

24th Annual Community Worship Service
Tulip Time Festival
May 4, 2008
“The Beloved Community”
Acts 2:43-47

Good morning.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, thank you for the invitation to be with you this day. It is an honor and privilege to be here. And, it is always an awesome responsibility to meditate on the Word of God with fellow believers. I pray that God may add a blessing to the hearing of this word.

Our scripture reading this morning is one of many stories that take place during the first century. Let us hear once again some of what was happening at that time. The Contemporary English Version of the Bible says: “They (the followers of Jesus) spent their time learning from the Apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together...All the Lord’s followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it...They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved”.

The first century Christians set a standard for what the followers of Jesus would believe and how the followers of Jesus would behave. The Apostles would teach and those who listened would come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Lord and Messiah. Once the people believed Jesus to be Lord and Messiah they acted upon their belief. In other words, the behavior of the followers of Jesus – those first century Christians – their behavior was informed by what they believed.

So, what did those first century Christians believe? First and foremost, they believed Jesus to be their Lord and Messiah. And, they knew their Lord and Messiah had a ministry of compassion and justice. They knew Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, associated with outcasts and raised the dead. They understood Jesus’ love and care for the people. Without a doubt they were aware that Jesus was concerned about the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the people.

Using their Lord and Messiah’s life as an example, the first century Christians’ behavior was: like family to each other; one of sharing everything they had; sharing their food happily and freely; praising God. And, in light of this behavior, everyone liked them.

Truly first century Christians were the living Communion of Saints. Reconciled and redeemed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the first century Christians were the “Beloved Community”. People would say of them: “See how they love one another”.

The fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. was acknowledged by many people this past April. King had a vision of the “Beloved Community” for this country. King’s was a vision of a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice wherein brotherhood and sisterhood would be an actuality in all of social life. King often talked about “the solidarity of the human family”. He wrote: “In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor enriches the rich. We are our brother’s keeper because we are our brother’s brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly”.

Like the first century Christians King believed it was God’s intention that everyone should have the physical and spiritual necessities of life. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his life as a token for the reconciliation and redemption of this country. King’s dream was that the “Beloved Community” would be present for his children and all God’s children.

Like the first century Christians, the first Dutch settlers of Pella acted on their Christian beliefs. We are reminded in the book A Stranger in a Strange Land how those Dutch settlers who had been in the West a year or more gave of their own provisions to help the new strange people who came after them. The settlers taught the strangers how to cook and bake and how to prepare wild game.

The good news of all this is that the signs of the “Beloved Community” in Pella at that time went beyond the Dutch people – extending into the Indian community. The Indians were frequent and friendly visitors to the Dutch. In addition to the sign of hospitality, the sign of justice was also to be found in the “Beloved Community” of Pella. Run away slaves on their way to Canada would be fed and housed right here in Pella!

The Christian leadership of Dominie Scholte inspired this kind of behavior in Pella. As I walked the streets of Pella yesterday passing his home and the church he helped to build I could imagine the powerful witness he was. I even read that Dominie Scholte thought nothing of preaching two hours. Now don’t worry, I won’t last that long.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as twenty-first century Christians we stand on the shoulders of those Christians like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dominie Scholte who have come before us. They have modeled for us the “Beloved Community”. Like them, we are called to have our behavior informed by what we believe.

As the seventy-third Tulip Time Festival comes to a close and as we give thanks to God the rich history of Pella, let us celebrate at this twenty-fourth annual community worship service the unity and strength we have in Christ Jesus by ever striving to be the “Beloved Community” in this place at this time.

Today, let us strive to be the “Beloved Community” by asking the same questions that were asked by the Dutch settlers: “Who is the stranger today”? “How can I be like family to this stranger”?

Today, let us strive to the “Beloved Community” by sharing the things God has blessed us with. Everything we have is a gift from God. We are the stewards of God’s bounty. Surely today’s offering for the Pella Food Shelf will assist those with food and other essential items.

Today, let us not forget that we are Easter and Pentecost people. That is to say, our Lord and Messiah has been raised from the dead. Because he lives and has ascended in the power and glory of God, we too live in the power and glory of God. And, the power we have comes from the Holy Spirit, making all things possible for those who love the Lord.

So, I say to you, people of Pella, move forward into another day as the “Beloved Community”. Move forward, you have the history; you have the opportunity and you possess the power and glory of God in you.

Be not afraid for the Spirit will guide and direct your going in and your coming out.

Thanks be to God who gives us this victory through our Lord and Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.