

Title: What's mine is yours
Text: Acts 4.32-37
Theme: Your need is my need
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: Caring for one another is picture of and outgrowth of the gospel.

Read Text:

Many of the NT epistles, like Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians begin by explaining what it means to be a believer in Christ in terms of our standing in Christ. Then, the rest of the letter focuses on helping us see how that is to be displayed in our lives. Your position in Christ drives your practice as a Christian. But, coming to faith in Christ is a spiritual reality. That is, the Spirit gives you life, gives you faith, gives you a new heart, gives you new affections, gives you new desires, gives you a new conscience, and new love. When you come to faith in Christ you become a new person because you are in Christ. When you put a bunch of people together who are all in Christ together, you should see reflections of Jesus all over the place. And, that is what was happening here in the life of the early church. Luke gives us another slice of life in the early church. It is marked by unity, spontaneity and voluntary generosity. In other words, this...

1. **This looks just like Jesus!** (32)

At this point, no one knows what to call these people. Here they are referred to as "*those who believed.*" That is a bit clumsy for a church sign, but "*those who received his word*" and "*all who believed*" where the designations that Luke has used so far. Later on, the believers are called Christians. It is a term that literally means, "little Christ." But, look at verse 32. This is so rich. Look at how much of Jesus is reflected in lives of these believers. "no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common." Do you see the point? It all starts with Christ. He gave his life. He shared his very life and everything that he had. Everything that we have in Christ is because Christ gave it to us. Everything that we are in Christ is because of Christ. The mark of a believer is one whose life is not his own because he has been saved by a Redeemer who lived that way and by a King who rules that way.

a. Incarnation

The incarnation of Christ refers to how Christ, the Creator humbled himself and became part of his own creation. The incarnation of Christ is the term used to describe the advent (coming) and birth of Christ. Therefore, think of incarnation as: identifying with another in a sacrificial way. In order to become one of us, he had to give up a lot of what he had and had use of. He did not consider all of the benefits of his equality with God to being more important than us. In order to rescue us, he had to become one of us. In order to become of one of us, he had to subject what he was to what we are. No one made him do it. The incarnation of Christ was his free and voluntary choice. He loves us that much. This is what we are called to be and do. Think of who you identify with in a sacrificial way.

The early church is marked by members giving up a lot of what they had in order to enable them to care for one another. These believers did not consider what they had to be as important as their brothers and sisters. Let's say that you discover that your 5-year-old child has a cancerous tumor on her spine and she needs surgery to remove it. Of course that is very troubling, but, let's say that you find out that Detroit has the pre-eminent pediatric surgeon in the country who specializes in this very kind of surgery and he is scheduled to do the surgery. Are you grateful? Absolutely! But, let's say that months later, after a perfectly successful surgery you find out that this surgeon was scheduled to be in Colorado with his family on a ski vacation, but delayed his trip in order to do the surgery, now you are not only grateful, you are overwhelmed. He gave up good things that he was entitled to, in order to be in a position to care well for you and your child. Did he have to delay his vacation? No. But, he gave up what he didn't have to give up in order to serve you. That is what Jesus did. He gave up the honor and worship as the Son of God in order to become one of us. He gave up his glory and hid that behind the veil of a human body in order to live the life that we could not live. He gave up his right to justice in order to be unjustly condemned for our sins. He gave up his right for honor in order to be despised and humiliated by his death on the cross. He gave that up so that he could serve us. Now, here these believers were doing things that reflected that. They were giving up privileges and possessions in order to be able to care for someone else.

You may not have an extra piece of property laying around to sell in order to have funds to care for another brother or sister's need, but when you give up your time and you talk to someone, and pray with someone and encourage someone, or make a meal for someone, or give someone a ride, or anything that values the other person, you are reflecting Christ. But there is more and they are all related to one another. Because Christ became one of us, we cannot say, "You have no idea what my life is like." He does. But he became one of us in order to do more than identify with us.

b. Justification

When Christ came to this earth and took upon himself a human body, he became one of us, without sacrificing who he was. Even though he was in actuality God, he lived as a man. Yes, he fully understands what it is like to be hungry, tired, thirsty, discouraged, sorrowful, exhausted, rejected and tempted. As one of us, he fully identified with us. He is not a distant God. He took our concerns, our needs, our sins, so seriously that he literally bore them upon himself. When he died on the cross, he carried our sorrows. He bore our shame. He was counted as being guilty. He was treated as if he had committed our sin. That is what makes his death the only means by which our sins can be forgiven. Only he could bear them. Only he could be credited with them. And only he could pay the penalty by means of his death that is sufficient to pay for them. But, that is only part of the story. When you trust in Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, he not only forgives you of your sin, he credits you with his perfect righteousness. Just as he takes credit for your sin, you get credit for his perfect life. Do you see how what happens to you when you become a believer helps direct your life as a believer? Just as Christ took our lives upon himself and gave us his life, this tells us how we are to see one another, not only in Christ but in relation to one another. (more on that in a minute) Justification is the portal for the believer's union with Christ.

c. Union with Christ

“those who believed were of one heart and soul” The union of these believers ran deep, very deep. The language that Luke uses here is used in the OT to describe total devotion to God that is seen in love for God, worship of God and obedience to his commands. Now, that expression is used to describe the relationship that these believers have with one another. Their union was deep. Again, this comes from Christ. Every believer is in Christ and Christ is in every believer. The relationship is so intertwined that Jesus said, the two cannot be separated. Now, here in the early church, Anna finds out that Martha has a need, or Anna finds out that there are needs because some of the believers have been put out of their homes, or have lost their jobs because of their faith in Christ. So, Anna and her husband Jacob see these needs and when they help meet those needs do you see what they are doing? They are saying, your need is my need and my resources are your resources. That is what Jesus did for us. He took our need and gave us his resources (which was him). Caring for one another like that, puts the gospel on display.

d. Trinity

So, in the prayer that Jesus prayed the night before he died, he said *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* (John 17.20-21) So, when Luke says that “the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul” these believers were enjoying a unity amongst themselves that reflected the unity that God enjoyed as being God. What makes the Trinity so joyful, so happy, and so glorious? Each one is committed to the glory and the joy of the other. What was happening in the early church? The believers were committed to the well being and joy of others. That is supernatural! Anyone can get a killer band, have awesome special effects, and slick productions. But finding a group of people who care more about you than their own comfort? That is supernatural.

Remember, that this is what the early believers looked like, even though their lives were getting squeezed and pressured by the authorities. They had every reason to look at the political and economic climate and play it safe. Instead, here were all sorts of believers who said, you have a need and I am going to meet it. This is not socialism. Socialism says, you have too much and I am going to take it away. The gospel says, you have a need and I am going to help. How do we do this? Take a step. 1) Own this as your mission. You are the church. 2) Ask God to help you love others. 3) Talk to others. 4) Talk to people you do not know. 5) Ask God to help you know how to be responsive to the needs around you. As we love each other well, there will be so many opportunities to testify to others about the gospel, because they will want to know why you/we live that way.

2. This is answered prayer (33)

This whole scene began in chapter 3 with Peter and John going to the Temple to pray and they healed a man lame from birth. The miracle of the healing provided an opportunity for the gospel to be preached. Well, that didn't go over too well with the officials who were very irritated by hearing repeatedly of the resurrection of Christ. So, they arrested Peter and John, kept them in

jail over night, then threatened to punish them if they kept talking about Jesus. But, the problem was, they really couldn't do much because the lame man wasn't lame anymore and he was standing right there. So, Peter and John go back to the believers and as we studied last week they prayed for boldness to keep preaching the gospel even though they were threatened. They prayed for boldness and God answered their prayers in part through their generosity toward one another. V. 33 is surrounded by 32 and 34. I take 33 to be influenced by what is around it (explain).

What is happening here is the answer to that prayer. In chapter 3, the miracle of this man being healed by the miraculous power of God gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel and many people came to faith in Christ. Now, (don't miss this), the miracle of these believers selling their possessions in order to care for one another resulted in no one being needy among them. This was obviously having a huge impact. Once again, churches today want to know "what works." The early church was focused on "who works."

3. This is gospel fruit in the life of the church (34-37)

This is not socialism or communism because this text is not giving instructions for life in society. This text is telling us what happens to people in the church when they take the gospel seriously. Socialism is the top-down enforced redistribution of property, resources, goods and services. Margaret Thatcher famously said that socialism works until you run out of other people's money. Someone else said that it is like Jurassic Park. It starts out with a lot of oooing and aaahing, but by the end everyone is screaming and running for their lives. There was nothing here that was top-down. All of the generosity was bottom-up. The people saw a need and the people responded to meet the need.

There are three things I want to make certain that you see.

a. **Generosity** (34-35)

Who is happiest ever? God. Who is the most generous ever? God. Yes, there is a relationship between the two. "As many as were owners of land or houses." Again, this is descriptive and not prescriptive. This is describing what they did, but it is not giving a command as to what you have to do. This is describing the generosity of the people. Some of the people (not all certainly) had land and houses and sold what they did not need in order to provide what others needed. It is also likely that some took people into their homes, fed them, sheltered them, and provided for them. But, the big idea is how generous people were. They looked for opportunities to help and did not have to be told to do it.

Cornerstone, I am amazed that I get to be your pastor. While some of you probably need to grow in the grace of generosity, there are many of you, many of you who get it and you are such a joy. Before the service we played a video that told the recent story of how a small group got together and got a car for another member because they needed one. Then before the sermon, you listened to Steve tell you how the church (and others too) have responded to his need. In both of those cases, no one told you what to do. You heard about the need and you responded. I hear these and I just laugh with delight. But, there's more. I want you to hear another story.

Here is a good example of that (video)

When you are on the receiving end of generosity, you get a taste of grace. You are given something because you are loved and because you really matter. That is what Jesus has done for us, and that is what we get to do for others. But, won't people take advantage of this? Won't some people abuse this? They sure will. That is why while the early church was generous, it was also organized.

b. Organized

In verses 35 and 37, we read that in many cases, the people brought the proceeds and laid them at the apostle's feet. The apostles were entrusted with making sure that these funds were used for actual needs. As we will see, that became such a logistical need, that the apostles had to give this area of ministry away to others. But, the point is, just because someone wanted something didn't mean they got it. "It was distributed to each as any had need." Some people's "needs" are not really needs, but wants and if you give people money who are too lazy to work, you are not helping them, you are hurting them. There are legitimate needs and we should be industrious, resourceful, and budget-conscious so that we can be generous. If you don't manage your time, it will manage you. If you don't manage your money, it will manage you. But, why should you manage your money? Simply so that you will have more? No, so that you can be prepared to meet needs when they arise. Barnabas was.

c. Personal example (36-37)

What an encouragement!

Unity like this is so powerful, so attractive, so compelling, and so beautiful. It is all of this because it reflects God, therefore, unity like this is always going to be under attack. And as we will see next week, the attack is not primarily from without, but from within. And this is the reality of life in a local church. We are called to be something and do something that we do not do perfectly, yet.

Communion: Wedding reception, eating a meal with some people we had never met before. Common courtesy to introduce ourselves and talk. We are about to have a meal. The Lord's Supper. Common courtesy is seen in caring about others and learning their names. Uncommon courtesy, supernatural courtesy is caring enough about others to share our lives.