

Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • April 24, 2022



THE SCRIPTURE
Act 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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, 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.

THE MESSAGE
"Faithful"
Mark Briley

[Singing] *"Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives all fear is gone. Because I know who holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives."*

This song has been ringing in my heart ever since last Sunday when we gathered in this place to celebrate Easter. This is one of the songs that I always hear in my grandfather's voice. He's been gone for 18 years now – can still hear his voice singing that song in my head as clear as anything.

Do you know how that goes? It's like the National Anthem. The voice that you hear right now in your head singing that song because I have brought it to your attention is of course? *Whitney Houston*. Okay – not all the same. But you get the idea. My grandpa's voice is alive through that song in my very soul. So, I've been singing it. And I know the hymn wasn't around in those days after the first Easter, but I like to think those first disciples were humming it 24/7 as they found their way into those first days and weeks on this side of the resurrection. What a game changer!

I mean, what do you do when Easter happens to you? Do you chant and cheer one morning, eat the honey baked ham and then just move on? Do you enjoy the extended pastels wardrobe season? What do you *do*? And what about a community? What does the Church do once Easter has happened to them? We read about it. They get together. They celebrate of course – the songs, the stories, the food! But the celebration gives way to new questions about life? Everything has changed. *What now?*

Well... the first Christians stepped forward. They studied and prayed, gave of themselves, pooled their resources, and served the community. How could they not? Easter had filled them with new and vigorous faith, and the only response they could imagine was to be faithful. Easter has found us again, Broadway, and as always, Easter is right on time. What does today's faithful response ask of us in the here and now?

We're asking these questions as individuals and as a collective people hoping the synergy will press us forward with strength. But how long will that last? How long can you run on fumes? You get a sense when the "*E*" light pops up on your dashboard about how long you've got before you're stalled and walking because you ran out of gas.

"*How long will it last?!*" is a question kids often ask when faced with attending something beyond their choosing. Let's be honest, most adults often wonder the same thing. Whether it's a sermon, a lecture, a party, or a pandemic, "*How long will it last?*" is an honest wondering. The truth of our experience reveals that most things *don't* last forever. "*This too shall pass,*" we say and alas, it usually does.

In Paul's Love Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, he says it's true. Good things come to an end. Even the worst things, like death, don't linger forever as Easter has just reminded us. *But...* Paul finishes his beautiful prose with three things that remain, that linger, that last forever: *faith, hope* and *love*. Believing this is true, it seems the Church universal, and our church at 2601 West Broadway specifically, should pour our energies into these lasting gifts.

The pains of pandemic have tested our resolve to stay the course, broadening our mission to a whole new world revealing its evolution each new day. Like the first Easter people, the generous and committed gifts of the church are needed more than ever to sustain faithful, hopeful, and loving lives. So, we come off of Easter this year, partnering with our students at Broadway who will lead us in worship next week, to offer a stewardship series that will inspire us forward to thrive as a church family with a mission and vision that is built to last. Today – *faithful*. How do we grow as faithful stewards like the early church of Acts demonstrated so well?

In part, we know it's never as easy as it sounds. Our focal text from Acts today says, "*They fell in love with Easter. They were just in awe. Everyone got along and agreed on the color of carpet to put in the sanctuary.*" I embellish a little. But it's right there. "*They were in awe. They came together, had all things in common, sold off all their stuff, and pooled their resources together to meet needs. They got together for food and fellowship and worship and had glad and generous hearts.*" This is the sweetest thing ever, right? And then it says, "*The Lord added to their number by the day.*"

Well, yeah – who wouldn't want to be in on that sweetness? It leaves out a lot of the personal details though, right? This isn't the VH1 *Behind the Music* account of their lives. Not everyone was immediately on board, generously filling out a pledge card, and agreeable about process, were they? In fact, there are places in the Easter text where it says some encountered Easter saying they were "*amazed but not yet convinced.*" Or even on the disciple's hike up the mount before Jesus ascended to heaven, the text says, "*they worshiped him but some doubted.*" Even the faithful wrestle with how to keep Easter fresh, alive, and growing in their own lives. "*Pooling all my possessions? Making a pledge? Why?*" Easter wasn't a simple and small redirect of life. As one of my colleagues put it: "*Our world is more than a few tweaks away from being made right. Business as usual is more than a few tweaks away from becoming the Kingdom of God.*" (Brad McDowell). If Easter is just a head nod for us and not a committed way of life, we'll be in a constant state of internal wrestling.

