

It's almost as if our first reading from Acts was written just for us today! Think about it: All we disciples *spending much time together, breaking bread at home and eating our food with glad and generous hearts*. Like finally! A scripture passage that really gets us! This is exactly us these days. Honestly, who **isn't** spending much time together, breaking bread at home? Maybe the timing of this Bible passage is just perfectly coincidental, or maybe...

This passage is actually quite important in the life of contemporary disciples, such as ourselves. We're all familiar with it, but it's longer than we're used to reading. The part we know best is right at the beginning. Do you remember how it goes? Let me put it to you this way.

Ahem. Please turn to page 159 in your green Book of Alternative Services. About a third of the way down the page you'll find the following text: "Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?" And in the bold print right below we all say, "I will, with God's help."

This section of the Acts of the Apostles is where we get the text for one of our baptismal vows. This one comes at the beginning of the section right after the credal statements. It marks the jumping-off-point, if you will, of how exactly we're supposed to form our lives as disciples in a world that looks nothing like Palestine in the first century, or the lands arcing around the eastern Mediterranean prior to that.

Up until this point, the text of the baptism service takes us through doctrine and scripture history, and a statement of faith written at a church council meeting in the year 325. This question marks the point where the rubber of the concepts of discipleship meets the road of daily life experiences.

The baptism vows cover a lot of ground, but it starts with the base from which we draw strength, support and encouragement. The ground is the community we share with the people around us. It's in this community where we gather together, where we share the prayers, and these are the people with whom we break bread. This is the kind of community to which the disciples devoted themselves in the Acts of the Apostles. This is the kind of community Christians still gravitate toward.

You all keep coming back here, to this strange virtual community. There's something about this base that provides you the strength, support and encouragement your soul desires, and that your heart has been promised. I'm glad to see you all each week. My soul is certainly brightened by the fellowship we have here, and the prayers we share together.

I'd say that this notion of a community that demonstrates strength, support and encouragement is even wider these days than what we've come to understand as a gathering either at the church or on this virtual platform. I think there's something bigger going on in God's creation. If we thought that making the kingdom of heaven more visible was exclusively our job as Jesus People, we might want to think again.

In the scripture selection for today we read, "They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." I see that these days and can't help but read it in the context of what I've been witnessing across this country.

How many companies have retooled their production lines in order to make personal protective equipment, and ventilators, and hand sanitizers to distribute to all who are in any need? How many of us can tell stories of putting our safety on the line by making shopping trips for our neighbors, or who have had needed items delivered to our front porches by helpful neighbors? Who among us has had to make significant sacrifices; or figured out how to keep working from home to support the larger economy? It seems the agreed-upon way to ensure there's enough for all is to learn to be okay with purchasing only one package of something, when we'd usually get two; or being okay with a substitution the grocery store made to our order when they didn't have quite exactly what we wanted. I would call this a clear demonstration of glad and generous hearts - no less than what Luke described in the earliest days of Christianity.

In the Easter season we think about Jesus as The Messiah, The Risen Lord, the Resurrected Christ. That's all accurate and appropriate, but we mustn't forget what else Jesus was for us.

Jesus was a teacher; a teacher who encouraged his disciples to get out there and with the gifts, skills and abilities they already had, make the good news happen. Discipleship was never meant to be a spectator sport. It wasn't just Jesus who fed the 5,000. When Jesus was told that there was such a need, Jesus told Andrew to figure out a way to feed them all. It was Andrew who found the kid with the loaves and fish.

When Jesus went to the grave of Lazarus, he didn't go into the tomb to carry Lazarus out. He called in to him from the outside to come out. Lazarus had to do the work of moving his own bandage-wrapped body out into the living world again.

Jesus doesn't always do the heavy lifting. What makes him a great teacher is that he teaches us how to make the good news happen. In fact, he kind of expects us to step into the job as disciples of the living God, and put to work all that he taught us.

Do you want to see the Gospel good news? Just look around you. Watch how the people in your neighborhood act with kindness and care for one another when they pass each other on the street. Recognize that retired medical professionals came out of retirement in order to lend their skills to help. Notice the paper hearts and rainbows taped to living room windows that offer silent encouragement day and night. Notice that the most powerful thing most of us can do is to keep safely at home. I know that's not as exciting as the other things, but excitement is not always what the kingdom of heaven is about.

The Gospel good news isn't always miraculous. A lot of it has to do with thinking beyond our own individual selves, and putting the needs of others first. What is the good news? The good news is about how we care for one another in times of need. It's about how we share what we have so that others will not have to experience want.

I have a feeling what we're experiencing now is a big, bright moment in the cosmic spectrum of the human-divine relationship. It appears to me that we're living the first page of the next chapter in the narrative of humanity's ongoing conversation with God. A few weeks ago we read from Isaiah where God says, behold I'm about to do a new thing. Do you not perceive it? Can anyone deny that we're in the midst of a new thing? God has a long history of presenting humanity with new opportunities to build upon our relationship with God and with one another. The Acts of the Apostles is all about the growth of a new thing God did in the world through the life and teachings of Jesus. I see an opportunity unfolding now that we get to build upon.

Did Luke write this part of the Acts of the Apostles, with the foreknowledge that someday it would fit perfectly into a worldwide situation? I'll let you decide that for yourself. For now, I'd say our attention is being pointed

toward a very big expression of the good news of our creator God. Just as Jesus directed his disciples to act on the glory that was right in front of them, this scripture passage might be doing something just the same for us.

We are special in the human-divine relationship in that we have been invited to understand it in a special way - through Jesus Christ and his teachings. Thanks be to God for apostles and disciples; for church councils and doctrine; for the Gospel and all the ways Christ reveals himself to us; and all the opportunities we have to put Jesus' lessons into practice. We don't have to be the originators of good deeds. It's still good news when we amplify the good others are doing, and deploy the gifts, skills and abilities we already have to build a community that better reflects the glory of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the abundance of the kingdom of heaven.

And that's good news.