

Sermon Title: **“Very Early Church Life”**

Bible: **Psalm 133 & Acts 4:32-35**

When: on the 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 7, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Very Early Church Life

Today is the 2nd Sunday of Easter. We still celebrate the joyful and powerful resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, every Sunday is a little Easter. That’s why we gather on Sundays to worship together! The joy, the power, and the grace of the resurrection is to be overflowing through this Sunday, every day, and every moment.

We can taste the life of the very early church through the reading of Acts. In the very early church, there was not a needy person among them, because they shared what they had with each other. Very radically, they had sold what they had such as lands and houses, and brought them to the church, and shared them. What an amazing faith community! But is this faith community possible in the 21st century and in the United States?

In my understanding, there were three factors for that amazing or unbelievable faith community. First of all, there was an overflowing joy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If we are full of joy, we can be generous. Have you had any moment when you are full of joy?

For me, it was when my fiance said, “Yes, I do!” That moment changed my perspective. Everyone and everything was changed into beauty and awe. I feel like I have everything, which makes me more generous! It was when I heard that surgery had gone well for our church members. We had prayed a lot and passionately. It was the moment when I visited our church members in the hospital, when I saw the eye blinking, and when I could feel even a little power from a hand’s squeeze. That’s because it was a sign of healing and recovery. The very early Christians had been afraid not only of persecution, but also of the death of Jesus Christ. But Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed! Then, how could they hide their overflowing joy?

Second, the early Christians had shared their lives, their burdens, their smiles and tears, with each other. The early Christians were outsiders and strangers to the mainline society at that time. Most of them could not openly express their faith. There was no freedom of religion. They needed to hide their faith to survive. Otherwise, they were persecuted. According to the legend, among the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, eleven apostles, except John the disciple whom Jesus loved, suffered greatly and met violent deaths for their faith. And it was not only what happened to the apostles, but also to many early Christians. They shared their burdens and tears as well as their joys. They were not alone; they were together. They became one. So, sharing what they had was not for others, but for themselves, because they were one.

Third, they had expected the expedited coming of Jesus Christ in their lives. To most of the early Christians, they had expected that the coming of Jesus Christ would be very soon,

before their own deaths. What they worried about was the death of the believers, even before the coming of Jesus Christ. If the risen Jesus would come very soon, and if we expect the end of our lives very soon, we can understand why the early Christians shared what they had. They did not need to be ready for their retirement and their own future long lives. They might not need to think of the future, their children, and the next generation. This is our faith: Christ died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We believe that Christ will come again, but we do not know when. For more than two thousand years, Christ was not coming yet. Our own death would be before the coming of our Lord Christ. So, we need to prepare for our retirement, our own death, and our next generation. But Christ will come again.

2. A Loving and Caring Congregation

We learned what made the very early Church become a very radical faith community in terms of what they had. The reason why I chose the reading of Acts is not for selling what we have and bringing it to the church. If I or any pastor asks you to sell all you have and bring it to the church, please go to any church lay leaders, and report it! I do not think that it is the teaching of today's scripture readings. The reason why I chose the readings from Acts and Psalms is that I want for us to be a loving and caring congregation. Don't we have the joy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Don't we believe that life conquered death? Don't we believe that love wins over hatred? So, I want to confess, "How very good and pleasant it is when our congregation lives together in unity!" Even though we cannot share all that we have, we can share our time and energy. We can pray for each other. We can confess and

forgive each other. We can accept each other. We can send cards and texts. We can give calls. And we can help and support each other. We can do many things for our loving and caring congregation. We cannot avoid our own death. Someday, we will face our own death, and others' deaths. While there is time, how about loving one another more and more?

3. One Bread and One Body

Today is the first Sunday of April. And we will have holy communion. To be Christians means that we are not alone, but we are one body of Jesus Christ. Before the crucifixion, Jesus shared the bread and the cup. And even after the resurrection, Jesus broke the bread and shared the cup, because we are one body of Jesus Christ. We are one body. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26) We are already one body. We are already a loving and caring congregation. Let us continue to be a more loving and more caring congregation!

Closing Prayer

The resurrected, loving, and living God, thank you so much for calling us as your body of Jesus Christ. Please be with us and make us one. We are a loving and caring congregation. Please use us for your means of grace and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.