Some of this wrestling has to do with our sense of dissatisfaction with life. The Rolling Stones sang, "*I can't get no satisfaction.*" We can quickly lose satisfaction in the Easter stone rolling away being enough, too. "*I mean that's cool and all,*" we may say, "*but it ain't enough to change how I live.*"

There's been some interesting moments in this recent award show season, right? Will Smith's right cross to Chris Rock's left cheek has made the most noise of course. Thinking about enough, however, and what consumes our thinking, I remembered a bit

Jim Carey did at the Golden Globes a few years ago. Take a look... [YouTube Clip: Jim Carey Golden Globe Speech]¹

Was it just a bit or is it all too true? What is enough? And what does faithfulness look like when it comes to the placement of these realities in our lives. What did Paul say? So much is going to come and go in our lives – so much is temporary – makes no lasting impact; no legacy; no real impression. But we spend so much time fixated on the temporary. We just get so focused on the immediate that we lose sight of investing in bigger picture needs around us.

Have you ever been super hungry and called in your favorite Chinese takeout order and just been so stoked to devour it? You got the special sauce and went ahead and splurged for the extra Crab Rangoon's because, well, just because. And you're just so hungry and excited about eating that you just can't wait! You run down to the "House of Chow," and you pay whatever it costs for that goodness to soon be in your belly. So you get there to pay your bill of \$27.54 and you've got your card ready to roll and then they ask you, "Would you like to round up that additional 46 cents to feed hungry kids in the community?" and you stop... a little annoyed and think, "Do I want to give 46 cents to round up and feed hungry kids?" And we play the chess game in our head: "They're probably not really feeding kids," or "I'll give some other way," or "I'll do it next time." 46 cents? I threw all caution to the wind when I order those extra Rangoon's but another 46 cents... well. We've all got reasons why we process things the way we do. But we're not often thinking about faithfulness. We're just thinking about Crab Rangoon's. We get hangry (*and who among us hasn't been there?*) but we lose any hunger to invest in the lasting impact we're called to make in this world. We take our eyes off legacy and focus on the loot.

We do have to be responsible with our resources, of course. We must think about these things. But when the race of that pursuit surpasses our pursuit of faithful impact, we become enslaved to the chase that will never satisfy.

Leo Tolstoy, the great writer of the 19th century, wrote a story about a successful farmer who was not satisfied with his land. Needed more of it. One day, he received a marvelous offer. For 1,000 rubles or the equivalent of \$28, he could buy all the land he could walk around in one day. The only catch was that he had to be back at the starting point by sundown. He could walk around as much as he wanted – whatever land he touched was his as long as he was back by sundown. Challenge accepted. The farmer takes off at a brisk pace the next morning to cover as much ground as possible. By mid-day he was tired, but he was earning, he was pressin' and possessin.' But in the afternoon heat he realized his greed may have gotten the best of him and he

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9J8GaeDqVc>

was far away from the starting point. So, he started running toward home as fast as his legs could carry him as the sun began to set. He knew if he didn't make it by sundown, this vast amount of land would not belong to him. Gasping for breath, his heart strained, he pulled together every bit of strength in his body and staggered across the starting point just as the sun dropped into the night. Immediately, he collapsed. He made it just in time. The only problem was, within a few minutes he was dead. As Tolstoy writes the story, he says, "*Afterwards, his servants dug a grave and the grave was not much more than six feet long and three feet wide.*" The title of Tolstoy's story is, "*How much land does a man need?*"²

For most of us, this *enough* reality isn't about some fixed amount. It's a moving target. It's a mentality. The real issue isn't about the stuff at all. We can make an incredible impact with our resources. The bigger issue is our focus – are we living to consume or are we living to share in the impact of what matters most?

Last week it was D.B.R. – Death. Burial. Resurrection. This week, its Wu-Tang Clan's reminder C.R.E.A.M. – that I pose as a question: Does "*cash rule everything around me?*"

What are you feeding your brain, your heart, your soul? I'm no neurologist, but I understand that the brain will constantly rewire itself to suit the information we feed it. One doc said, for example, "*If you constantly complain, gossip, find excuses, etc.; it will make it much easier to find things to be upset about, regardless of what is happening around you. Likewise, if you constantly search for opportunities, abundance, love, and things to be grateful for, it will make it much easier to find a reflection of those things around you.*"³

Faithful people seem to have found a way to work at this wiring. They find ways to be generous. They find ways to serve. They find ways to come together for the greater legacy.

