



RESURRECTION REMIX: Strengthening the Community

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, March 30, 2008

Rodney S. Sadler Jr., Lectionary Team Commentator

Lection - Acts 2:42-47 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 42) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (v. 43) Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. (v. 44) All who believed were together and had all things in common; (v. 45) they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. (v. 46) Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, (v. 47) praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

After the joyous celebration that is Easter we turn our attention now to the “so-what” of the faith. What does it mean that Jesus Christ has been resurrected? What tangible impact does that have on our identities and on our lives in this world? What happens when resurrection power mixes with our lives and remixes our communities?

Remix is a musical term and it means “to recombine (audio tracks or channels from a recording) to produce a new or modified audio recording.”¹ To remix something then means to take something old and make it something new, with a new sound, new tune, new tempo, or a new rhythm. A ballad could be remixed into a breakdance rhythm, a hymn into hip hop, or reggae into a rap. Remixing creates a new song and dance for a new day in the liturgical club.

For this lectionary reading when we use the term resurrection remix we are simply talking about the resurrection in a fresh way in light of the needs of the African American

community. It means that not only do we celebrate that Jesus was resurrected, but by mixing our lives with the reality of the resurrection, the black community can live again in new ways because the resurrection remixes us. Mixing our lives with the reality of the resurrection suggests that the African American community can have a new tune in the world and be stronger and better because of it. Poor and rich, outsider and insider, hip-hop and hymnist, all coming together through the resurrection remixing us. On this Sunday, this remix may take the form of mixing up the community a bit inside the church so that folks outside the church on the streets are made welcome by the church folk. “Remix” Sunday may even introduce initiatives that aim to help the wider community in order to become a stronger community. The holy hymn “He is Lord” could even be remixed into a holy hip hop sound on this particular Sunday, remixing the vibes of God’s resurrection power.

On Easter Sunday, we recognized the implications for us as individuals. But Christ’s transforming resurrecting power extends beyond our individual lives. It impacts how we come together in families and alters how we understand community. Resurrection remixes our notions of community. In this moment, we will consider the power of this great Pentecostal passage for the formation of a remixed community in our midst.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Acts 2:42-47

Part One: Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

As a poor kid raised in inner-city Philadelphia, PA and Camden, NJ, I have long appreciated this passage. I know what poverty looks like and know how hard it is to overcome by oneself. Overcoming the hardships associated with total systemic failures in North Camden or West Philly took the support of a community of committed people. I found the support and encouragement of community in church. I was reminded that it takes a village to raise a child.

I later worked for the Congress of National Black Churches and became more thoroughly convinced that the solutions to the persistent problems plaguing African Americans were to be found in Christ and in Christ’s body, the Church. The Black Church, still the only institution in which African Americans exercise decisive agency, holds the possibility of Christian community as expressed in Acts 2:42-47. Overcoming the host of crises threatening our black flesh begins with the Spirit forging Christian community in the Church and when the Spirit blows you together, you cannot break apart.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Acts 2 is remarkable for many reasons. One reason is because of the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit, or the “Holy Ghost” as many African American Christians say. This Pentecost passage shows the power of the Holy Ghost to bring about unity amid diversity and to forge community from those of different backgrounds. The Spirit’s fire reshapes and remixes these individuals from an old way of relating into a new way of being, a new community that talks of God and walks in God so that all needs are met. At

first glance, one might think that the miracle of unity is no big deal because all Jews are alike, right? Wrong! The author demonstrates differences between the Jews gathered from around the Hellenistic world. Jews of different hues from different hoods of various parts of North and Northeastern Africa, Southern Asia, and even Europe were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate that particular Pentecost. It was a party that no one wanted to miss and it was a party that they would never forget. On this day, at this Pentecostal party, these mixed Jews were going to be remixed by the Spirit for a new way of being community in the world.

