! That is why Easter is, in reality, for most of us, a minor holiday, a single day instead of a season. We do not grasp that "playing small does not serve the world."<sup>1</sup> Of course, Thomas doubts. His snarky "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands... and put my hand into his side, I will not believe," could have been spoken by almost any of us.

How dare I make this claim? Because neither your parish nor mine lives like the early Christians in Acts. However, their strange lifestyle has always been part of Church teaching. Pope Paul VI explained it in *Populorum progressio*, where he called it the universal destination of goods (1967). He wrote that no one owns anything forever and without regard for the needs of others. What we do must protect the common good, not just the good of some. Each of us has the right to private property, but it is not an absolute right. This is not a recent invention by liberals: Pope Paul quotes St. Ambrose who wrote in a fourth century sermon, "You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich."

Easter is God's statement that life operates under totally different parameters than human beings could ever conceive. Easter empowers those who believe in it to live radically different lives based on those parameters. Jesus' Easter evening visit in the first part of this Sunday's gospel lays out these parameters. First, Jesus appears in the room even though the disciples have locked themselves in. He *is* alive and we cannot shut out his life-giving power. Don't worry though, for he comes because he loves us. We are never beyond the reach of Jesus. Jesus is with us in every part of our lives, the delightful as well as the messy and the boring. With this amazing and constant companion, how brave we can be! Second, Jesus gives the disciples peace, not once but twice. We do not need to lie awake worrying. We do not need to pooh-pooh peaceful solutions; they are in fact the only real solution. Jesus is living proof. Next Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Again, we are assured that God is present to us as intimately and surely as oxygen reaches every cell in our bodies. The Holy Spirit literally inspires us and we can lean into that. Lastly, Jesus tells the disciples that everything they set free will be set free and everything they hold onto with an iron grip will be held. (N.B. Jesus is talking to disciples, not just apostles. See Mt 16 for the basis for sacramental confession.) Each of us holds the power of compassion and forgiveness in our hands. Peace is a choice to participate in the resurrection.

1Jn 5 says, "God's commandments are not burdensome, for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world." When we finally decide to believe in Easter, ay caramba! Imagine the good we will do!

- ❖ What appeals to you in the early Christian community described in Acts 4? How could/do you live like that today?
- ❖ What worries could you give over to Jesus, who offers you peace?

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, 1992