April 8, 2018

Second Sunday of Easter (B)
Acts 4:32-35
1 John 5:1-6
John 20:19-31

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Today’s first reading, a passage from Acts, describes a post-resurrection experience of the Christian community. Oneness is a very important quality of this community - oneness of mind, oneness of heart, oneness of possessions. It also speaks of the great power of the witness of the apostles and the blessings that came from that witness. It is a rich passage, one that boasts of several different theological themes. However, these themes might not be as different as one might think at first glance.

One theme that might be central to this portrayal, though often overlooked, is the fact that members held all things in common so that the needs of each member could be met. Though common ownership might be a problem for contemporary believers, assuring that everyone’s legitimate needs are met should not be. This tradition was more than sound social practice; it was grounded in covenant theology, a theology that was communal in its focus, not individualistic. The technical covenant formula reads: “You (plural) will be my people; I will be your (plural) God” (Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4, 8; Ezek 26:28). The practice of meeting the needs of others was so important to the ancient Israelites that it became a defining characteristic of the eschatological age. It is from this eschatological perspective that the practice of caring for the needy as described here should be understood.

At the core of ancient Israel’s eschatological theology was the presence of a community of believers committed with each other in the embrace of the one God. This community was to be a historical community, existing in actual space and time, not in another world. It was only a future dream because those who should have been faithful to this religious insight were not. Despite their failure and infidelity, the Israelites never relinquished its eschatological hope that someday, they would respond positively to God and would actually become a faithful people of God.

One of the most prominent themes found in the parables of Jesus as well as in the accounts of his interactions with others is meeting the needs of others. In fact Jesus says that when we act this way, the ‘reign of God’ becomes real in our world. In other words, whenever we do something that improves the life of another, we do change the world. This means that in some way we bring to fulfillment the eschatological hope of being the faithful people of God. Today’s first reading is an example of this.
The community is of one mind and one heart. They know themselves as God’s people, concerned about the well-being of each other. The way they live this concern cries out in witness to the broader society. “These Christians, see how they love one another” (Tertullian). This, not extraordinary events, is the authentic witness to the resurrection. This concern for those who are needy is what attracts others to the community. As simple as this may sound, it is not an easy way to live. It is no wonder that interpreters insist that this is an idealized account of life within the early community.

How do we measure up to this eschatological vision and make it more our reality today?

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