

“How then shall we live?”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday April 11, 2021

Acts 4:32-35

With the wondrous strains of Easter’s Hallelujah still echoing, with the empty tomb still proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection, the cross still draped in white as sign of Jesus’ victory over death, in light of all of this, how then shall we live?

Easter proclaims again all the good gifts we have received from God.

We are a community founded on the generosity of God.

We are all here because of the gracious invitation of Jesus.

We are all here because of Jesus gifts given to us.

We are a community founded on the generosity of God.

Everything we have, *everything* we are, is a gift from God that we have received by faith.

How then shall we live?

We shall live learning to be children of our heavenly Father.

We were made to participate in God’s gift giving.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we are to be imitators of God as beloved children.

We are to do what we see have seen Jesus do, what God does.

God has given us all that we have not just for our own enjoyment, benefit and salvation, but God has given it to us so that we might share all that we have with others.

That's the picture that is painted for us in Acts 4.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them.

How could the people in the church do that, share so freely with others? It wasn't a rule or a law of the church, no one commanded it or compelled them to live this way.

But Christ's indwelling presence freed them from exclusive orientation to themselves and opened them up in two directions: towards God, to receive good things in faith, and toward one another, to pass these gifts on in love. (adapted from Free of Charge p.52)

Participating in God's gift giving by giving gifts is the purpose of God's gifts.

It is like a river flowing from God to us and continues on to others. (Free of Charge p. 48)

Many of us in the church have experienced moments like this – deep communion and love for God, and great generosity and love of God's people.

It is how we know the church should be.

We long for this to be the reality all the time.

We long to be deeply connected to Christ, and deeply connected and caring for one another.

It is the dream behind all the other dreams God has given us – it is the foundation of the dreams God has given us.

When I was a student minister, a lot of years ago, I interned at a church in which most folks had a growing dynamic relationship with Jesus, and they cared for each other well.

People were brought to faith, new people were added to the church, and the community, the watching world, knew God was at work, lives were changed, and people were cared for.

They had a practise of giving “love offerings”.

It was something the church people did frequently.

A few people would see a need, or just want to help with something, or just wanted to encourage and bless someone else, and money would go anonymously, there were no tax receipts given, but people were blessed and changed by the graciousness of God and God’s people.

A family went through a crisis of personal bankruptcy, credit card debt got the best of them, they had 3 sons in elementary school.

They lost their home, they lost their car.

The parents both had jobs to get to.

The church helped – helped with groceries, helped with getting a vehicle, helped with first and last month’s rent, helped with the kid’s expenses, and helped the family carry on and learn new ways, and supported them.

A year after the crisis, when they were back on their feet, everyone was moved to tears as the father of the family

thanked God for the support of the congregation for him and for his family.

It was hard to tell who had received more help, the ones who gave or the ones who received.

The whole church community was blessed, we were all were joyful, all were built up.

Miraslav Volf, describes a day when God's kingdom comes in its fullness and he sees it like this: "In the kingdom of God's rule of love we won't quite know where giving ends and receiving begins. We will rejoice in receiving no less than giving because we'll delight in the givers joy and rejoice over each recipients delight." (Free of Charge p.100)

The whole community flourishes as the body of Christ when we share ourselves and what we have.

Giving builds community.

We, you and I, have lived this together.

Sacrificial giving of ourselves to each other and to God, builds the church.

How then shall we live?

As a new community that is being transformed by the love and generosity of God.

As an Easter people who know that we are founded on the generosity of our Saviour Jesus, and we are learning together to receive God's gifts in faith and share them generously in love.

Thanks be to God.