

“Won’t Share”

Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; ² with his wife’s knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. ³ “Ananias,” Peter asked, “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us[Ⓜ] but to God!” ⁵ Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men came and wrapped up his body,[Ⓜ] then carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price.” And she said, “Yes, that was the price.” ⁹ Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

This week’s weird story takes place during the early days of the founding of the Church. The day of Pentecost has arrived. The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. Next, we are told that “all who believe were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Then just two chapters later, we get this weird story of Ananias and Sapphira, which paints a less than idyllic picture of the early Church.

Again, as people of faith, we find ourselves wondering what exactly we are supposed to do with this weird story found within our sacred text. Is Luke implying that death will come to us if we do not sell our possessions and give all the proceeds to the church? Well yes and no. Luke is not telling us that literally a bolt of lightning will come down and struck us dead if we do not give 100% of our income to the church. However, through this story, Luke is telling us that it will be like death for us if we respond to God's grace only out of obligation rather than see it as a gift freely given. Luke is telling us that it will be like death if we put aside the narrative of God's abundance and take up the narrative of scarcity which this world constantly tells us is true. Through this story of Ananias and Sapphira, Luke is telling us death will find us, find the community, if we lose sight of the vision of the Kingdom of God fully realized here on Earth, a vision which guides our interactions with others, a vision which stands in contrast to the values of greed and power which dominate our world, Luke tells us it will be like death for us, for the community of faith, if we begin to only care about our own needs while ignoring the needs of others in our midst.

Here is what I mean by that: Luke is one of the few Gospel writers who does not shy away from talking about money. Luke's Gospel is the one which tell us about the young man who goes away crying after Jesus tells him to sell his possessions and follow him. The young man is unable to do what Jesus asks

because he cannot imagine a life without his riches. Luke is also the one who tells us that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a person with riches to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Luke's Gospel, time and time again through parables, through Jesus' teachings, through stories of Jesus' ministry, as people of faith, we are reminded that where our treasures lay, there our hearts will be also. He does this because Luke understands the illusion of security which money offers us. Luke understands the power money has to pull us away, to distract us from seeking out the Kingdom of God in our midst. Luke understands that it is love of money which is the root of all evil. Luke understands that in our search for security, for power, for money, there will never be enough, which is the complete opposite of what God's abundance grace tells us is true.

That is why Luke plays on society's obsession with money through this story of Ananias and Sapphira. Luke knows that we will assume that Ananias and Sapphira met their untimely end because they did not share all the proceeds with the church. Luke knows we will assume that it was all about the money. Luke knows that we will assume that the same systems of greed which rule the world also operated within the early Church as well.

Luke plays on society's, plays on our obsession with money...to pull the rug right out from under our feet because oddly enough this weird story in our Bible is not about money. It was and is about the fact that Ananias and Sapphira's act of deception endangered the community of faith. Their act of unfaithfulness undermined the trust, undermined the relationships, undermined the very vision of the Kingdom of God which guided the community of faith's words and actions, which still guide our words and actions as modern day disciples of Christ.

Luke wants his readers to understand that this breach of trust puts the whole community of faith at risk because it goes against our very call. As people of faith, we are called to live out an alternative narrative, a narrative based on the abundance of God's grace, a narrative which tells us that it is all about the larger community, not about us as individuals. As people of faith, we are called to show this world that it is not all about power and wealth but rather about being transformed by the possibilities of the Kingdom of God in our midst. It is about living out a vision where all live in community, where all are seen as Beloved children of God, where all are made whole.

Ananias and Sapphira's act jeopardizes all that. In their deception, in their unfaithfulness, they acted in ways which go against the very values of the Kingdom of God. Their act would have brought death to the vision of God's Shalom fully realized here on Earth. Their act would have made the community of

faith just like all the other oppressive, unfair systems which rule our world. And that was not a risk the early church could take.

This weird story is a cautionary tale for us as communities of faith because it reminds us that as people of faith, although we live in this world, we are not to embrace its unjust systems which reward a select few while ignoring others. Rather we are to set the prisoners free. We are to break down the oppressive systems which keeps others in cycles of poverty for generations to come. We are to scatter the proud. We are to bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly. We are to fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. As people who have experienced the abundance of God's grace, who know the possibilities of new life which are in our midst, as ones who are to be a light to all nations, we are called to work to bring about God's Kingdom here on Earth just as it is in heaven, and not just for a select few but for all of God's people.

You see, there is too much at risk if we ignore or forget this call. There is too much at risk if we forget who we are and whose we are. There is too much at risk if people simply think we are just like every other institution, only caring for ourselves while ignoring the problems in our midst. Because as the Church, as people of faith, it is not nor has it ever been about budgets, buildings, or having more bottoms in the seats. It has always been about being the Body of Christ here on Earth so that all will know the life transforming power of God's abundant grace.

That is what is at stake when we as the Church, as people of faith, act in ways which do not reflect God's abundant grace. That is what is at stake when we act in ways which do not show the welcome is wide. That is what is at stake when we act in ways which buys into the narrative of scarcity rather than live out the narrative which tells of God's transforming love.

As the church, everything we do...has never been about building us up. It has always been about reflecting the very character of our God which we know to be true...a God who is steadfast from generation to generation, a God who is abundant in God's love, a God who since the beginning of time has worked and is still working to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

As people of faith, we reflect this understanding of God, every time we come together in community and share what we have, not out of any sense of obligation or as a requirement of faith, but as a response to God's grace freely given. As people of faith, we reflect this understanding of who God is every time we come together as one to build up the Kingdom of God here on Earth so that healing and wholeness maybe fully realized for all of God's people. As people of faith, we reflect this understanding of who God is every time we come together as one sharing what we have, holding nothing back, because we know that through Christ a way of life together has been made possible unlike anything this world has ever seen. May it be so. Amen.