

April 7, 2024

Acts 4: 32-35 "All Things in Common"

Does that sound good, to be one in heart and mind with other believers? Does it sound good, to have all things in common with your brothers and sisters in this congregation?

Luke states that "there were no needy persons among them" v 34. Luke is probably bringing this up to show that the Kingdom of God Jesus' disciples, referring to what will be considered normal for the Israelites when they enter the promised land. *Deut 15: 4 "However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as you inheritance, he will richly bless you. "*

Between Easter and Pentecost, passages from Acts take the place of the Old Testament readings. This is to show that everything about Jesus is a continuation of the work of God beginning with creation, through the covenant with Abraham and the people of Israel.

These are the promises of enough and abundance to God's people, and the charge to justice and mercy, as debts to other Israelites are forgiven every 50 years in the year of Jubilee, *Dt. 15:1-3*, but you can keep the debt on the books for foreigners. And such is the Kingdom of Heaven, caring for one another by sharing resources. But now, everyone's inside the circle, right?

Previously, after Pentecost the believers were hanging out together, sharing meals in their homes and being encouraged and strengthened.

Here, it has progressed to caring for others in the group by handing in the profits of property sold, to the apostles, who were coordinating the believers.

Following this story, a generous brother names Barnabas sells property and gives it all for the others. Then a married couple sell some property and decide to say they are giving the whole selling price to the community, while keeping some for themselves. They are judged by the Holy Spirit for lying, not for only giving part of the price.

A moment of sharing, sweet and deep. It doesn't last, but it is a benchmark, a signpost of how people can live together with contentment and without striving.

In 1953, The Agrarian Reform Law redistributed parcels of the land of Bolivia from large landowners to indigenous peasants. Access to the farming land provided many people the

means to feed their family. And yet, of course there were still hardworking people who were needy, and as the years rolled by, and generations came and went, land was bought and sold, inherited and lost, consolidated and scattered. How can a nation, a people, a community, truly share all things in common and there be no needy people?

When a loving disciple broke a jar of expensive fragrance over his head and the disciples accused her to wasting resources that could have been given to the poor, Jesus says, *“The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me...she did this to prepare me for burial.”* *Matthew 26:11, 12b* Jesus is addressing the use of resources in the context of trust and relationships.

Utopian experiments of equality begin with high hopes and purity, but cannot be sustained in the long run.

The history of the Christian community of faith is not clean in regard to greed and riches. Still, we must read this today and find God’s presence in this Scripture today. The Psalm that is paired with this reading tells of the joy of living together in unity. One image of that harmonious life is of fragrant oil running down the head, through the beard. This sounds a lot like the anointing of Jesus’ head, where love and respect come first.

But it surely cannot mean that luxurious gifts to those closest to us are exempt from scrutiny because they come out of love. Sharing everything we have may not be about rules, but it is about recognizing the needs that each member of the community has. It about taking those needs seriously and using resources with wisdom and freedom.

Life within the kingdom of God is about trusting that God sees each of us and will provide for all of us. There is enough in God’s presence. We don’t compete with one another to get our share, or to prove that we are worth just as much or more than others. We don’t need to strive endlessly to better our material possessions, to upgrade as a sign of success or God’s blessing.

The disciples were certainly surprised when Jesus told them that it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew 19:24*. The riches were a sign of God’s endorsement, with which people could support religious activities. The leisure and freedom of riches were believed to give people time and energy to figure out how to keep the law and live righteously.

If rich people had a hard time entering the kingdom of God, what chance did people without extra resources and time have for figuring it out? But Jesus didn’t let the rich or the poor off the hook. Look to God trustingly for all you need. Share what you have. Use your resources according to what is important.

In the communities where I lived for most of my early life, I was the biggest by far, even when I was thin, among the men as well as the women. I remember on a winter youth retreat one of my friends borrowing a pair of boots. It had been difficult to find a pair that fit my enormous feet, and I was afraid of cold, wet feet the rest of the weekend if something happened to those boots while she was tripping around in them with her small feet. She looked at me, seeing my anxiety and desire to keep those boots for myself. I remember realizing how little I trusted God for to care for me in a world where the things I needed were not readily available.

This passage from Acts is telling us that the work of Jesus is a continuation of the promises to the People of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that in the Kingdom of Heaven there are no needy people. Let's live that, probably not in an utopian commune, but holding all God has given us in an open hand, without fear.