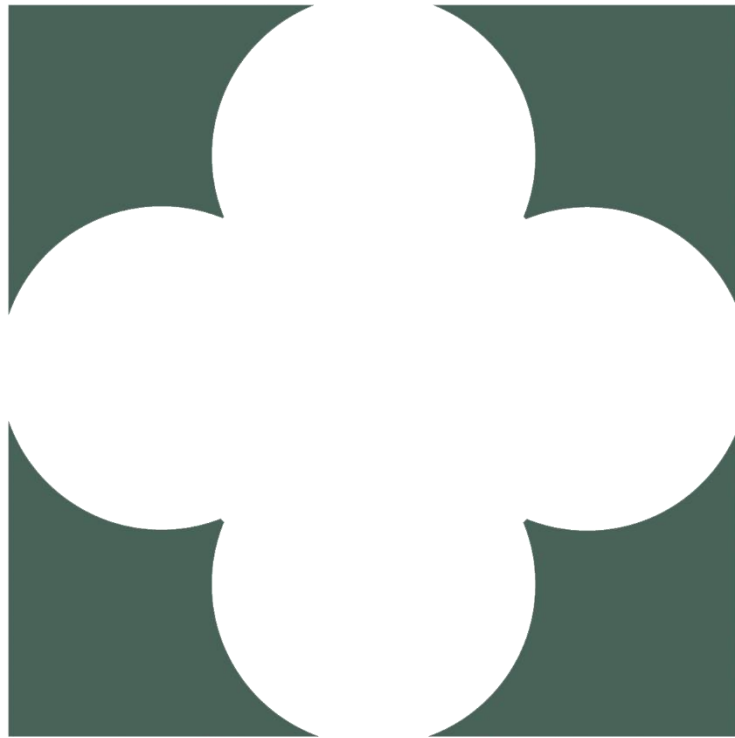


More Than Enough

Dr. Patricia L. Hunter



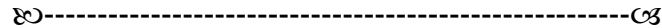
seattle first baptist

June 19, 2022

Acts 4:32-34

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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. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 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.



I mentioned last week that for June and July we are looking at the work of those first churches as described in the book of Acts. Those churches were in transition as they tried to figure out how to share the gospel and what it meant to walk in the way of Jesus. Since we as a congregation are also in transition, we might find some wisdom on how to navigate this season as we look at how those first churches built community and shared their faith.

When I read our text for today, it makes my head spin, because I have a hard time figuring out how it worked. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, wrote:

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.

Is the book saying that those first believers shared their wealth freely with one another? Is it really saying that all needs were met because everyone shared what they had? Yep, that is what the book is saying. But, how does that happen? As I look at the state of our Christian Churches today, I see more jockeying for political influence and not so much serving the least of these among them. If the Church (capital C) cared about the least of these, there would be free universal childcare. Amen somebody. And I still see some denominations focused on who's sleeping with whom, who they can put out, kick out, and withhold benefits from instead of opening the doors and saying whosoever will, let them come. Perhaps the institutional church lost its way somewhere.

I believe community care and transformation happens when there is a shared commitment to love, healing, and wholeness. Community covenants and serving one's neighbor must be more important than one's personal goal of having it all, doing it all, or making it all.

The capitalistic mantra that says I deserve to get more and more, and I don't care if that means you have less, would not have been tolerated by the first church of Jerusalem.

It is not by accident that Luke first tells us the community was of one heart and soul. The new believers operated as a unit and were singularly focused. Even with the diversity of languages at Pentecost, there was unity in heart and soul. The community was committed to sharing the love of Jesus Christ with believers and non-believers — period.

When those first believers committed themselves to Christ, everything changed. It was more than an intellectual exercise from the neck up. And it was definitely more than lip service. It was a total body, total life, transformational experience. The whole concept of who was family changed. All those who walked in the way of Jesus were family. All the believers were mother, father, parent, sister, brother, sibling. And all deserved the upmost care.

That spiritual transformation touched everything, even how they looked at their wealth — their houses and their land.

Theologian Alan Padgett wrote in *Feasting on the Word* that

The problem with wealth is spiritual—it easily takes our minds off of God and weakens our faith. Money is not evil, but scripture proclaims that the love of money is the root of all evil.

As a Certified Financial Planner, professional, I love talking about money and wealth management. But money is just a tool. When I do financial planning, my first question is what are your goals? Where is your heart? What is your passion?

It is understandable these days that a great deal of our attention is on our money. Gas prices are well over \$5 a gallon. Food prices are staggering. Housing costs are sinfully high. The stock market has dropped over 20% since January and we are officially in a bear market. We are seeing our investments and 401K's slide south real fast so who wouldn't be focused on money.

Yet, our text reminds us that even with all that is spiraling around us, our priority must always be on things of the Spirit. God must always be our first love. Even in the midst of craziness and uncertainty, loving God and serving God's people must come first. Loving

God and loving the people go hand in hand. It is the womanist way to live. Relationships come first.

When loving God and serving God's people are our highest priorities, we may be surprised that we use our wealth differently. We may give away our money more liberally. When God is the center of our joy, we may change our focus from acquiring things to thanking God for simple gifts of grace, like locally grown strawberries, low tides for clam digging, and hummingbirds that fly backwards.

Now having said all this about money and wealth, even the first church of Jerusalem struggled with this. So, while Luke wrote there was unity and oneness of heart in chapter 4, as soon as we get to chapter 5 we have financial deception.

Time will not allow me to say much about the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Like many others in the first church of Jerusalem, they sold property — a field — and gave the proceeds to the community. But ego got in the way, and they lied about the amount they received from the sale. The couple said they were giving all the proceeds to the church when they secretly kept back some money for themselves. There was no requirement that they had to give anything. Those who sold property and land gave because they wanted to.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be recognized like others were for their generosity. Yet they are now known for lying. Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead as soon as they were caught in the lie. The moral of that story is don't lie, because it is not going to end well. Honesty is still the best policy.

The author of Acts wants us to know that resurrection in Jesus still has power to transform our lives. Even those places where we think God has nothing to say. The power of the spirit can give us new insight on our finances. The power of the spirit can get us unstuck from our past. The power of the Spirit can nudge us to better our self-care. The power of the Spirit will instruct us on how we raise our children and how we treat our elders with respect and reverence. The power of the holy can transform and impact all areas of our lives.

When we give our whole selves to the power of the most high and walk in the way of Jesus, believing in the power of resurrection, the beloved community will be transformed. We can have unity of purpose, and care for all our neighbors. Yes, there is more than enough. There is more than enough in this world for all God's people to live

with hope and dignity. We just have to choose to share. And all God's people said, amen.

Our closing hymn is, ***O For a World***, #57. Please stand as you are able.