

April 8, 2018
By Wayne J. Schneider

“What’s Next?”

Acts 2:1-4, 4:32-37 & 1 John 1-2:2

Resurrection Sunday is over. The children and grandchildren have gone home, the chocolate bunnies and eggs have been consumed. We sang “*Christ the Lord Has Risen Today*,” so what do we do now? I believe this was one of the first questions the disciples asked themselves, too.

The women had shared that Jesus was alive, but the men were still ‘closeted’ behind the doors of their minds. What gives here? Suddenly, Jesus is there saying, “*Peace be with you!*” The followers began to rejoice, but Jesus wasn’t finished speaking. He continues: “*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” (St. John 20:19-21)

THAT certainly clears things up, doesn’t it? Where are we being sent? Just as God breathed life into the first parents in the Garden, so Jesus is going to breathe “New Life” into “Followers of the Way.” They will become “new creations” by the breath of God.

In the passage from the Book of Acts, we discover the Disciples living out this mandate, this command. They preach the word of God in languages they have never studied. People profess faith and receive baptism in extraordinary numbers and many are healed. This is fantastical! These believers are living and preaching what they have seen and heard. They are living as one, tasting heart-and-soul unity and fellowship.

I do not believe for a moment they all agreed on everything! I, do mean however, that they were united in love and devotion to Jesus Christ. The first letter of St. John helps us here: “*God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we*

have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)

Jesus is saying that we must first have a correct relationship with God, if we desire unity and fellowship together. None of us is perfect, of course, and that is never an expectation. Yet, as Christians, Jesus does expect us to confess our sins when needed, and to work toward living in a Christ-like manner. Unity and fellowship then follows.

Unity and fellowship require lots of hard work in the form of caring. The Book of Acts show us the early church lived with all things in common and, as a result, no one needed anything. Some even sold everything and gave the money to the church. Now, THAT’S radical discipleship! You may be thinking; is this the way we should be living today?

Literally? Generally speaking, I think not. It is possible that God may ask an individual to do this, but not everyone. But, before you empty your lungs in relief, there is a vital question: *“Do you own things or do things own you?”* God’s stewards understand that the cosmos, and everything in it, belongs to God, and we only manage the part that God assigns us, as individuals and as the church.

In Camden, New Jersey, a ministry was begun by Bruce Main in a predominately white church. During the first eighteen months, over one hundred children, mainly African American, found safety after school and during Sunday worship. Even though the ministry was self-supporting, it was hard on the church carpets, and there was graffiti on the bathroom walls, and children-were-children during worship services.

The church lay leaders requested a meeting with the pastor. They wanted to know if the ministry was worth the wear and tear on the church building, and their idea of proof was the number of baptisms. They were flabbergasted to discover that a number of children had professed their faith and were prepared for baptism.

The leaders tried to cancel the ministry, and some leaders did leave the church eventually.

But, the Holy Spirit works in Camden, New Jersey, and the ministry is fully supported by the congregation. Today, *“Urban Promise”* is a thriving outreach ministry whose ministry mission reads: *“To equip Camden’s children and young adults with the skills necessary for academic achievement, life management, Spiritual growth and Christian leadership.”*

You may find more information at <http://www.urbanpromiseusa.org> and in the book *“Revolution and Renewal”* by Tony Campolo (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000).

John Wooden won numerous college basketball national championships in a row at UCLA. He was asked the question, *“What does it take to make a winning team?”* His answer consisted of three things...

1. *“Get them in the right condition.”* (right with God and Salvation)
2. *“Teach them the fundamentals.”* (Discipleship)
3. *“Teach them to play together as a team.”* (unity/fellowship)

It is my prayer today that each of us with the Church universal, may live in unity and fellowship with Jesus and each other, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria