

Sharing (It's Weird!)  
Acts 4:43-37  
John 15:9-14, 17-20

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Acts 4:43-37

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. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

John 15:9-14, 17-20

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.

This passage from Acts is not preached very often. It appears once in the three-year cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary, and it's put together with the much-more-fun story of Doubting Thomas.<sup>1</sup> I'm sure that Thomas makes it into many more Sunday after Easter sermons in Year B than this story ever does.

But it is Scripture. There is wisdom here for us.

Money is a topic we don't like to talk about, isn't it? The old joke says never ask a woman her age or a man his salary. Only a handful of people in our congregation know who gives how much to the church (and just for the record, I'm not one of them).

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<sup>1</sup> John 20:19-31.

That's because the world out there judges people on how much money they have. The world out there tells us constantly that rich people have the world figured out. That, if they're rich, they must be wise and virtuous.

In our hearts, we know that's not true. If it were true, all these reality shows about celebrities would be incredibly boring, as they kept choosing the morally and ethically right response to the challenges life and the producers threw at them.<sup>2</sup> The tabloid media would go out of business.

We know that's not true for another reason. Scripture tells us that the true worth of a human being lies in their being a Child of God, not in their wallet. Scripture tells us again and again that riches in this world are not a sign of God's favor, even though that's what rich people want to hear. Scripture tells us that the poor in spirit are blessed, that the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.<sup>3</sup> Scripture tells us that Jesus was not a rich man, that other people paid his bills. Scripture tells us that the love of money, not money itself, but the love of money, is the root of all evil.<sup>4</sup>

And still the world out there keeps telling us that "The one who dies with the most toys, wins."<sup>5</sup> That "greed is good."<sup>6</sup>

This causes what psychologists call cognitive dissonance, and most of us less precisely call uncomfortable confusion. So we don't like to talk about it.

Hang onto that. I'll come back to it.

It's been a rough Spring, hasn't it?

Stay-at-home orders.

Stores and restaurants closed.

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<sup>2</sup> Can you imagine a reality TV show full of the character Chidi from *The Good Place*?

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:3.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

<sup>5</sup> A popular 1980's bumper sticker.

<sup>6</sup> *Wall Street* (1987).

Worshipping online instead of gathering together in the same room, even on Easter Sunday. There were only two people in the sanctuary on Easter Sunday morning, and they were showing us an Easter banner, not leading worship.

I went looking this week for what other people have thought about this passage, and I came across what a preacher named Will Willimon said. "The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not an empty tomb or a well-orchestrated pageant on Easter Sunday but rather a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community, that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history."<sup>7</sup>

The most eloquent testimony to the reality of Jesus' resurrection is not the empty tomb. That could have been accomplished by grave robbers. It wasn't, but it could have been.

The most eloquent testimony to the reality of Jesus' resurrection is not a well-orchestrated Easter pageant. It's not even a full sanctuary on Easter Sunday. The most trite, pointless high school talent show you've ever heard of may be well-orchestrated, and it will often have a full house. That doesn't mean that there's any genuine meaning there.

No, the most eloquent testimony to the reality of Jesus' resurrection is a group of people whose lives are different. Different from the way that the world builds a community. Different from the way people of the world act.

People who care about each other, and about other people.

People who look after each other, even when there's nothing in it for them.

People who are willing to endure discomfort, if it will help other people.

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<sup>7</sup> Will Willimon, *The Acts of the Apostles* in the *Interpretation* series, 1988. p. 51. Will Willimon went on to be a bishop and one of the most eloquent preachers of the United Methodist Church, but, when he wrote this, he was Dean of the Chapel at Duke University.

People who are willing to stand up to “the way of the world,” if it is counter to the way of the Kingdom.

People who love people and use things, instead of the other way around.

People who do justice, and love kindness.

People who walk humbly, because they know it’s not all about them.<sup>8</sup>

On our good days, we are people like that.

It’s really hard to keep doing that every day, though. It seems like everything you hear on the television or the radio or on the Internet is telling you, “It’s all about me.” And “Nice people finish last.” And “I got mine, forget you.”

That causes cognitive dissonance. It causes uncomfortable confusion. We know that what we’re hearing is wrong, but we may not be able to put into words why it’s wrong. Particularly when we’re tired.

That’s why we need each other.

To remind us who we are, that we are Children of God. Children of the God who loved the world so much, that Jesus came and was born and lived and died and was resurrected for us.

To help bump us back in the direction we need to be going, living our entire lives as a response to that.

The early church community gathered and ate together, both sexes and all social classes together. That was radical at the time. Radical and weird.

They shared their money, so that no one went hungry. That was radical and weird.

They gathered together to encourage each other and remind each other who they were and to help each other stay the course.

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<sup>8</sup> Micah 6:8.

I pray for all of us that we will continue to be radical and weird.

I pray that, when we are tempted to conform to the ways of the world, we will be reminded that we are Children of God, and just how amazing that is.

I pray that we will all be reminded just how amazing God is, and how amazing our response should be to God's love.

I pray that we will all share what we have, whether that is money, or encouragement, or energy, or love. Or some combination of those things.

And be okay with being weird. Jesus certainly was.

In Christ's name,

Amen.