

May 7, 2017
1 Peter 2:19-25
Acts 2:42-47

The Rainbow Unicorn Church

Some things are nearly impossible to believe. No matter how much we want to believe them or hope to believe them, in the end, it's just hard to believe them. Even if the Bible says it's true. It's hard to believe that there actually was a church like the one in Acts 2. A church where people shared everything? Where they sold their possessions to help each other? Where they had joy and harmony and goodwill? Where they devoted themselves to study time and prayers and meals together? Where there were no squabbles and no grudges and no running feuds and no controlling agendas and no cliques that excluded people. Evidently there were no human beings in that church in Acts chapter 2, because all of that seems hard to believe.

The very first church **SHARED** all they had. And they did it with glad and generous hearts. They **SHARED** everything in their **SHARED** life of **SHARED** goodness. And I imagine that if this first church had a name, it would be the Rainbow Unicorn church. Because it is as magical

as a rainbow unicorn. And it's also as mythical that a church like that exists.

And yet, the book of Acts insists that this church was real. That this is really how the church was immediately after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. And the first community of believers really gathered like this and when they did, something amazing happened. From the common devotion of this little group of disciples, the Holy Spirit created something. It created this wonderful community; the church as it was meant to be. As it could be and should be. A church of generosity. A church of grace. A church where signs and wonders were being done all the time. A church that was quite possibly the perfect church. Where every worship service was amazing. And every sermon hit home. And every prayer was concise. And every mission experience was profound. And every fellowship event was awesome. Imagine that church of your dreams. Where every person you meet is full of the love of Christ and the desire to know God's word. And everyone in town knows the church and loves the church. It has five stars on google. It is cool. It is popular. That's how the first church is described in the book of Acts. And if we

could find a church like that now, wouldn't we want to join it? If only the Rainbow Unicorn church was within driving distance.

We long for that kind of church, don't we? For that Garden of Eden, fresh off of Easter church where things are perfect. Where there is grace and generosity. Where people are joyful and glad. Where there is always love and always space for others. Where people don't think twice about sharing. That's what the first church is in the book of Acts. It's what we want the church to be and what we know the church SHOULD be. It's what we long for, no matter who we are or where we are or how we are. We want a community like that where people will share with us and we can share with them.

We long for a church like that. And people way back in the Bible times, they did too. Whether they were Christian or not, people talked about having a community that shared and cared for one another. Philosophers like Plato and Cicero dreamed of societies built on friendship and mutuality.¹ Places where everyone would have enough. And everyone

¹ Dr. Matthew Skinner, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=52

would belong. And everyone would live in harmony. We are still dreaming about that, aren't we? We are still hoping to create that perfect rainbow unicorn community. And we discuss and we argue and we say things could be perfect if THOSE people would do more or THOSE people would say less. If there was more government or less government, more religion or less religion. Maybe you have some thoughts on the subject. Maybe you have some ideas about how society could be perfect.

But society aside, today we are talking about the church: the church of Acts, chapter 2, the church of signs and wonders, and glad and generous hearts, and extreme sharing. We long for that church. But is it possible for us to be that church? Some scholars wonder if the church of Acts 2 really existed. They say it was written decades later. And maybe this Bible story was really written to impress the non-believers. Or to prod less harmonious churches into behaving. No, no, other scholars say, this was really how the church was. And oh, how we have fallen. Oh, how our modern church has drifted theologically and spiritually from its original state. The church is not what it should be. –I used to love

pointing out the flaws in the church when I was young and prophetic—
Woe to church, for it is not sharing. It is not full of glad and generous hearts. It's full of joyful people. It is full of unhappy people trying to control things, like the Easter Pagaent or the Sunday school storeroom or the paving of the parking lot. Things are not as they should be. They are not as they were in the early church. Maybe you have experienced that yourself. Maybe the church disappointed you or hurt you. Or disillusioned you because it was not what you longed for. It did not share joy. It did not share anything as anyone had need. All it shared was gossip and criticism. It was not the church you knew it was meant to be Acts, chapter 2 tells us how the church is meant to be. It is meant to be a place that SHARES. It shares the good news of Easter. The forgiveness of Easter. The hope of Easter that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. The church is made to share the love of God because that love has been shared with us in Jesus Christ. We are here to share. You and I, we are that church. There are not others who will be that church for us. It's your job and my job. To share what we have now. Not what we might have some day. To share with the people

here now. Not the people from twenty years ago. We are it, by the power of the Holy Spirit. You and I are not waiting for that community. We are that community. God has made us that community.

