

Sermon Text For September 16, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Proverbs 22:1-9, Acts 4:32-37

“Come on people now”

I bought my mid-life crisis car. Anyone who doesn't know what it is, want to guess what I got? There are just certain cars that at a stage in your life you say: I just have to have it. What kind of mid-life crisis car do you think I would get? How about a Prius? You all can support me in that, right? Since Bethany left the house and Stacy has had to take care of the three remaining children, the cat, the dog, and me, in that order of importance, it has given us a lot of time to think about our place in Strasburg, in the community, in the church. When you have a lot of time to think, things begin to get more and more comfortable for me. .

Today in Acts we read about this new community that we talked about in earlier sermons, this community that loves each other and takes care of each other. It is a community where there were absolutely no dividing walls between people, none whatsoever. These verses show us the importance of Christian unity which we heard about last week. And these verses manifest that unity by describing a community that loves to gather. But the degree to which they gather is shocking, and also challenging to us. Let us read now Acts.

READ SCRIPTURE

I need to explain the sermon title a bit for people who do not recognize this as a title of a song from the 60's by the Youngbloods. Some years back I would use the first lines of that song to gather people together when I was helping out in the youth group of our church in Florida. The advisers probably came to hate it, because I would do it so often. It is cheesy enough to get on your nerves when you hear it once, but when it is used as a call to gather over and over again, it really gets on your nerves.

But people notice it, and remember it, and know what to do when we are called to come on now people, we are called to gather. I am into each one of us looking at this community, this fellowship, this gathering and if you are anything like me who has profited so much from being a small part of this community, you are wanting to reach others to come and be a part and share in the joy and love of Christ in this intimate setting. I am convinced that is what people want, to be a part of a 1st century church of people who love each other.

Well, that was certainly the case in these verses in Acts 4. What you find is a community the likes of which we have seen in other places in Acts. Remember in both chapter 1 and 2 you have an image of a sacrificial community who had all things in common and even more remarkably as verse 32 states were of one heart and soul. But I want you to look at vs.31 and you see what was the impetus for this gathering together, for this extreme unity that we find. Let's read that: When they had prayed, the place in which they gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Pentecost part II takes place right here to set up the stage of real Christian living.

Here in Acts the focus is on the believers who were of one heart and soul. It is clear that God hates division in his church. It is clear that God hates it when his children speak in such a way that drives wedges between brothers and sisters. There is nothing more painful to watch than brothers and sisters draw battle lines and shout at each other.

I must say that God has been good to First Presbyterian Church. We are not a very diverse group of believers and we don't cover a very broad gamut of theological, cultural, social, and even political views and positions. We are somewhat diverse in some ways, but fairly homogenous in most ways. We are called to not be like that. As we continue to grow we will become more diverse. There will be more and more people who don't think like you and think more like me, there will be more and more people who don't look like just about any of us, there will be more and more people who have ideas and understandings that may seem foreign to us. If our community does not become more diverse, we run the risk of a false unity because we are not representing the kingdom as we ought to represent.

But we, like the early church, love Jesus Christ, love each other, and love our neighbor. What defines us is not the positions that we take on issues, but the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ defines us and calls us what we all have in common as believers. We are God's children and brothers and sisters. That's what ultimately defines us, not any of these societal definitions that people try to put on us and try to get us to define ourselves in that way. I know that as we start to change that we will lose some of you because you will not feel comfortable worshipping in a place where people are very, very different from you. I encourage you to stay, I encourage you to try to listen to others within this community.

We love to gather together, and surround the one who is hurting with cards and encouragement. They were of one heart and soul, notice it doesn't say of theology or politics, and there is a reason why it doesn't say that. Because the heart and soul is shaped and fashioned by Christ, while the rest is what we do and so has to have a secondary place in our lives.

This unified body in Acts, this one heart and soul moved the community to a community that took concrete practical steps in its unity. It wasn't enough for them to gather in prayer and worship, which they did. It wasn't enough to glow in the warmth of fellowship, which they did. But their unity was manifested in real, practical, radical action.

Listen to this verse and then consider what it means. Everything they owned they held in common. There was not a single needy person among them. Oh how I wish if we could somehow now distance ourselves this morning and just for a moment from our current political environment and the discussions going around us about Obamacare and welfare, social security, and more or less government and spending and taxes. This Scripture for the sake of this sermon this morning we are not applying to all of that. This talks about a group of Christian believers that are living in community, and how can we learn from this community by how they take what they believe, how they take their common heart and soul and put it into action in their lives. How do they do it.

They do it through their property, through their material goods. If you want to know how to get someone's attention, then that is the way to do it. Karl Marx once said: that every human attitude and action can be traced to economic sources. I never thought I would quote Karl Marx in a sermon, but I did. Neither Jesus, nor Luke, nor the early community were Marxist, but they did reflect their human attitude through a concrete action that had to do with economic resources.

Our being of one heart and mind has to translate into practical action whether it be economic or time, or energy, or effort. Look around you, do you see these people around you, they are part of the community that you have for better or for worse chosen to associate yourself with. They are your brothers and sisters. When we reach a point when we can say, and mean it, "I am accountable for you. If you have a need, I will try and meet it." Then we are discovering intimate Christian community. Then we have responded to the call, come on people now.

You know, each one of us has a need, but it often goes unnoticed. I am going to digress from the economic needs to a need that I think is far more fundamental and universal. Each one of us dreads being lonely, and yet many of us are exactly that. That's right. We may come religiously on Sunday morning, surround ourselves with hundreds of good Christian people, well, Christian people at least, but we still feel alone in this church. We have not felt the embrace of a small group of people who know you by name and take the time to talk to you and truly be interested in you. Most of us want to be able to tell someone what our interests are, how much we love our Savior, the problems we faced this week. But even here, we feel alone.

I think at the root of each of us we need a meaningful fellowship that goes beyond our Sunday gatherings where we feel that we belong and allow that loneliness to be somewhat dispelled. In Genesis the only time that God says that there is something that is not good is in chapter 2 when we hear God say, it is not good that the human should be alone. Jesus himself states that where 2 or more are gathered, there I am present. We cannot consider our faith in Jesus Christ to be so personal that we don't need anyone else. No, Jesus surrounded himself with people I feel not only to teach, but to be a part of a group whose heart and soul were unified.

Is that your longing. Are you lonely and need a meaningful community where your heart and your soul can be one with others? This Scripture gives us the challenge this morning to recognize this gathering of believers as absolutely essential to our heart and soul. If we already feel connected here and love this church family then you have a responsibility to make sure that other people are able to experience that same gift from God. This is not just an opportunity to just fulfill a Scriptural command, but it is an opportunity to strengthen the community of believers. May God bless us as we focus on the risen Christ for our understanding of what it means to live in community.

Amen.