

## Thought For The Week

# *Break Bread Together*

*May 4, 2014*

Scriptures: Acts 2: 42-47 • 1 Peter 1: 3-9 • John 20: 19-31

I'm sure the thought must have often crossed the minds of many Christians that life in the early church must have been a delight in comparison to what we experience during most Sunday morning gatherings today: crying children, lengthy sermons, constantly learning new hymns, less than comfortable seating, a sound system that doesn't always work the way we would like it to, etc. etc. All these conditions have disturbed my Christian sense of devotion on more than a few occasions.

Perhaps many of us have the sense from reading the four Gospels, as we do on these Sunday's following Easter, that the early church must have been the ideal: the remembrance of Jesus was still fresh in the minds of that small community; everybody knew each other; they shared their meager livelihood, no central authority or financial obligations to bother with; Congregational Finance Officers had not yet been invented.

Well, let me paint a two-sided picture of the early church for you as we read it in the above captioned Scriptures. In the early Acts of the Apostles we are given the following characteristics of church life, not so different from ours today: (The early Christians) "devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to prayers." Pretty simple, right? That is what happens in most Christian churches around the world today. It also says that they held all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide the proceeds among all according one's need.

On the other hand, however, we hear other stories about early church life around the year 50 A.D. that are not so different from our own day: Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles that differences began to surface early on in the small community. The first complaint was that the Jewish parishioners (especially the women) were receiving more out of the common provisions than did the Greeks.

Interestingly, the church leaders immediately got on to the problem and assigned deacons to tend to the distribution of food while the apostles dedicated themselves to the breaking of bread (Eucharist) and prayers. So, that settled the first big problem.

Then in the late 50's Paul writes about a real problem in the small Greek Christian community he founded and left in Corinth. Here are Paul's words (1 Corinthians 11, vs. 18-21) "I hear that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you...When you meet in one place then it is not to eat the Lord's Supper; for in eating each one goes ahead with his own supper; one goes away hungry and another gets drunk." Then Paul writes in the most critical terms. "Am I to praise you for this? No. Indeed, in acting like this you are offending the body of Christ." Paul, by the way, is not speaking of the bread and wine of the Eucharist but of the Body of Christ itself, the Christian community. In other words, Paul is reminding the Christians that when they gather for Eucharist, they themselves are the Body of Christ. "You are what you eat," he says.

Having now gotten a picture of life in the early Christian Church, it seems obvious that they may have had the highest ideals but human nature interfered early on and the church began to look much like a food tent at the state fair or an out of control pot luck supper.

Obviously, our Sunday morning service does not resemble some of the practices of the early Corinthian community. We must ask the question, however, is there a sense of individualism among us when we celebrate Communion together. Does the sense of community only appear later during coffee & chat?

Perhaps we must say, therefore that the early Christians and we too today may overlook the human dimension of the church. We are still human whether at home, at work or at worship. Given that reality, we have the need to be constantly aware of the sacred body that meets together in the same church building each Sunday. There is an old Latin phrase: *“Ecclesia semper reformanda.”* “The church must constantly be in the state of reforming itself.” If we are a human church, you can just bet that our shadow side will occasionally rise up to contest who we really are, the Body of Christ.

## Prayer Thought For The Week

O God of peace, we praise you and give thanks for your gentle, guiding calm in our lives.

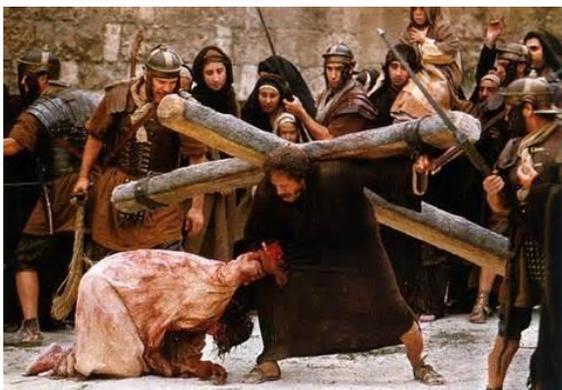
We remember Eritrea this day.

May its citizens and leaders be open to the light that gives counsel and comfort and guidance, we pray.

We pray for all people everywhere who search for peace.

We remember current needs around the globe, as well as our personal struggles and concerns.

Heal us we humbly pray, O God. May we follow the lead of the Prince of Peace. Amen.



## Stewardship Thought For The Week

*“As they were marching out,  
they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name;  
this man they compelled to carry his cross.”  
Matthew 27:32*

The Lord calls us to love God and to love our neighbor.

Every day we are presented with opportunities to love our neighbor and help him “carry his cross”.

These opportunities aren’t usually big events;

they are usually ordinary occurrences like helping someone carry their groceries  
or holding the door open for someone.

The key is putting the other person’s needs before your own  
and not expecting anything in return.