I marvel at the early church and the ways they became Easter people who wired the movement toward faithfulness. I think if you asked the early movement leaders – and not just the ones that get their names on the disciple's marquee but ones who really got it done, who did the work and shared the gifts without a whole lot of fanfare – they would say, "*How could we not?*" This is faith.

² <http://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/2738/>. This is one link to the larger version of the story.

This story has been told in many places and various ways over time. I was inspired to share it after hearing pastor Rich Villodas share it on one occasion. Villodas serves as Lead Pastor at New Life Fellowship Church in Brooklyn, NY.

³ I could not find the source to give attribution of this quote.

I've seen it in you, too, Broadway. Just this week, I was talking with a friend newer to Broadway about the recent Habitat Sale which has now raised over \$35,000 to build a home for a deserving family in our city. This new Broadway-er worked the sale for the first time and was amazed saying, "*Those Broadway people know how to work!*" And you do champion these things so well. Another newer-to-Broadway said at a luncheon this week, "*There's just something different about the people at Broadway. That spirit they talk about. There's something to it.*" And I sat with several folks in their homes or at the hospital this week who are facing some of most difficult things we face in this life and to a person, each said some version of, "*I don't know how people go through this stuff without a church family.*" There is a faithfulness we share in this journey that is legacy worthy. It can change the direction of a city. It alters the course of our own lives. It creates a community that is built to last.

Another new friend to me and to Broadway told me this week that, just like me, she's been singing "*Because he lives*" all week since hearing it with us on Easter Sunday; the first time she'd been in church for a couple of years. It took her back to a time she had to make a difficult decision for her family and throughout that season, she sang that song because it focused her hope; it reminded her of what matters most; it held her during the struggle knowing it was faithful to the legacy – of what was built to last. And here that song comes again – Easter rises and reminds us that we need each other.

Look. I know there is a lot changing in our lives right now. And we have lots of questions about surviving and purpose and future... and there's angst about direction and your many responsibilities in this life. The early church had all those same realities to contend with coming off of Easter one. But they did it. They came together. They pooled their resources generously and what happened? Needs were met, the movement grew, and their faithful impact is evident still in our very being here today. It's what one leader said about our time and our current struggles: "*We always need to lean into the future; when the world changes around you and when it changes against you – what used to be a tailwind is now a headwind – you have to lean into that and figure out what to do because complaining isn't a strategy.*"

We're finding our way into these first days post-Easter, post pandemic, stepping into a whole new world. And we have a vision here, friends, that is primed to connect with God's next major movement in our city. It's built on the faithfulness of those who have gone before us. We may build forward in a different way, but we certainly build forward with the same trusted spirit, *where love leads*. Thank you for being part of this moment in the life of Broadway and the world. Every gift matters to the impact of this ministry.

I had zero idea that the last couple of years would have been as they were. You didn't either. But do you know what I believe more than ever? I believe in that song we keep

singing together. I hear it in your voices that keep speaking up saying, “*I know Broadway. I know who we are. I know what we can do. I know who we can be. I know how generous we are. I know the faith we have always exhibited.*” And I don’t know why I’m still surprised when I see that sparkle in your sharing. Because we just keep rising and it doesn’t get more Easter than that.

May it be so.

SONG OF FOCUS
“Faithful, Hopeful, Loving”

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. You have made us in your image, a relationship to share.
You have given us your presence, nurtured in your loving care.
You have offered us a way to communicate in prayer.
And you promise us that you'll always be there.

2. You have called us through the prophets, you have saved us through the Son.
You have given us your Spirit to unite us, make us one.
You have sent us to this world of need, reaching out, forsaking none.
And now, our God, we pray, “Your will be done!”

Refrain:

We would be faithful, this is our prayer today in faithful, living witness to your Way.
Live in your presence, lifting prayer in all we do to be faithful,
always hopeful, loving, too.

3. You have called us through the prophets, you have saved us through the Son.
You have given us your Spirit to unite us, make us one.
You have sent us to this world of need, reaching out, forsaking none.
May we be faithful in all you’ve begun.

Refrain:

We would be faithful, this is our prayer today in faithful, living witness to your Way.
Live in your presence, lifting prayer in all we do to be faithful,
always hopeful, loving, too.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH