

May 5, 2013

Acts 2:43- 47

“For the Love of Generosity”

The Rev. Peter Cook

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.

The scripture I just read to you offers a vivid picture of what the Christian church was like 2000 years ago. For very early Christians, they faced a lot of challenges. For one thing they had to deal with big lions. Yes in those days, if you followed Jesus, you might get fed to the lions by the Roman government for lunch. Some Christians, I guess, were pretty tasty.

The early church had some other problems. There were people in the society who experienced much pain and injustice. If you were poor, or if you were a widow who could not longer rely on the stability of having a husband, or if you were a 10 year old kid, life could be pretty hard for you. Many felt crushed by very unfair taxes. With all these pressures, the church community sought to offer a different way of life to ease the injustice, stresses and strains in the society.

In this scripture passage, we get a picture of a church where many very giving and generous people eased the pain by including others and giving to others as any had need. They sought to create a church which offered a picture of the world as it should be rather than the world as it was. To create this kind of community, there were many apostles who performed many signs and wonders. These apostles taught the church to be a generous place. They took the time to listen to and care for many kinds of people. They especially taught the people in this church to be generous. A generous church felt a lot better than a society which was often unkind and less generous.

As many of you know, we have been engaged in a great stewardship effort where we invited everyone to give generously to create the sort of church we want to be. If you look in your bulletin you will see a list of all the wonderful people who performed many signs and wonders by reaching out with phone calls, letter and visits to teach us all about the need for generosity. One of the apostles who has led this effort is Tony Hall. I could not have imagined anybody who could do a better job. Tony's zeal, his unflinching sense humor, his generosity of spirit, his earnestness and his honesty have meant so much to all of us. He has taught us to have glad and generous hearts. Anyone who might think doing stewardship work is not a fun and joyous experience should have a chance to work with Tony. He will prove you wrong.

So I would like to turn it over to Tony to say a few words.

TONY.....

Now on this celebration Sunday, I wish to thank everyone for the way in which you opened your hearts and your pocket books to help this church be the best it can be. I give thanks for so many people who took a risk to have a conversation with us and to think about the place of giving in their life. This process was so good for this church and a great foretaste of better things to come.

In a few moments we will dedicate our pledges while offering other expressions of generosity to carry out the mission our church. In your bulletins, you will find a yellow sheet which we invite each person to fill out and bring forward. As we celebrate what we have accomplished, I invite us to remember that each and every one of us, no matter how young or old, can have a glad and generous heart to make our church strong and to serve others. On one side of the yellow sheet, you have a few check-off boxes.

If you have made a financial commitment or intend to do so, please let us know. If you already made a pledge tell us that. If you received a letter or visit and are now ready to pledge, tell us that. If you are scheduled for a visit, there is no need to fill out a sheet until you have had a visit. Just let us know a visit has been planned. And by all means, if you have not yet been contacted about a visit and would like to have a visit, let us know and we will be in touch. We will keep visiting through out May.

If there is something else you want to say about your financial intentions or if you just want to make a comment that you think would be helpful, please write it down. Please write your name and phone so we can follow up.

Now if you turn over the sheet, you will find a few questions to help you think about generosity in your life. Pick one. Tell us about a good deed you have done or would like to do. Did you or could you call on someone in need. Perhaps you seek to make a meal for a lonely neighbor. Maybe you can walk to raise some money so people can have a home. Maybe you write down the name of someone who was generous to you. Maybe your mom or dad gave you a toy you particularly wanted. Maybe somebody else helped you get through college. Was there someone in your life who cared for you when you were sick or discouraged? Perhaps you received an unexpected windfall from someone else that made a difference in your life.

In the book of Acts a vision was offered of what the church could be like where people cared for each other as any had need. If you could dream about what the church could be like what would it look like? You can always offer a prayer. So if you can now, let's just take a few minutes to pause and reflect in silence and our sheets.

Everyone gets their own sheet whether you are in the first grade or the first year of your retirement, When we are all done, after the hymn, you are invite to bring you yellow sheets forward along with a pledge sheet and of course you offering. So let us cultivate a glad and generous heart as we reflect on the place of generosity in our lives and this wonderful congregation.