

Small Group Discussion ?

ACT IN | COLLABORATING
 JULY 18-19, 2015 | ACTS 4:32-35

Dear God, help us work together. Amen.

NRSV

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Collaborating



What does resurrection mean to you?

Did resurrection happen once, a long time ago, or is it happening still today? Did Jesus live once, walk alongside us once, die and rise again once, two thousand years ago? Or do those things happen still today? What difference does your answer make in your life? Why does resurrection matter?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on a Monday afternoon at work as you find out you're not getting that promotion? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on a Tuesday morning as you're concerned about your appointment at the doctor's office? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on a Wednesday night as you wonder if anyone will visit you in your lonely retirement home? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on Thursday as you drive home from work realizing that you have it all, but you're empty inside? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on a Friday evening as you realize you can't afford enough food for your family over the weekend? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when you dare to believe that resurrection matters on a Saturday when you know that next week might just be as hard as last week? What happens on Sunday night when you're completely overwhelmed? Has anything like that happened to you? What did resurrection look like in that moment?

What happens when we gather in community as part of the living church? Does our worship propel us out into the world with hope? What does resurrection look like then?

What happens when hope seems far away?

What if you're hurt, in pain, or in need? What is God's promise? Where is God in those situations? What is God's hope for you? And what is God's invitation to all of us? Does this God inspire us to join in collaboration? Do you want to work alongside this God? Is this God welcoming, or scary? Is there hope?

IN through community

What does “community” mean?

What images does that word evoke for you? Do you picture the 60s? Do you picture communes full of long-haired adults and unwashed children singing Kumbayah? Are the people happy? Are their needs met? Is anyone starving? Is anyone lonely?

Is this socialism? Is it a cult? Is it bad? Is it contrary to the American way? Is it possible to live wholeheartedly in the way of Jesus in this country? Does it require giving up anything that our nation or our society values? What? What does living like Jesus look like in this country? Do we ever live like that? Why, or why not? Is it difficult? Why, or why not?

Why does this story matter?

What does this story show us about the first Christians’ reaction to Jesus’ teachings and ministry? What did the life, death and resurrection of Jesus inspire them to do? How did they live out their testimony in community?

What does Jesus inspire *us* to do? How do we live out *our* testimony in community?

Where do we draw the line between giving away all of our possessions and taking care of our own futures and our own families? What is the difference between giving away everything we have and giving away what’s left over? Is this story about the percentage of stuff we give away, the ratio of our earnings to our donations? Does it tell us how much generosity is enough? Does the writer make a distinction between what you should give and what you should keep? Does Jesus? Do you?

Does this story tell us to follow a rule or an equation? Or is it about learning to live in such a way that we can’t bear to see anyone suffer? What is the difference?

Are people in your community suffering now? Why?

What is the difference between playing church and living church?

Are we a real, authentic community addressing the real, individual needs of those around us? Do we believe that caring for each other, and for our community, is the absolute best and right response to Jesus’ resurrection? If not, what is? If so, how are we living it? How is this faith community living it? Are we living church, or simply playing church?

When have you experienced people living church rather than playing it? What was that like? Did they make any sacrifices for others? Did that make them more empty, or more whole?

OUT for the world

Do we have what we need to be a living church in this world?

The early Christians realized that they needed to collaborate to meet the needs of the community. Possessions were used for the mission of God, and caring for the needy became a program of the church. They lived a theology of plenty, not scarcity.

Are we living a theology of plenty? Are we giving stuff away freely, or are we afraid we’re going to run out of stuff for ourselves? Is our problem that we don’t have enough stuff, or is it that we don’t have enough generosity?

What does it mean that the Kingdom of God is an upside-down economy? Is that frightening in this country, where we believe in retirement funds and financial planning? Is God telling us not to save for the future?

What is God telling us, exactly? What would really happen if we gave away everything we owned? Would God provide for us? Would the community of faith provide for us? Is that what this story is about? And what happens when resources really *do* run out? If we take this story only literally, do we miss the abundance and generosity that resurrection inspires? If we take this story only figuratively, do we miss the real call to help those in need around us? What is the answer?

What does it mean to be a testimony to the risen Jesus?

Does resurrection compel us to reach out beyond ourselves and into the world, developing and growing partnership after partnership? Are we, as a community, living more and more into our vision of being a collaborating church? How?

What happens when resurrection is central to your life? What happens when you dare to dream about God’s Kingdom here, in this place? How will that bring hope and healing? How are you being called to bring your best and loudest testimony to a broken world?

What is the reason for the hope within you?

What does that question mean? Why does it matter? Is your answer what keeps you moving forward? Is your answer a glimpse into your worldview, and your image of God? Does your answer tell you what’s in your own heart?

How will your answer propel you to create a community where heaven and earth come together? How will your answer draw you into collaboration with God and with each other? How will your answer inspire you to reach forward and help drag God’s hopeful future into our present?