That's where we begin. We begin with what God has shared with us. We are Easter people. Resurrection people. People of new life and new beginnings. Because God has made us so. God has shared God's self with us. God says, "all that is mine, I give to you. You have death, I give you life. You have fear, I give you peace. You have mistakes and regrets, I give you a second chance, third chance, a seventieth chance to start over." God has shared everything with us. Even the thing God loved most, God's own Son. That's what Peter is telling us in his letter today. In Jesus, God has shared joy with us by sharing in our suffering. God has shared in our affliction, so we might share in God's hope. God shares that with us first. So, our first challenge this week is to receive what God has given. To take our share of grace. To take our share of love, in spite of how we have fallen or failed. We come to this table and take what God gives, what God shares with us. And say Thanks be to God. I needed that.

God shares with us, and then, we share with one another. We share life in community. We live together instead of apart. And that's the hard part about being the church. Anyone who has lived with others knows how hard it is to do that. I lived with two other young women as a Young Adult Volunteer in Mission. And we were all Christian. We all had the same desire to serve others in the world. And yet we did not always have glad and generous hearts. We struggled to be civil with each other sometimes. Who was going to do those dishes? Who was going to vacuum? Who was going to move their stuff so that someone else could use the washing machine? Could you please turn down your music? Could you please not slam the door when you come home late? Could you please manage your money so we won't have to buy your groceries at the end of the month? When you are sharing life together, it is hard to share life together, even when you have the same mission. Because there is always going to be someone else doing something that bugs you. It's easier live life separately instead of together. It's easier to keep up our distance. It's easier to make a religion that is just about acts of charity; just giving money or donating possessions or dropping things

off for people you'll never meet. It's easier to share stuff without sharing life. And so our second challenge is this as the church, to share that life in God. To share a meal with someone. Or a conversation. Or a prayer. To be present with your family. To set aside time for a visit with a neighbor. Or an evening with the youth group. Or a Saturday with the kids at Uspiritus. That's what church is. That's what it does. It's meant to share life. To be with others as God is with us. To let people know they aren't alone and that they don't have to be self-sufficient all the time. We share because God has shared it with us.

We long for that life. The world longs for that life that can be shared.

And lastly, as much as we need to give to others, we need to receive. We have to let others share with us. Let them comfort us. Let them care for us. Let them share grace and forgiveness with us. Even those who are not from our church or our culture, our challenge is to be humble enough to let others offer something to us. Some of the holiest moments I have experienced are not when I give, but when I receive. Like the time when I showed up to serve a meal at a shelter, all proud of my Christian self, and someone I was serving gave me the welcome of Christ. Or when I

went to offer my generous company to a refugee family, and instead they offered me the company that I needed. Or going to youth group to teach the kids, and finding that they teach me. That's what church is. It's about giving AND receiving. It's offering the peace of Christ and getting it back from others. It's passing the joy of self-sacrifice and mercy from me to you and you to me. So the final challenge for us today as the church is to let others share with us. To let ourselves receive. To humble ourselves and admit our need for a share of God's love.

The church is here to share life together. It is a real place, not a mythical magical one. It's what we have right here and now. It is you and me, sharing our honest-to-goodness, imperfect lives with one another other. Sharing in the broken body of our Savior. Sharing in the love of God that loves us to the end. At this table Jesus says, take and eat. Here is the life I share with you. A life of joy and grace and peace. A life given so you may have life. Take it and share it with one another and be my church.