

Acts 4:32-35

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The Word of the Lord

I spent my two years between undergrad and seminary as a Young Adult Volunteer. The Young Adult Volunteer program, YAV for short, is a program through the Presbyterian Church USA that sends young people across the country and the globe for a year of service. There are currently 14 sites in the United States and 6 international sites. For national sites there are two tenants of the program: Intentional Christian Community and Simple Living. You see, the YAV program is meant to be a ministry of “being” rather than a ministry of “doing.” Participants are supposed to stand in solidarity with those that they are serving as well as live together with the other volunteers in intentional community. YAV years are one year commitments, but it is not uncommon for people to do two years and I decided after my first year to stay in the same placement for a second. I was placed in San Antonio, TX on the Westside of the city. The Westside is 98% Latino, mostly immigrants, everyone is below the poverty line and most people speak only Spanish. When I entered into my year, I was concerned about how I would fit in Westside neighborhood. I already spoke Spanish, but I was worried that as a white person, I would not be accepted into the community. I thought that outside of my YAV community, I

would struggle. I could not have MORE wrong. The struggle for me was not fitting into the Latino community my struggle was living in intentional community with four other young women from across the country. We were all white, all Presbyterian, all college graduates, all in our mid-twenties, all willing to take a year of our lives to give back to the world and that is where our commonalities ended. We were each given \$90 a month for groceries and spending money. Our very first *decision* as a community was to decide what to do with our \$90. Our very first *argument* was around whether to put all of our money in one lump sum and share our resources or keep it for ourselves and survive on our own. It took us 4 hours to decide to pool our money. We argued, we over thought, some cried, some yelled and not one of us thought about what Jesus or the early church would have to say about it. Reading this morning's text brought to mind those very long 4 hours.

My first thought upon reading this text was, "What happened to Easter?!?" Why on this the first Sunday after Easter are we going to talk about money and property? What a downer. This text is interrupting our celebration of the resurrected Christ! This text is a killjoy! But I did some research.

The book of Acts was written by the same writer as the Gospel of Luke. Large parts of both Acts and Luke deal with economic issues in the early Christian community. In fact parables about money are unique to Luke with the exception of one. It is safe to assume that the Lucan writer had something to say about the way money and economics play into our community and our church. This particular text comes to us just after Peter and John spent a night in prison for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus in the Temple. The people hearing Peter and John teach began to believe and the movement of the early Christian church was growing rapidly. When they were questioned the next day, they were asked, "By what power or by what name did you

do this?” And Peter responded “Rulers of the people and elders, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that I am standing before you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, there is salvation in no one else!” Peter was bold and his words were strong. This was not just some guy spouting off random words in the Temple. In those days religion and government were one in the same and this bold apostle was shaking the status quo. This movement of followers of Jesus, was interpreted as a political threat to both the Jewish and Roman leaders.

After their release the Apostles and their followers gathered and prayed for strength to speak the Gospel of the risen Lord. And then we come upon this morning’s text. The very first verse says that they were of “one heart and one soul” this saying would have been familiar to Luke’s audience. It draws upon Greek images of solidarity, including the virtues of communities that are grounded in relationships that prize what is best for ALL over what is merely self-satisfying. You see Palestine in those days was a place of economic hardship. Most people had barely enough to survive. So early Christian communities were forming that could support the whole rather than the individual. People knew that the movement and the work of the apostles was so important that it HAD to continue. The example that Jesus left them HAD to be followed. The best way to honor the resurrected Christ was to honor his teachings. They gave all that was necessary, even sharing or selling their properties, to strengthen the movement.

We read this text now and we see them as Socialists. But before we jump to that conclusion let me mention that in the translation from Greek to English there is some information that is lost, some linguistic nuances that English doesn’t cover. It is not clear to what extent common ownership or selling of properties was obligatory or if in fact it was voluntary. It

would be reasonable to conclude that the early church was aspiring more to the practice of sharing resources than to community owned property.

So what do we do with this? Peter and John and the other apostles were modeling what Jesus had intended. WE are called to follow the same teachings. How in our individualistic, competitive, solitary culture are we supposed to live for the good of the community? Jesus gave his life for us and the best way for us to give thanks for that is to honor the resurrection. To become a community that nurtures love, and selflessness and equality and gives everyone a fighting chance to succeed. And that way of living is so radically different than the status quo of our Western culture. But, in the resurrection of Jesus, we are resurrected too! WE have new opportunities, another chance to be changed, another chance to bring into being the world God's intended for creation. WE are Easter people, washed clean, given another chance, this is the time to reinvest, to give for the good of the community. Because we are not here just for worship, or fellowship, or to be good functioning members of society that are socially engaged, we are not here for ourselves. Jean Vanier says, "It is when the members of a community realize that they are not there simply for themselves or their own sanctification, but to welcome the gift of God, to hasten God's Kingdom, and to quench the thirst of others, that they truly live as community."

Northminster is a busy congregation I have never seen a church with so many people willing to volunteer their time and energy. We are working hard to grow in faith while being rooted in love. And in this Easter season, I want us to remember why. Why are we pouring ourselves into this community? Why are we here, giving of our time and energy and resources? Why are we here on Sunday morning when we could just as easily be at home relaxing? Friends, this work that we do, this Christian way of life is not easy. It is often against grain. It often makes us question ourselves and our culture and how we manage to live on the edge of secular

life and church life. We often have to sacrifice something for the good of our Christian community. The trick is to find joy in those sacrifices. To remember that we are a part of this community, giving of ourselves, because Jesus gave the ultimate gift. By remembering that we are a community working to bring about the Kingdom of God. We are living into the resurrection. We all give what we can, when we can. We all have something unique to offer, each of our gifts are necessary for our community to function. As individuals we cannot live into our calling to be Easter people, we need each other. I love the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." And so allow me the creative license to repurpose the saying a bit. Sisters and Brothers, "It takes a village to bring about the Kingdom of God." Let us remember that together, in community we are the Easter people. Amen.