

Easter 2B  
Acts 4:32 - 37  
The Rev. Bonnie Underwood  
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### Resurrection as Relationship

I was talking to one of my sons the other day. He and his older brother had recently had one of those rare occasions when their families were able to grab some unexpected time together and he was still laughing about how their two oldest children had played together. Scout and Dylan are about the same size, even though they are 2 years apart in age: Scout, at 5, is a precocious child, quick to take charge and tell all around her the right way to do things, while Dylan, almost 3, is very accommodating, with a sweet, gentle nature.

The two got along great, but Scout directed everything — telling Dylan the correct way to play each game, the right way to use the local playground — first you go up this ladder, then you go down this slide, and on and on — and Dylan being his easy-going self, was happy to follow along after his older and wiser cousin, thoroughly enjoying their play time together.

But I imagine that it won't take long before things change. Dylan will become more assertive about how he wants to play, about what he thinks is the best way to conquer the playground or even which game they play next. Over time, there will need to be more give and take in their play, for friendships, relationships, take work, if we're to grow and live together in unity.

So too, with the early church. Those early followers of the Way had to discover what it means to live in a Resurrection world and better define what it means to relate to one another \within community, loving God and loving neighbor. And it's a daunting task! Developing long term, meaningful relationships takes work with friends and family, much less with strangers, and it can be uncomfortable to learn that how we treat one another does reflect on how we live into loving the Risen Christ. The church, since the earliest days, has struggled to understand how to care for one another, how to live in unity, and how to live into our call, our mission, to follow our Living God. It's a very human struggle.

Today's reading from Acts tells how one community chose to care for one another by stepping away from private ownership and holding everything in common: not a model that fits within our capitalist view of economics. But rather than dismiss this passage as impractical in our modern lives, what if instead we examine it as an example of a community exploring something new in light of the Resurrection: a new relationship, a new kinship that encourages these Christ-followers to view their possessions differently? Rather than seeing the "I" in what I have — what I accomplished, what I earned, what I own — instead, viewing all that I have as blessings from God: God's favor, God's gifts.

And if all my possessions are truly of God, rather than simply "mine," would I be more willing to share with my brothers and sisters? I'd suggest that this passage does not renounce ownership, but rather encourages us to turn away from those worldly voices who cry out for us to grab more and more, encourages us to jump off that consumer treadmill with its constant reminders that we need the newest, latest, and greatest. Perhaps then, we could realize that we actually have enough — recognize that rather than focusing on acquiring more, we could instead open our eyes to both seeing the needs of others, and more deeply caring for the broader community. If

we can grow to see Resurrection as relationship, we can also grow in understanding how we can seek to serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The Book of Acts also tells us that great grace was upon the all the believers, for they were of one heart and soul, living together in unity! But that too is hard work, for it's not our human nature to easily recognize all as God's beloved creation. The world around us reinforces labels and stereotypes, tells us that we should be fearful of the stranger and those we perceive as different.

But if we can grow to see Resurrection as relationship, the Risen Christ leads us to expand our sense of community by seeing the face of Jesus in ALL others. Talk to those from our church who visit the women of Arrendale, who now see how much we share in common with those women who are prisoners; or get involved in Family Promise where you can come to know the face of homelessness and how we can, in practical ways, help others; or become a mentor to a child through Mentor Me, discovering how the young lives we touch can then touch so many others.

Are we willing to take the time to listen to other other voices, to hear other stories, in order to discover our common humanity and recognize the face of Christ, in those who are poor or oppressed or those we identify as other? When we can grow to see Resurrection as relationship, we can discover the abundant blessings of living together in unity.

It's never been easy to live a Resurrection life — reimagining our relationships, caring for one another, living in unity. Look back in history. In the early days of the church, the disciples disagreed, special councils were convened to better understand the meaning of grace, and there were multiple disputes about ideas and practices. And later church history was no better, for there we learn of fractures, heresies, schisms, and splits. The number of Christian denominations that exist today is a constant reminder of how much we, as God's people, tend to disagree.

Living in community is no easier for us today.

Yet when we're willing to open our eyes to seeing Resurrection as relationship, we can discover the deeper meaning of following Christ: to strive for justice and peace among all people, to respecting the dignity of every human being. I had the opportunity this past week, to participate in activities that marked the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr, by recognizing those who today contribute to the broader community in the spirit of Dr. King by helping the poor and the oppressed. Leaders who created micro-groceries within neighborhoods known as food-deserts or creative educators provided much needed help to underprivileged student. I also re-read Dr. King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, which I'd commend to you all to read or re-read.

Hearing these stories, reading old letters, helped me to recognize where we were as a nation 50 years ago and the long road that we still need to travel to stretch ourselves towards recognizing, as Dr. King said, the "interrelatedness of us all" and that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We need to be wary of falling into the status-quo-trap of being more devoted to order than to justice, remembering that Jesus was not a proponent of the status quo, but is the Holy One who redefines what it means to live within community. The Risen Christ leads us

reimagine how our relationships with others relates directly to how we live out our relationship with God.

For the Resurrection created a new community of faith, where people of different backgrounds and ideas can stand together in unity to proclaim that Christ rose from the dead. And as Christ's own, we are called to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to the world by sharing the great love that God has for all God's beloved children, by respecting the dignity of every human being.

Easter begins our mission as the church. The Risen Christ reveals himself through the empty tomb, breathes new life in us through the gift of Spirit, and strengthens us as his disciples to go out into the world to share the good news. Be the church, by seeing, and helping others to see Resurrection as relationship, while asking opening ourselves to ask, "Lord, what would you have me do, in this time and this place?" Amen.