

All who believed 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.

I speak to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When was the last time you asked someone for help? How did you feel?

Maybe it was a small thing: a door held open, a cup of coffee passed across the table. Maybe it was bigger - help with a weighty prayer, a health crisis, a financial need. Was there a time you needed help but couldn't bring yourself to ask?

Hold on to that question while we turn to our scripture.

What a strange moment in Christian history described in Acts today. I'm so grateful the Holy Spirit has preserved this history for us in the Bible - it's a window into the past, when the bedrock of Christian community was being formed.

Jesus' followers are gathered together in the direct aftermath of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. They don't know what's ahead; Jesus could return a hundred years from now or a hundred seconds. Long before the age of rectors and vestries and annual meetings, this group of faithful people, facing an uncertain future, began with the basics:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

This is a vow we make at baptism, too: the celebrant asks “Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?” and the congregation responds, “I will, with God’s help.”

This is the core of Christian life. To learn together, spend time together, eat together, and pray together. Being Christian is never something we do alone. We do it together; and we do it with God’s help.

What comes next in our Act’s story makes a lot of us uncomfortable, and it probably should, because it’s a challenging vision of community.

“All who believed 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.”

Early Christians, rooted in the bedrock core of Gospel living, decided to sell what they had and share it with others.

Someone in the Acts story gave more than they received; someone in the story received more than they gave. Because the Gospel is not about efficiency, or outcomes. I'm sorry to tell you that the Gospel isn't about fairness.

Jesus asks us to lend without expecting anything in return, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick - to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, and take up our own cross of sacrifice to follow Him.

The Gospel is about reconciliation. It's about abundant love, about giving and receiving in ways that don't make rational earthly sense.

We live in a culture that values independence. That can be a great thing! Independence allows us to claim our own personhood, to ask questions, to make our own choices. It can mean freedom.

But as with many good cultural values, independence has a shadow side. If I'm supposed to be independent, what happens if I'm ... not? What if I need help?

What happens when I lose my job or can't find one? If I'm injured, or sick? If I'm enduring a season of depression or anxiety? If my rent goes up and my pay doesn't? What if I'm overwhelmed by a rambunctious kiddo? What if I need help?

We have this narrative - a hopeful narrative - that needing help should be rare in a person's life. That a good life is an independent one. Unfortunately, that narrative comes with a cost.

If an independent life is a good one, a *dependent* life is unfortunate.

That narrative is a lie.

When we lift up independence, we accidentally create shame. It becomes difficult to admit you aren't enough for the moment; you need help.

It's a shame most adults feel, because it's actually more normal to need help than to not. Our lives are complicated: something, somewhere, is guaranteed to be going sideways. Every single person in this room, in the pews, at the altar, on the livestream, running the livestream, is going through a hardship. Every single one of us. And that means every one of us needs help. There is no such thing as an independent person. We depend on each other, and above all we depend on God.

“they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

It strikes me, reading this passage, that the only way the disciples could have known who “had need” and distributed their proceeds was by asking. There is a moving kind of shamelessness in the early Jesus community. The Holy Spirit has preserved this vision for us in the words of scripture so we might be challenged in our own ways today.

Someone in the Acts story gave more than they received; someone in the story received more than they gave.

I’m preaching to you today as someone who has received far more than I’ve given.

You, St. Timothy's, have given me prayer. You've given me your time. You've given me a small stipend. When I have messed up (which I have done plenty!) you have given me patience, love, feedback, and even forgiveness. You have given me lessons in ministry and faith I will treasure in my heart. You have given me words of encouragement.

I needed help, and you helped me.

And here at St. Timothy's, I have experienced something so special. Not once, here, have I felt shame when asking for help. Not once, no matter who it was. You have shown me such generosity. You have been, to me, the community we see in Acts. You have given to me as I had need, when I had need. Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

Here at St. Tim's, I have received more than I have given. That generosity, your generosity, is the bedrock of Christian community. This kind of Gospel living isn't about fairness or efficiency; it's about abundance. The vision of Acts liberates us from shame and calls us to celebrate our dependence on one another.

You have taught me a great many things. As I leave this place and return to Texas, I will carry one lesson above all else: No one is an island. Live generously, even when it's hard. Push through the shame and ask for help. Because our dependence on one another and God is a vision of total belovedness.

Amen.