

**Sunday, April 8, 2018 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter/Full of Faith II**  
**“Life Together”**

Acts 4: 32-35

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Text/Application

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed, Alleluia!)

There’s an old adage that if you’re looking for problems, you’ll find them. That goes for people, relationships, buildings, purchases. The flawless ideal is hard to come by. That is, unless you dig into your memory. Somehow our minds have a way of whitewashing those flaws and the past it seems is often a lot better than the present.

So when we read a text like Acts 4 today we’re tempted to read back wistfully, longing for days that could be as idyllic as that. Believers being of one heart and mind, sharing what they had, Jesus’ resurrection is the very center of all they’re about and all they do, everyone shares with those who have need. And then our heart may sink at the way reality doesn’t line up with that. It’s not just church, either. We see our flawed spouse, who isn’t like they used to be when you first met or got married, our stressed parents, who aren’t the superheroes we once thought they were, our wayward kids whose choices took them in directions we didn’t expect, our disloyal employers who slash benefits and want more and more from us, our less committed employees who jump off the wagon the moment you’ve got them up to speed, our leaders who don’t live up to the leaders of the past, and an imperfect church that doesn’t have that idyllic look of Acts 4. Would that it was the way it used to be – can we recapture a little bit of that magic – \*sigh\* those were the days.

Well let me shatter that dream illusion for you. The good old days might not be as good as you remember them – just ask someone who experienced those days differently. This Wednesday was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination. Sure there has been some change in the past half century but not only is the nation divided, the divisions are too often seen in churches, which can be strangely monolithic rather given the “every nation, tribe, people and language” that’s all over the New Testament, rather than diverse. It was long ago observed and is still true today that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. All you need to do to realize the good old days might not have been that good is talk to someone whose

experience is different than your own and realize – no matter what issues we have in 2018, they'd much rather be alive now than in 1968, much less 1868.

No, the good old days weren't that different than today in the Bible, either. One of the reasons the church was banding together so well in Acts 4 was shared adversity. Moments before this heartwarming description we have Peter and John being detained by the religious leaders, first asked nicely and then point blank threatened to stop preaching about Jesus. Then in chapter 5 after they go ahead and preach about Jesus anyway they'll be arrested and beaten. The sharing that took place wasn't some ill-advised communist utopia, it was acts of compassion for people being persecuted alongside you, in danger of losing employment and housing on account of their faith... which is exactly what would happen not long after this. There's a way people come together in tough times – we saw it, here in Vegas after 1 October, and fleetingly after 9/11 and maybe for a little longer during World War II and it is usually sparked by tragedy and shared suffering. There's no such thing as utopia on this side of Heaven.

The fact is doing life together in this kind of love is hard. It's hard because the people in it with us and the problems life throws at us don't reflect the ideal very well. For every description like Acts 4, or Acts 2 where they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer there's also rampant favoritism shown to the wealthy people at the church in Corinth, and there's racial division in Galatia, and the book of Hebrews describes Christians becoming apathetic as give up meeting with each other in worship and James pleading with people to watch their tongue that so easily speaks evil against each other. Doing life together with vulnerability, intimacy, safety, security all founded on trust... is really hard.

Some of you came across this idea in the Screwtape Letters class that Kris Schneider is leading – if you're not familiar with it, it's a brilliant fiction by CS Lewis about two demons conversing about how to best tempt a "patient," a new Christian. This is the suggested temptation from the older so-called "wiser" one, Uncle Screwtape: "When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors. Make his mind flit to and fro between an

expression like 'the Body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy's (that is, God's) side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to our father below (the devil) is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous..."

The devil, who is very real, wants us to look around at each other and find everything not to like, everything ridiculous, everything hypocritical, everything getting in the way of this church being better, everything that stops us from being like the Acts 4 church in the good old days. And since this church is made up of poor miserable sinners whether you're looking for problems or not, you'll find them. The question is this: Do we say we have no sin so that the truth is not in us, or do we confess our sin?

Doing life together, full of faith means a radical reprioritization. What is most important: your own self and what you want? When you think of sharing life with others is the top priority your blood relation? Is it patriotism or citizenship or politics or skin color, with people who look and act and think like you? Is it age, people similar to you, do you privilege people already born, is it uncomfortable to be around old people or do you look down on youth? Life together cuts across these lines because Jesus reconciled the whole world to Himself. To the extent that our being bonded as one in Christ is not the most important, unifying factor of your human relationships, we confess our sin. God is faithful and just to forgive our sin because of Jesus and cleanse us from that unrighteousness, not only yours or mine, but the sins of the whole world... squeaky shoes and double chins included.

Doing life as disciples of Jesus with vulnerability and intimacy while feeling safe and secure and building trust is hard – sometimes because of fears we bring to the table, sometimes because we doubt the ability of others to be that way for us. I can't change anything about you, but by the grace of God as a new creature in Jesus, I can change myself to love you well. This is what disciples are called to do.

And friends, we're going to doubling down on that focus with the addition of a new associate pastor. A major part of his scope of responsibility will be to help guide and encourage

us in that vulnerability and intimacy with both God and with each other, keeping Jesus' resurrection the focus of why we have this hope and promise but helping us with vulnerability and intimacy, sharing life with each other and with our community with a new small group model. We won't do it perfectly – Acts 4 wasn't perfect either – but we're in this life together, centered in Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.