

Acts 4:32-35

ESV They Had Everything in Common

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. **33** And with great power the apostles were giving 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 were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold **35** and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

1 John 1:1-2:2

English Standard Version

The Word of Life

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—** **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** 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 cleanses us from all sin.** **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all**

unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**

John 20:19-31 ESV Jesus Appears to the Disciples

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**" ²² **And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.** ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed

because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon. In this period between Easter and Pentecost we drop the Old Testament reading in favor of a reading from Acts. But, the outline of the book of Hosea is relevant today. Hosea was told by God to take a prostitute as a wife, and then live out the tribulations he experiences with that arrangement. It is an example of a **visible demonstration of a message that God** is conveying to the Hebrews. As we delve into the texts today we have to appreciate that, **just as Hosea was a means of conveying the Divine message, so, too, is Jesus the Christ as he serves as both our redeemer and as our best – and perfect – example of what God wishes in mankind. It is Divinely inspired experiential learning.**

Our Gospel text for today draws our attention to the story of Doubting Thomas. If you consider the totality of the post Resurrection discussion, the other ten disciples were not particularly insightful and immediately faithful regarding the Resurrection either. Remember that the women told the disciples and Peter and John then ran to the tomb to confirm what the women had told them. The others, perhaps, were too afraid to venture out. You remember that our text last week recounted how, that same day of the Resurrection, Jesus came to the disciples, less Thomas (who was, unfortunately for him, not present). What that means is that the 10 disciples who witnessed Jesus come into their room and eat with them were privy to a physical proof. That seems to be the only difference between them and Thomas – they saw the risen Jesus and he didn't. So, notwithstanding our focus on Doubting Thomas, I don't think that is the point of today's Gospel text. **Just as we discussed last week, I think that the point this week is the**

same as last week – Jesus challenged the disciples when he came to them. He gave them a task and he gave them authority. This is underscored by how John concludes this chapter and the book – telling us that the whole purpose of the book is to share the Gospel so that the world may know.

Our epistle lesson is a follow on to the Gospel. John has taken up the challenge from Jesus and is testifying of God’s grace to his audience. The bottom line that he provides is that Jesus the Christ is the fulfillment of the promise of grace and that we should live accordingly.

Our Acts reading takes us to the early days of the church, when its adherents enthusiastically embraced the message of living justly as demonstrated in the example of the Christ – experientially learned by the early church through the disciples who were the students of Jesus.

I think that it is a mistake to assume that this lesson is that giving was to be exceptionally sacrificial – selling off your assets in order to provide for the congregation. Now, I do think that sacrificial giving is appropriate and I would be happy to talk further about that in a non-worship venue. We know that early believers were certain that Jesus was going to return soon. Indeed, over the centuries we have seen countless groups with the same conviction. When your horizon comes close to you, then you have a different perspective than if it is at some unknown distance. **I think that the point for today is not the amount of giving, but the fact that the early church members actually were thinking of others** – indeed, perhaps thinking of others first. We Yankees tend to be a very private group. In our world I think that we assume that if someone has a need they will articulate it and then we can provide or solicit help. The Acts message is different – it is one of being proactive. **It appears that the early congregations did not wait for stewardship appeals, but, rather, assumed that there were unmet needs and that we, as God’s people, should be concerned with them.**

On an individual basis, this means being tuned into each other – difficult when we tend to privacy. **That can be as simple as just talking with**

someone. Or considering their feelings before your own. Or being alert to needs of others. But, **back to the point of the text – the early church reflected very much the experiential example of Jesus** and his ministry.

Jesus' appearance to the Eleven, including Thomas, is all about the challenge to take the Good News further. To not be afraid, to be empowered and to get the Good News out to everyone. John's epistle takes up that Divine mandate and challenges John's readers to walk in the light that Christ provides and not the darkness that we otherwise live in. Acts is an example of how some of the early believers were trying to walk in the light. God has saved and redeemed them and their response is to care for each other, sacrificially. It is all about the Good News of grace and what that grace frees us – enables us – empowers us – to do. Spread the Good News. Translate that Good News into your own actions.

Sometimes we revert to our Jonah personalities – keeping the Good News locked up as if for our own benefit. Sometimes, I suspect, we take the same view toward helping others – why help those people? For sure, none of us and no entity, such as this church, can help everyone with all of their needs. That is not the point. The point is that God has provided richly for us. Atonement for our countless sins. Fellowship with Him and each other. The practical wherewithal to live on this planet in this place. Given all of our blessings, what else can we do other than to follow the example of the early church? Our God given responsibility is to share the Good News in every way possible so that the world will know of His goodness and outreach to us. A starting point for this is to grasp what those blessings are to each of us personally. Not an academic question, but a very real one of our own personal experience. Where is God in your life? Exactly how do you reflect Him in how you live? In your actions. Your priorities. Glorify God in your living so that the world may know of Him and what He has done and is doing.

By His grace alone. In faith alone. In Christ alone. Through the guidance of Scripture alone. That we may, in all that we do, give all glory to God alone. Solideogloria. Amen.