

Treasuring community

Kathryn Fleming *reflects on* Acts 2:42-end and John 10:1-10

It's an ironic truth that the Acts account of those exemplary New Testament Christians tends to make me anything but an exemplary Christian! Honestly, just thinking about their perfect community, holding all things in common, giving alms, celebrating God's goodness day by day, turns me into a green-eyed monster. Not only did they have the ideal church, but it was growing too, which isn't necessarily the case for churches we know and love. And of course, it was because of how they modelled authentic Christian community, reflecting God's love in every aspect of life, that the Church grew.

Even if you don't experience signs and wonders, unmistakable evidence of God at work in ordinary people is pretty irresistible. So where does that leave us? It's easy to think "that was then, this is now" and plod onwards, trying to avoid painful comparisons. But there's a challenge. Jesus calls us to life in all its fullness – freedom from both the confines of a narrow religion of "thou shalt not" and from the anxious search for security in material possessions or personal status, which can never satisfy. Those early Christians were able to be generous because they understood that with God there's always enough to go round. They recognised that we often find God most easily in other people, so they treasured their community. And they knew that to practise God's praise come what may, can be a route towards a transformed life. That's still true – and something to rejoice in. 😊

Gracious God, help us focus afresh on the essentials – on teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and on prayer. Give us glad, generous hearts; that your Church may proclaim life in all its fullness through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Keeping Easter alive

by Katharine Smith

Katharine Smith concludes her series on keeping the spirit of resurrection.

"Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son, / endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won." ("A toi la gloire", by Edmond Louis Budry)

When I feel burdened by the weight I seem to be carrying, this great Easter hymn lifts my spirit up far beyond any negative thoughts, biting worries and self-doubt I may have. Its words and tune are truly

magnificent and can certainly lighten my load, no matter what that load is! Try listening to a recording of a good choir singing the hymn (volume turned up!)

That first Good Friday was real, it happened. Nothing can change the truth of its tragedy and disaster. But we need not allow that to quash the glory of the first Easter. It is triumphant, wonderful, the victory of love and good over hate and evil. We can cling on to that glorious victory and rejoice.

We are Easter people! Thanks be to God! Alleluia! 😊



People of the New Testament

Timothy

by Caroline Fletcher

Acts 16:1-5; 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:2-5; Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11; 2 Corinthians 1:1, 19; Philemon 1:1a; 2:19-24; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy; Hebrews 13:23.

Timothy has been unfairly branded as timid, but that fails to appreciate his circumstances, where speaking out for Christ could lead to being reviled, abused, even killed. Indeed, to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys at such a

young age, knowing full well how Paul himself had suffered, shows real bravery. He did not always succeed and he struggled to find the courage to fulfil his calling, but that's a reality for us all – none of us is without fear and weakness. Indeed, Timothy is an encouragement to us all. Despite his struggles, he made a difference. He was a real support to Paul, playing an important role in composing his letters and showing God's love to the churches they founded together. He also reminds us how much the Church misses out if it fails to recognise the gifts bestowed upon younger people, enabling them to carry out God's work. 😊

“Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there.”

Clarence Wilbur Hall (1902-1984), author