

Easter 2

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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 was held in common. There was not a needy person among them....."

This community described in the early development of the Christian Church in Jerusalem is noted for the sharing of wealth. It is the only such community described in the New Testament. The striking ideal is not that goods were held in common, or that people sold personal possessions to support that in which they believed, the striking ideal is that the needs of all were met. These believers clearly were transformed by the apostles' teaching and the witness of those who knew Jesus. Their lives were changed by the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead to seal the promise to all of eternal life.

In the early days the followers of Jesus tasted the very kingdom that Jesus talked about throughout his ministry. Here is a community where no one is in want while others struggle over how to invest their excess funds. Here is a community where everyone is willing to sacrifice for the well being of others. Here is a community born of a common experience. It is a taste of heaven on earth that we cannot help but envy. In the words of Jesus, these early followers knew where their heart was and there they invested their treasure.

I want to share a story with you. It is a story about an art collector. He had one son that he raised alone after the child's mother died giving birth. The son did very well in school and went off to college. Tragically his freshman year he was killed in an automobile accident. The father was heart broken.

Three years after the tragic accident a young man appeared at the man's door. He introduced himself as a friend of his son. He talked about how well like and respected his son was. Finally he came to point of his visit, "I am an art major. I painted a portrait of your son. I know it is not very good, but I want you to have it."

The art collector looked at the painting and began to cry. He said, "Oh it is perfect. You captured his eyes and his smile perfectly." He proudly hung the painting in his home among other priceless pieces of art.

Many years later the art collector decided to sell his collection. Dealers from around the world came to bid on the art. An auctioneer stood before them and held up the portrait. "This is the first piece to be auctioned off today, he said. The dealers began to grumble. They came for masterpieces not some amateur art. No one bid.

Finally a voice at the back of the room said, "I bid one hundred dollars," It was the art collector's gardener who watched the son grow up. "I have a bid of one hundred dollars, do I have any other bids?" There were no other bids. "Sold for one hundred dollars. And now the auction is over." The dealers started complaining and yelling at the auctioneer. The auctioneer said, "The one who has the Son has it all."

The one who has the Son has it all. That is the story of the early Christian Church. That is your story and my story. That is the story of our faith. We are loved by a God who has blessed us beyond belief. God provides all we need, any and all of us need, to survive comfortably in this world. Everything we have in this life is from the hand of God. God provides more - God provides eternal life. God gives the gift of a Son and those who have the Son have it all. We have the gift of forgiveness, the gift of baptism into God's family, we have the gift of life and life abundantly. God's generosity towards us provides it all.

That is the setting for us this second Sunday in Easter when we talk about committing ourselves and our blessings in service to God through the ministry of this parish family. God has richly blessed us so we might bless others.

There are plenty of voices crying out that now is not the time to talk to people about sharing resources. The stock market has not been friendly to any one lately and the prediction is that things will not get better very soon. Most people have not seen income decrease drastically but they have experienced salary freezes and lower dividends. There is plenty of fear to go around as word like recession and depression get banter about by the press. Most people are not sure how things got to be such a mess. We want to blame someone so we look to CEO's of big corporations, banks and insurance companies who seem to have taken more than

their share. One economist when asked how we ended up in this situation said, "It comes down to two words greed and fear."

Makes the Christian community in first century Jerusalem sound like an impossible ideal. Yet, Jesus reminds us, God has richly blessed us. Blessed us not so we might cling to those blessings, accumulate them for ourselves as if God will never bless us again. God has blessed us so we might bless others."

Our call is to be generous. To be Easter people who know the reality of God's promise and who live in the faith of that promise. The call is to be every bit as generous as God is generous. The reason Jesus urges us to answer that call is "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." When we put our treasure to work for God, then our heart will be led to God. It is that simple.

Jesus knows us well. That which we value most is that which we are going to spend our money, our time and our abilities pursuing. Jesus wants your heart. So, Jesus calls you to be generous with your blessings. Jesus wants your faith to grow and reach out so others may believe. We who are richly blessed have the privilege of blessing others.

We can hear this story and long for the "good old days." We can hear this story and think the early Christians were naive. Or we can hear this story and seek to be like those of the early Church: grounded in the truth of Easter, living by grace, seeking the well being of all and using our resources to serve God. We can invite this story to renew our faith.