

May 3, 2020

OLD SOUTH CHURCH IN BOSTON

This Side of Heaven, a sermon by Nancy S. Taylor, Senior Minister

Based on Acts 2:42-47

Worship in the early church looked a lot like this... like Christians gathering in their homes on Sunday; gathering to turn heart and soul, body and strength to worship the living God. Their Jewish counterparts gathered on Saturday, the Sabbath day, the last day of the week, the day of rest. : Christians began to gather on Sunday, the first day of the workweek in Judaism. Why Sunday? Because it was on a Sunday that Jesus was resurrected. Sunday is resurrection day. For Christians, every Sunday is a little Easter. We gather on Sunday to celebrate Jesus' presence among us, his resurrected presence... his defeat of death ... his love for the left out and kicked out, the left behind

The early church looked a lot like this ... Christians dispersed across the known world...yet held together by a common story ... the story of Jesus. And, held tougher by common rituals: Sunday worship, the Lord's Supper, Baptism.

The Christians of the first century didn't have their own buildings. So, they gathered in each other's homes. These were not large gatherings ... maybe 10 or 20 people ... a couple of households worth. Early Christians were a remarkably diverse lot: poor and rich, enslaved and free. So, a group of Christians, geographically proximate, gathered in the home of a wealthier Christian, a larger home. Rich and poor, enslaved and free, side by side. They did together what we still do today: Sing. Read scripture. Hear a word. Pray. Take a collection for the needy. And, break bread together, remembering the Last Supper as a memorial to Jesus.

This table, this bread, it is for Christians a witness to the inclusive dimensions of God's realm. It is at this table that outsiders become insiders, strangers become family... and the waters of baptism prove thicker than blood. It is that this table that we become the beloved community ... a borderless community ... a community who refuse to privilege one another by nationality, or tongue, or citizenship ... a community who refuses to privilege or measure one another by gender or orientation or wealth or color or ability or age ...

It is at this table that we swear allegiance to a risen Savior whose language is love. In eating at this table, by ingesting the bread and cup – we hope to learn this language ... the language of divine love...the language of love in a hateful world, the language of peace in a violent world, the language of justice in an unequal world, the language of forgiveness in a merciless world, the language of healing in a sickened world, the language of humility in a prideful world, the language of sharing in a competitive world, the language of generosity in a miserly world, the language of borderless-ness in a bordered world.

It is at worship, in the presence of Christ, that we study and learn this holy language – its grammar and syntax, that we are immersed in it. We pick it up, here, and practice it, over and over. The hope? that someday we become so conversant it in, so fluent in the language of Divine Love, that it becomes our first language, instinctive, natural, intuitive, ordinary.

Worship in the early church looked a lot like this... like Christians gathered in homes on Sunday; gathered in homes across the known world, gathered to turn heart and soul, body and strength to worship the living God. Gathered to remember the risen Christ and, in his presence, to break bread and share a common meal, that we might learn together, the language of God's divine love.

Let this serve as a reminder that we will soon share the Lord's Supper. You may want to prepare with some bread and juice, or bread and wine, or bread and water... or, well, be creative.

Should you not have the wherewithal to procure elements, join us in a communion of the empty hands, miming the motions of partaking.

Here is the truth: worship in the early church looked a lot like this.

Acts 2:42-47 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.