

Nothing Is Our Own

Texts: I John 1:1-2:2, Acts 4:32-35

Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – April 11, 2021

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From the lectionary this morning, we have these three wonderful Scripture passages about community life in faith, being united, and walking in the light. On this first Sunday after Easter, it seems to me that it is appropriate to talk about the community of faith and how the resurrection of Christ has impacted and transformed the body of believers. “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin.” And “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” It sounds so inviting, so beautiful, and yet, so impossible, right?

Scott Hoezee, director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, writes, “Acts 4 is enough to break your heart. Was it really true at the earliest stage of the Christian community that the believers were completely one in heart and mind? Did they really share absolutely everything even as they fell adoringly and reverently at the feet of the apostles, hanging on their every word (and with nary a criticism of any sermon they preached)?

The truth is that even the Book of Acts itself testifies to the fact that from the earliest days of the Christian church forward, a measure of disagreement and strife and conflict was present. Acts is remarkable for many reasons, not the least of which is its bracing honesty in admitting that sometimes the apostles disagreed and had to call special councils to hammer out their understanding of grace. Sometimes some of the apostles disagreed so sharply with one another that they had to continue their work for the Lord down separate paths.

And that's just the Book of Acts. If you read between the lines—and sometimes you can read the lines themselves—in epistles like I Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians, you can see how often Paul had to mediate disagreements among believers and correct (sometimes sharply and harshly) false ideas and practices the earliest Christians had adopted within their church communities. Even the friendliest letter in the New Testament, the Letter to the Philippians, has to pause near the end to tell two women to stop their public squabble and get along for Jesus' sake.

It is good and pleasant when brothers and sisters in the Lord get along. It is good and pleasant when Christian believers can share things in common and cling to the one Word of Life that just is the apostolic witness of the gospel. But it is also sadly true that complete unity and utter harmony across all boundaries, times, and places are rare and unusual” (From Internet. https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-2b-2/?type=old_testament_lectionary. 04/06/21). What would it take to be the church of Acts 4? To live out our faith in such a way that showed the radical commitment to Christ and to sharing and living in God's grace? Is it even possible?

“No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own.” In the Acts early church, there was this belief that none of the possessions of the people belonged to them. There were no claims of ownership of anything. “For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.” Wait, what?

Now, that would make for a very interesting and intriguing stewardship campaign! If you sell your home, your car, your boat, or anything of real value, you must donate all of the proceeds – not just some of the proceeds but ALL of them – to the church. Then, the church

must use the money to help those who are in need. Who is first? Any volunteers to set the tone for the rest of the congregation? Well, I do not see any hands raised of those who have their cameras on, and I can only imagine the looks on the faces of those who do not have their cameras on. This is asking a lot. This model raises so many questions – and “but, what if’s,” does it not?

But, is it not how we should model our lives? Living as if nothing is our own, but a gift from God, meant to be shared. How far are we each willing to go in this way of life? How can we use these words to make us more of a community of faith and life? There was a recent Gallup poll that has caught the attention of the media. Basically, it is saying that only 47% of Americans claim membership to a church or faith community. That is down from 50% in 2018, and 70% in 1999. We could all speculate what we think the reasons are for this trend. However, I wonder. I wonder if we began to live more like nothing is our own, if our mindset is that of humility and generosity – always thinking of the other, what could we do? How could the church impact our communities and beyond with the Good News of a Resurrected Lord?

“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.” The power of Christ’s resurrection changed and transformed the apostles so much that they were on fire in their faith. God’s grace was so powerfully at work in each of them. But this fire that was stoked inside each of them was not a fire and brimstone passion. It was God’s grace – God’s unconditional love and mercy. There was no turning away of anyone – but there was an intentional sharing of what had been given to them by God. So, they were satisfying the community’s physical needs – caring for those in need. And they were also satisfying the

community's spiritual needs. Proclaiming the Good News of the Risen Lord. It is what they had in common and what brought them together to serve their community. How do we?

“How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!” The apostles and the people were united because of all they had experienced. On the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead. They had witnessed it, they had experienced Christ Himself in the flesh, and they came together in ways they had not even dreamed of before this encounter with Jesus.

How good and pleasant when we live together in unity through Christ. Is that even possible today? Everything we see goes against unity – we are divided on so many levels. Politics, pandemic, you name it. Can we live in unity even though we may disagree on any of these or something else? Can we bear with one another and lift up one another despite the differences we share? What we have in common is that Christ died for each one of us – for our sins. Christ rose again from the grave for us. And in that unity, there is invitation. To share with one another. To love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength – and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And to share God's grace and our resources with those who have need – physical, spiritual, or otherwise.

It is difficult to be united. It is difficult to come together with those who believe or agree so differently than you. But can we try? Let us try – for our sakes and for the sakes of those who do not yet know the hope that is in Christ Jesus. For nothing is our own – it is all God's. To Him be the glory! Let us pray...

Generous God, You have given us so much. Life, shelter, and grace and salvation through Christ. We are not worthy of the many blessings You have bestowed on each one of us. And we admit that we want unity in our midst and in our lives, especially when there is so much division and discord around us. Help us, we pray, to take steps to live out our faith in such a way that nothing is our own – that is all in trust from You. Guide us to be generous and to share Your grace with others. Through Christ we pray, Amen.