

4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: ACTS 2:42-47

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

REFLECT:

These six little verses give an inspiring vignette of early Christian community life. They capture a kind of utopia, radical and pure, a description some of us might wish our churches resembled more closely.

One of my community-minded neighbours has set up a social networking group for residents of our close and some of the adjoining roads. People can use it to ask for or offer help in this time of lock-down. Maybe there are similar initiatives where you live? It's a simple, practical idea. Through this network we've been getting to know our neighbours. For the first time in the many years we've lived here, we feel part of a local community.

There have been some beautiful examples of “goodwill” and sharing “things in common.” One neighbour alerts the group when they spot that Tesco have released new time slots for online delivery. Another neighbour with an allotment has been sharing his wonderful produce; he’ll send out a message to say that he’s left rhubarb, or courgette seedlings, or his surplus lettuce seeds, in a crate at the end of his drive for folks to help themselves to. In the good weather of the last few weeks there’s been a frenzy of gardening in the close and much sharing of plants, seeds, pots and advice. A few days ago we all stood on our doorsteps to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to our next-door-neighbour who was turning 12. It has taken a national crisis to bring us together, but I hope we’re learning ways of living that will carry over into whatever future we’re headed towards.

There are reminders, too, of the challenges of human community. Though my neighbourhood group has shining ‘Acts 2’ moments; there are also definite 1 and 2 Corinthians dynamics emerging (read these letters from Paul for a grittier, more nuanced account of early Christian community life!). Sadly what began as a forum for neighbourly sharing has at times descended into grumbling and shaming. People post pictures of ‘fly tipped’ garden waste and dog poo (bagged and unbagged) left along roadsides. Others join in the righteous indignation with vitriol; even ideas for identifying and punishing the culprits.

This happens. We’re human. The truth is that people – all of us – are hard to love at times, and sustaining community takes a shedload of grace.

Our ‘new normal’ presents us with opportunities. Opportunities to live the kind of ‘back-to-basics’ Christianity depicted in the New Testament, where worship and fellowship happen in people’s homes, where we can devote ourselves to prayer and the scriptures, where solidarity is forged by the danger we face together.

Let’s share and celebrate our ‘Acts 2’ moments. And pray for grace to hold us together.

CONNECT:

This week's challenge: find / make use of opportunities to connect with your neighbours, and try to be a voice of goodwill, generosity and grace in your local community.

PRAY:

Give thanks for neighbourhood support groups and community volunteers, and for small acts of creativity and kindness

RESOURCES

AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:
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