

The Power of a Risen People (Getting Real)

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 through 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.

Think back to an older movie titled *The Truman Show*. Remember the premise? Truman was a man who was born into a televised social experiment. Ever since Truman was a baby, his life was a reality TV show. Whether it was sleeping, or working, or picking the food out of his teeth cameras were hidden everywhere for people to watch Truman's life unfold. Actors and actresses played his friends and co-workers. Special effects controlled the weather and traffic. It was reality TV, but none of it was real. The entire network from actors to directors was a construct invented to do one thing: keep Truman believing it was real so they could keep the false reality going. At least not until someone snuck on set telling Truman what he was experiencing as reality wasn't really reality at all. You see, resurrection is like someone who sneaks on our set and wakes us up to what is real and what we only believed was real because it's what we've always experienced. Resurrection shows us what is true versus what only pretends to be true.

So start by wondering if there is a bit of Truman in all of us. After all, we have all lived inside of constructs we thought were real because it's what we've always assumed was true. If you grew up like me, we learned a whitewashed version of American history. We absorbed the patriarchal belief systems of our churches. We mimicked the values of our friends or parents. All of it seemed real, except some of it wasn't. I mean, think about gender: a social construct based on what a majority of society claims is normal—or what society *says* is the majority even if it's not the majority! But is it real? This week was the 70th anniversary for when President Eisenhower signed an executive order banning 5,000 people who they thought "might be gay" from working in government positions. It was the first time Congress implicitly discriminated against sexual orientation. The construct was aided by our churches who began publishing the word "homosexual" in our bibles in 1946. A construct was created and now the same is happening toward trans folk. All injustices around gender, race, sexism, phobias—are rooted in constructs which aren't even real! But they are assumed to be real because they have social, politic, and religious buy in.

So, when we look at the story of the early church, we notice that resurrection has changed some perceptions. They have witnessed an inbreaking of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of the risen Christ. And as a result something happens to them. Their lives are awakened and their priorities shift. Sort of like how Covid awakened us to what was truly important. It's a community full of diverse Spirit-infused people who are living outside of the constructs. Notice the lack of rivalry in their economy. Their possessions are sold or shared. Notice the detachment to the categories. Day by day they enjoyed one another: they ate together, they worshiped

together, they grew together—as one diverse people. What we are seeing is a group who prioritizes people over politics, relationships over religion, and thriving over surviving—beyond the constructs of politics or religion or even death. When we read the story we notice resurrection changes what we perceive as ultimate reality and peers through the veneer of what is not.

Now notice what happens next. People are drawn to the way. More, people are set free by it. Now here's a confession: Whenever I would read this story, I would say, "well that's a utopian ideological socialized state. *It's not our reality*. Not to mention, it doesn't seem to last very long before there were some serious problems!" More people equals more needs, more egos, more problems. But I have to admit, over the past several months, I have experienced this church as a church that has a bit of early church Spirit in it. It seems we aren't simply *being* a community. *We are doing community!* And there is a magnetic spirit to it. We might have issues with the budget. We might have issues with some parts of the service. We might have some issues with the theology or what we have believed is the reality of the church. But for a while now we have been watching this natural process of a church becoming more and more alive in the resurrection Spirit. We are seeing beyond the constructs which control us, and are responding by doing community—one on one meetings, and speaking Spanish, and now doing something about these horrible laws which normalize hate against the existence of our trans friends and family. It turns out, this vision of the early church might not be something which came and went—that was then, but this is now—it is resurrection's reality which cycles around when we are ready to do community rather than simply being one.

Of course, here's the thing. The more this momentum builds, the more powerful it becomes. The more it takes on a life of its own. And the more powerful it becomes the more resistance there is from those who need the false constructs to be true, even though they are not. The principalities and powers awaken when the people rise which is why our job as a church is to keep creating space which lives as freely as possible into a reality beyond the constructs. Maybe the truth is that the church is—and always has been—less like a 4H club, less like a Cathedral and more like a halfway house. In our first home in Winston, we lived next door to a halfway house. It was a home for those who had been through recovery treatment or spent some time in prison. It was a place where those who went there could get reacquainted to society. To do so, they had to live in community—teaching each other, eating together, leaning on a higher power who could ground them. They helped one another adjust to a reality which was no longer dependent on their addiction or time in prison. And they did community because they knew their own freedom was dependent on it. Perhaps it is what the church is and always has been. In the face of powers which said no the church has said yes. What most said were impossible, the church said, "I think that's possible." It's a powerful thing: To be a halfway house for all of us to get adjusted to a reality made possible by resurrection. And to keep doing it because our own freedom is dependent on it.

True, we won't do it perfect. True, we won't always get it right. Yes, we might relapse along the way. But we will do community together. And my hunch is that as we focus on growing deeper and fellowship, breaking bread and prayer, we will find ourselves thriving beyond the constructs and inside the reality of resurrection. It is the power of a risen people. And the only thing that can truly stop us, or so it seems, is ourselves.