

# Resurrection Practices

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*Fourth Sunday of Easter*

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## Scripture

### Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## Sermon

It's right after Pentecost – Peter has preached a barnburner of a sermon, the Holy Spirit has made a dramatic appearance, three thousand people have been baptized, and the early church jumps right into it, figuring out how to live together as a community of the risen Christ.

How did they do this? They shared what one commentary calls – Resurrection Practices -- devoting themselves “to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” *Acts 2:42; “Resurrection practices” from Called to Be Church, Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, 2006, Eerdmans, p. 79)*

There was such joy in this gathered people who had such “glad and generous hearts.” They took delight in being together, they were filled with holy awe – reverence for God and what God was doing in their midst. People were welcomed, included with genuine pleasure in the gift of one another. They experienced signs and wonders – people were healed, needs were provided for, everyone had enough. In its communal life, they were bearing witness to the new creation of Jesus Christ. It was a foretaste of the kingdom, of the realm of God. (*Called to be Church, p. 45*)

A question I once had about this text is, this sounds too good to be true: was this solely a case of the later church looking back on the good old days? Was there a wistfulness to this text? Nostalgia, perhaps? A harkening back to what it was like when all was new, a time of peace and plenty before conflict and separation? Looking back on the honeymoon after the divorce?

Our church is working diligently, with the wonderful guidance of our new communications & office manager, to share the message and purpose of this congregation in an honest & effective manner. I suppose if the answer to my questions were totally in the affirmative, our branding on our church sign and other materials would be: *Come on and join us; our best days are over!*

Honestly, I don't think that. I don't believe that. And I don't think that's entirely what the writer of this text thought either. Then and now, we are a community trying to live together in faithfulness to what God is doing, and what God is calling us to be. We're still engaging together in these resurrection practices, celebrating – sometimes resisting – where the Spirit is

moving in this beloved community of Christ. We're still seeking to exhibit the signs of the kingdom.

Last week in our Care of Creation Sunday, one of our speakers shared a warm word of gratitude for all those who tend to the needs of our world, the many ways people are caring for Mother Earth. Today, it is appropriate to give a shout-out to those people in our congregation who are specially tasked with shepherding us in our resurrection practices. We are ordaining and installing elders and deacons -- people who have been called and gifted by the Holy Spirit, and duly elected by the members of this congregation -- and are making a promise to be guided by their leadership as they lead us in the way of Jesus Christ. We promise to pray for them, encourage them, respect their decisions, and follow as they guide us, all in service to Jesus, the True Shepherd, the Head of the Church.

These words are part of our Constitutional Questions – written out in the worship section of our Presbyterian Church, USA, Book of Order.

As surprising as you may find this, as I always am to rediscover it, our call to live out these resurrection practices is beautifully and succinctly described in our Book of Order. In the sections where it refers to the leadership of the church, of the roles of Presbyters – elders, ministers – and deacons, I continue to be amazed and humbled at our collective confidence that we can live in the words of this morning's text. There is a lot that is expected of all church members, and especially of our church leaders. The leaders of these "ordered ministries" are, as our constitution says, entrusted with "ordering the life (of the church) so that the ministry of the whole people may flourish." (G-2.0102)

These shepherds of the church, our elders and deacons, are continuing to guide us in the way of life of the early community --- learning, praying, fellowship, breaking of the bread.

We have a really full worship service --- ordination & installation, the sacrament of baptism – so I don't have a lot of time to name for you the many ways that our shepherds – our ordained leaders – do this. But let me highlight a few:

First, the courageous and rather inclusive practices of fellowship & prayer. (Please be sure to read the article by Moffett Churn in the May edition of our church newsletter, because she writes elegantly about this event.) The session, made up of our Ruling Elders, voted on a recommendation from the Peace & Justice Committee to co-host an Iftar dinner with our Muslim friends from the Maryland Turkish organization, MARTI. This meal, begun at the close of the day's fasting during Ramadan, (that evening it was 7:32 pm) was held in fellowship hall. 50 people from this congregation and 50 people from MARTI gathered together around a table. They shared conversation, good will, engaging interaction. People made meaningful connections – learned about the foundations of each other's faith practices – Ramadan and Easter – and gathered with a spirit of respect and trust and honor and dare I say, holy love. I am particularly grateful to the session because, in its role as shepherds of this worship space, voted that the sanctuary should be open to those at the dinner who participate in Muslim evening prayer. One of the more beautiful things I've ever seen in this chancel is the sight of folded up beach towels which had been laid on the floor as prayer rugs, now collected on top of our communion table.

And second: to my question of should our message be: "Come join us, our best days are over?"

I hope you've noticed our bulletin these past two weeks. In an echo of the early gathered community, our words of welcome are inviting and inclusive and filled with joy about being together. We are each named "beloved" and everyone – of every age and background – is called

to join in a lively and generous and open community of faith, the body of Christ. We are claiming our identity as people baptized into a long line of witnesses to the Good News of what God is doing in the world. Our deacons and elders continue to lead us as we seek greater openness, deeper sharing, wider welcome. And... I just cannot let the moment pass without saying a truly heartfelt thank you to those who have provided cookies and lemonade and marvelous tasty refreshments for fellowship hour each week. Your graceful hospitality has enabled us all to gather together, to get to know one another, to share a smile and story and an absolutely delicious snack.

I continue to be grateful, as always, for the work of the deacons and their many ministries of care and compassion. They, and the mission committee, offer opportunities to share our resources, to provide for the needs of the congregation and community. And one of our great joys this year has been pairing two of our Stephen Ministers with two care receivers.

We continue to pray for our shepherds, the officers of the church whom Christ calls “not to be served, but to serve.” We continue to live out and live into this family – welcoming newly baptized – with joy and with a promise to guide and teach so that all will experience wonder and awe, and thus serve the Lord with reverence and thanksgiving in all that we are and do.

Thank you, thank you --- shepherds of the church for following the promptings of the Spirit so that we can continue to grow as resurrection people, faithful to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I'll close with the words of the Book of Order, may you continue to lead us in recognition of “the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that (this) congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.” (G-3.0201)

