



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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OURS

Acts 4: 32-37

Who likes to share? No really, who likes to share? It does feel a bit like a trick question.

For most of us, yeah, we like to share, but if we are being honest, it kind of depends on what we are sharing right? If you have an ice cream and it's your very favorite, brand and your very favorite flavor of ice cream, you get ready to eat it on a nice warm day and then along comes along a family member or friend, "Hey can I have some of that?" "Well, ok, but just a little." You may be happy to share, but there is a bit of you that is like man, this is mine!

There are other things we like to share, once you have read a great book or discovered a new artist, usually we want to share that information, let others know. When we get great news, we want to share that with others, we like to share joy, and it is fun to find creative ways to do that. When we get bad news, we often must share, to allow others in to support and help. That kind of sharing is not always so easy, but just as important. There are some things we are not supposed to share. The digital world has opened a whole new world of sharing, data files whether they are music, or movies or programs are being shared all over the world as we speak. Sharing makes it all sound so nice. Although when I was a teen, if a buddy bought a great album, I would often give them a cassette tape so they could, "share" it with me. So maybe that is not completely new.

There are some things it is just not cool to share. COVID-19 19 has taken us to extreme measures not to share. We stay home, close down everything, including church. We do not want to take the slightest risk that we would share that or that someone else would share with us. As God forbid someone close to you starts sneezing or showing symptoms. We give them the same kind of respect that has been reserved for lepers in the past. I was in Lowes earlier this year and the guy behind me let out a huge sneeze. I must have responded like he was torturing puppies. He saw my look and said "Dude, I have allergies!" I felt a bit foolish, but that is where we are with this pandemic. We do not want to share.

Conversations about sharing crop up frequently in any house that has young children. We want to teach our kids not to be selfish and to be able to share. That means as parents or grandparents we must lead by example. That gets particularly tough when you have your favorite ice cream. Is it OK to not share with your kids when it is Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia? Asking for a friend.

Most of us are OK with sharing, most of the time,

That brings us to today's passage. We are looking at Acts Chapter 4: 32-37. A glimpse into the life of the early church. It is a good passage to follow on from our stewardship campaign. Scripture tells of a community that shared a lot, in fact as we read this passage, it seems that was a big part of who they were.

Reading from verse 32 of the 4th chapter of Acts.

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.³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.³⁴There 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.³⁵They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement').³⁷He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

There are two phrases that jump out as I read the passage, "The whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul." Really? We understand they were a truly diverse group in that early church. They probably numbered in a few thousands. Some folks of Jewish tradition, some of Gentile tradition, different languages, and customs. How is it possible that they were of one heart and soul?

We have a family of 4, 3 right now with Aidan at college and we cannot agree what to have for dinner or what movie to watch! Are we to believe this young church were all on the same page?

Surely there were disagreements, surely someone got mad that they painted the church kitchen yellow instead of green. There must have been a church meeting about some mess the youth group had left. Surely someone had a falling out over some

theological matter. Well actually, yes, they did. We know they did, we can read about it in Acts 15. We read from verse 1.

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them."

We then read how they dealt with the issue. Paul and Barnabas and a few others were assigned to travel to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders regarding the issue. As they travelled, they heard how many Gentiles had come to faith. When they arrived, they were welcomed, and some Pharisees stated the Gentiles must be circumcised to keep the law. We read that the apostles and elders met to discuss the issue. After much discussion, Peter speaks to the work God has done with the Gentiles fact that they have been saved through faith alone. Then we read this in verse 12.

"The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them."

Then James shares that they will not make it difficult for the new Gentiles believers, while quoting Amos chapter 9. We then read in verse 22

*22 Then the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas."*

From what I can see here, there was a disagreement. The leaders met. There was a lot of storytelling about the grace of God. There was also a lot of listening. Did you catch that line about the whole assembly being silent as they listened to Paul and Barnabas? Scripture was read and a decision was made. And then the whole church was onboard with the next step.

I think this passage helps us get to what is meant by, *"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul."* I do not think it means they agreed on everything. How could they? It means they knew how to solve disagreements and move on together as one. They were all onboard with the truth of the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. That is what made them of one heart and soul. And I think that is what motivated them to do the next thing we will look at.

We read, ***“Everything they owned was held in common.”*** Which the NIV translates as ***“They shared everything they had”***. A few lines later we read, ***“There was not a needy person among them.”***

That is a beautiful thing and that could cover a multitude of needs. There is a sense of a common bond between the believers and a desire to be in this together. It does seem there were those in the community that had much, but with what they had, they took care of all the ones who did not have much, they took care of the community.

Now, and I am treading lightly here, it could be quite easy to politicize this passage, and The Good Lord knows, at this tender moment in our nation’s history, I am not going there! But we should not ignore it. I have read various blogs this week that take a definite political slant on this idea of selling what you have, to share with the body. All we can do is look at what scripture says and let The Holy Spirit guide us. We read ***“No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.”*** We read that many sold land and homes and gave the proceeds to the church leaders and there was not a needy person among them. It is also true this was not a rule in the early church. Most commentators would say not everyone would have done this. It was a choice. In fact in the next chapter with the awful story of a man called Ananias and his wife, who lied to the leaders about how much they made from selling a property, we find that he is asked by Peter, ***“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?”***

While not the point of the tale, we learn it was his choice to sell and his choice what to do with the proceeds.

Where I do want to go with this is the idea that this new faith of this new this Church had the concept of OURS. It was not Peter’s faith; it was not John’s. There is a sense that it is not his, or hers. This faith was theirs. They would have said, OURS.

And though we live in a different time and a different place, we are still able to look around at this place, this community and see it as OURS. As we spend time thinking of these last almost 70 years we have been here as a church, the realization is that this is bigger than us, it has been here before us and will be here after us, we have been handed something to take care of and we will pass it on when our time is done. So, no ministry here is mine, or yours. They are ours. Regardless of who we have lead them.

My youth group, my bible study, my Sunday School. I know I have used those words. While that may not seem so bad in itself, what it leads to is this. We describe each other's ministries as yours. You are doing this You are doing that. Should be WE are doing this or that.

No ministry belongs to any individual or even committee. They are ours. If we can eliminate the words, me, them, mine, yours, when we chat about what we do here and replace them with we, us, ours. I think we become a lot healthier and closer to being of one heart and soul.

Sure sometimes it feels like yours because, you are the only one doing anything, And it is true we are given leaders, people who are trained and gifted in certain roles and we need them to provide leadership & keep us on target. In Acts 15 where they discussed the disagreement, there were leaders and James make a decision as leader. The best leaders have enough humility to recognize the wisdom of others.

And of course, it is probably running through some of your minds that the ministries are not even ours they are God's. But God has entrusted us at this time with this place.

When our ministries become yours or mine or hers or his, we may be missing the point. They are Ours; they are God's. To find God's leading it needs as many of us as possible to discern the will of God, that's one of our strengths as Presbyterians, decision making is fairly widespread, lessons the chance of a crackpot, making us drink the Kool Aid!

We do not need to agree on every detail, thank goodness that would be awful, but as we live with our disagreements we must understand all of this is ours, we are all a part, no matter how small or big our role is perceived to be, it is ours.

If we learn anything from the early Church, let us learn, that we are in this together. That means we need to have lots of grace, patience, understanding, justice, and love, not just to give but to receive.

And sometimes we may have to share the Ben and Jerry's.

Amen.