***We Are the Modern-Day Acts Community***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church

May 3, 2020, 4th Sunday of Easter

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Blogger Laura Wilcox recounts the harrowing experience of Hurricane Harvey in 2019 in her Houston Texas mid-rise apartment complex.[[1]](#footnote-1) She describes how the bayou waters rose and surrounded the complex, a food shortage, and running water being cut off for a day. Faced with a crisis, though, people rallied together – they shared their rations of food with one another, and strategized together to conserve water.

Years ago, I had the privilege of hearing a centenarian tell me her story of community forming during a time of crisis. She was in a London air raid shelter during the 2nd World War. The German air force was pummelling England from above, but deep in that shelter, community came together. Families and individuals shared what they had with one another. Prior to the war, above ground, they might have been neighbours quarreling over politics. But, wondering if they would ever get out of this place alive – they shared rations, listened to one another’s stories.

The writer of both the Gospel Luke and the book of Acts, tells us that Jesus formed a community around him grounded in God’s vision for community. What a devastating loss those followers experienced, watching their teacher die. As the Gospel of Luke comes to an end, Jesus appears to them one more time after his death, and says:

…stay in the city *until you have been clothed with power from on high*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

“Wait.” They were told. Something big will happen, no details given. This diverse community of Jesus is left to their own devices as they wait… and wait. They might have resorted to bickering, But I’m guessing that the mentoring of Jesus prepared them for this difficult waiting. The focus for the writer shifts from Jesus himself in Luke to following the Jesus community in book of Acts. Acts opens with the followers of Jesus organizing, waiting, uncertain about their future, but holding onto hope.

Facing uncertainty with hope; an experience that we share with the Acts community. We don’t know what lays ahead, but we know that God is with us. We learn the stories Jesus, discern their relevance to us; faith is planted deep within us, and it is nurtured, andtested *in times just like we live in now.* Moments that could scare us so much that we might want to hide. But instead, friends, I’m hearing stories from the community that tell me – well, that we *are* facing uncertainty with bold hope.

In a couple of minutes, you are going to hear about what this community of Jesus called St. Andrew’s has been up to. Isolated physically, staff and volunteers at St. Andrew’s continue to connect with Sudbury’s most vulnerable people. Thanks to financial generosity of many of you, and volunteers, love is baked, and shared with the too many people of Sudbury who don’t have a stable roof over their heads, but are lucky to get shelter bed.

A week ago, I heard a person say that he regularly calls a friend from church who is now confined to their room in a long-term care home because of COVID-19 precautions. That regular call probably makes a huge difference to that friend, reminded that they have not been forgotten.

I can’t help but notice how polarizing and fractious our world has become in recent years. Yet, in this surreal pandemic time there have emerged communities and individuals guided by a love and care for others, as they want to be loved. I believe that God’s love flows everywhere. Let me be clear – it isn’t just followers of Jesus showing love. But, we, the followers of Jesus, we have this gift of Biblical Stories, like this story from the Acts community.

They endured the crucifixion of their leader, then had to wait. Waiting. Isolated, probably afraid of persecution. Prior to today’s Bible story, we would find the Pentecost story, that event that Jesus foretold at the end of Luke’s Gospel, the Spirit descended upon the community, energizing them. Community forged within the pressure of crisis, crafted by God’s love. The community:

had all things in common; [they sold] their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Now, I may have rose-coloured glasses on, seeing radical acts of sharing and compassion around me in these trying times. Or, perhaps the stories of Jesus have *formed me*, trained me so that I look for the signs of God’s radical sharing community. How about you? Are you looking for signs of hope, or do you find yourself attracted by the sensational and sad stories out there? It is tempting, sensational.

I do believe that we, largely confined to our homes, are like that Acts community; Waiting, praying, hoping for opportunities to act: contributing financially to churches and organizations that are making a difference when we can; volunteering where we have capacity; praying fervently. All reflections of a modern-day Acts community; formed in love by Jesus, activated by the Spirit to respond to this crisis, with deep and abiding hope and faith. Amen.

A graffiti covered wall

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*We All are One in Jesus Christ* - Soichi Watanabe 2009

<https://www.omsc.org/portfolio-soichi-watanabe>

1. “Hurricanes Make Community Happen.” A blog by Laura Wilcox, November 13, 2017, <https://sacredstoryministries.org/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke chapter 24, verse 49. New International Version®, NIV® Copyright , ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Acts chapter 2, verse 44 & 45. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)