Likewise, one could wrongly assume that because most members of black churches are ostensibly “black” they are all pretty much the same because some folks think all black people are alike. But anyone who has spent any time in ministry in an African American congregation can attest to the fact that members of our congregations may share a common hue, but that doesn’t mean we are all alike. In fact, having the same hue does not mean we help each other as we should. We are different—different because of class, career, calling, and concepts. Integration, regional disparities, and ideological distinctions further complicate matters making the “black community” more of a fictive concept than a discernable reality. Even the languages we speak are different. Anyone raised in the era of Marvin Gaye, the Jackson 5, and the Supremes can attest to this if they have ever tried to communicate with those from the Jay-Z, P-Diddy, and Destiny’s Child’s era; we do not all speak the same language! 2008 primary elections have divided the African American vote between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and the 2004 presidential election divided the African American vote over abortion and gay marriage, showing us that our political views are no longer routinely similar. We are different. No longer is it even certain that our church members who commute from outer-city suburbs to our inner-city churches feel affinity for those un-churched brothers and sisters they pass-by along the way. As in our churches, the crowd in this narrative, despite their differences, were assembled only because of their common faith. These mixed Jews were remixed by the Spirit for a new way of being community in the world.

The motley crew in this story is united by the power of the Holy Spirit who bridges the differences between them and makes of many languages, voices, and backgrounds, one community in Christ. One can hear the sighs of the Spirit—out of many, one people. This unity is crystallized by the conversion and baptism of some 3,000 members of this group into a Eucharistic community of shared faith and disciplines. The differences that distinguished the crowd at the beginning of the chapter no longer serve to divide the people at its end. They are remixed through the Spirit of the resurrection. The Holy Ghost is the spiritual glue bonding different flesh together in Christ.

This *Spiritual* glue binds the Black Church because black people are historically a “Spiritual” people. Our preachers preach *in* the Spirit, we get filled *with* the Spirit, we are led *by* the Spirit, we move when the Spirit says move. But, do we always do what the Spirit does? Do we ever quench the Spirit? In this passage, God’s Spirit unifies a divided Christian community; where our community is divided, do we allow the Spirit free reign to unify us? The Spirit’s presence is more than preachers whoopin’ and hollerin’ and

people gittin' happy; it's more than runnin' in aisles and talkin' in tongues. The sign of the Spirit is unity despite difference and if you got religion, you better show a sign!

The sign is crystal clear in verses 44-45—supernatural sharing. This chapter begins with a hodge-podge of Jews from mixed backgrounds but ends with a remixed community. Before, they were separated but now they were integrated and *expressed their concern for each other by action*. People who were different were unified and shared their wealth so no one went without. Every need was met and as such, we are called to be more than a conceptual community; *Christian community is more than ideas...it is expressed in actions*. A remixed community means that *some will have to give up something in order for others to get something, to receive what they need*. Resurrection remixes our communities with the Holy Ghost so that those with more give to those with less.

A remixed community accounts for the differences in prosperity, power, and privilege between the members of our community. The impact of these differences in opportunity, education, and employment must be addressed in the larger African American community. To be a true community, we must recognize that while many of us have forged ahead, many more of us have been left behind. No child left behind? No person should be left behind. Failing inner-city education systems, increasing incarceration rates, and epidemic HIV/AIDS infection rates are not the problems of a conceptual “them,” they are the problems of an actual “us.” But we will only realize this if we are remixed by the resurrection. If remixed, we will work toward the solution of these problems with the same Spirit-led zeal that caused early Christians to pool their resources and declare their common lot. We need to care for all of our collective lives with the same enthusiasm with which we care for our individual lives. In a Spirit-led community, all needs are viewed as common, all interests are intertwined. “I am because we are.”

Because of this black religious sense, I reject cynical scholars who believes that the kind of community in Acts 2 never existed. Such a pessimistic view fails to take seriously the transformative power of the Spirit of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God is able to take a fractured humanity and forge a community consisting of difference (backgrounds, generations, social-locations). God has the power to make us one in Christ. Such a vision should not be daunting and it should not be dismissed as impossible for nothing is impossible with the Spirit of God.

Celebration

At this post-Easter moment, we celebrate God uniting us. Community defeats division by the power of the Spirit. Despite our differences, a community is formed. Because of this, we rejoice in the common commitment to our collective well-being for we are united by a common Spirit in Christ. Those things that separate us can be seen as unimportant in light of our new fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

Descriptive Details

Sights: See the community together teaching, eating, praying, and in fellowship; see wonders and signs being performed by apostles; see possessions and goods being sold to assist all in the community;

Sounds: Hear the community in fellowship; listen to their prayers; hear the awe of the community; hear them praising God;

Smells: Smell the breaking of bread/the meal; and

Textures: Touch the bread/food.

Note

1. "Remix." The Free Online Dictionary. Online location: www.thefreeonlinedictionary.com accessed 5 January 2008