

Acts 4: 36 – 5:11

<sup>36</sup> There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”). <sup>37</sup> He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

**5** But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; <sup>2</sup> with his wife’s knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles’ feet. <sup>3</sup> “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? <sup>4</sup> 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!” <sup>5</sup> Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup> The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup> After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

**Trinity Presbyterian Church**  
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**“Sermon Song: A Requiem for Ananias and Sapphira”**

*\*\*This sermon song is based on the the song, “Want to Say” by Aaron Strumpel*

I imagine the early church singing a requiem as they attend the funeral for Ananias and Sapphira. Just as couple’s caskets are being lowered into the clay earth, as the fear and mystery of what just happened seizes the congregation, I imagine them singing these words:

At the dawn of the day  
I want to say  
I'll start with hope  
I'll start with faith  
I'll start with you

At the dawn of the day, when resurrection’s mist is fresh in the air and God’s promises are budding up within the church, Ananias and Sapphira get swept up in the arresting Spirit of generosity. Perhaps they witnessed how a man named Barnabas sells his property, and then joyfully lays his life savings at the disciple’s feet. They saw the freedom in his eyes. They felt his passion. And you get this sense that Ananias and Sapphira longed to have the same feelings of joy and freedom and faith.

Perhaps we desire to have it too. To get swept away by generosity and to have the faith to joyfully give it all away. Maybe it is why when we hear about someone giving their life savings to a charity or like that couple who won the lottery, but then turned around and donated it, something uplifting touches us deep inside and we say, “Yes, that’s how it could be!” I mean, generosity is contagious. It reminds us that we are created in the image of a faithful and generous God who has given us everything—both hands completely open—and it reminds us of who we truly are. So at the dawn of the day, it is easy to imagine Ananias and Sapphira feeling the Spirit’s wind of inspiration as they desire to sell some property, placing the proceeds at the Apostle’s feet.

#### At the dawn of the day

I want to say  
I'll start with hope  
I'll start with faith  
I'll start with you

But if we are being honest, most days we aren’t like Barnabas. Most of us don’t lay all our earnings at the feet of the Apostles. No most of us, if we’re honest are more like that couple who, after the dust of the dawn’s excitement has settled, are confronted with the complexities of life’s reality. And as Ananias and Sapphira look at the stash of cash piled up on the kitchen table, something shifts inside of them, and they decide to hold some of the proceeds back. Now you can bet they weren’t thinking *Let’s go ahead and lie to the Holy Spirit today*. No. Instead they were probably thinking, *You know, we have bills to pay. It would help a lot if we could use some of the money to pay off the mortgage. Or perhaps we can put a little aside just in case this gospel thing doesn’t work out*. I mean, you can hear the rationalizations going off in their minds. So they planned to give it all away, but what do they do instead? In the midst of the day, after the excitement wears off, they are faced with life’s demanding reality and they decide they are going to hold back.

#### In the midst of the day

I want to say  
I'll chase down peace  
I'll chase down joy  
I'll chase down you

Of course, it wasn’t only that they decided to hold some of their money back. Perhaps the deeper problem was they weren’t being honest about it. In the midst of the day they wanted to say that they were able to do something they just couldn’t bring themselves to do and so they lied. And notice: our bible never says that the Holy Spirit kills the couple. They could’ve died from shame or the surprise of being called out on their dishonesty. The point is not that God will smite anyone who doesn’t give all their money away. The point is we have to take a hard, honest look at ourselves—seeing all the ways we aren’t able to trust God—and not pretend to be something we aren’t. I mean think about it: not being able to give all our proceeds away and being honest about it; well...God can work with that. But pretending to be “all in” when really, we know that we are holding out on God? Well, that is a brick wall

named denial. And like our friends in A.A. teach us, how is a problem ever going to get resolved unless we take that crucial first step of admitting that there is one.

So maybe we aren't ready to trust God and let go of something yet. Maybe we aren't ready to trust God by giving away more and downsizing our houses, maybe we aren't ready to trust God with our pain or our wounds. Maybe we aren't even ready to bear the cost of following Jesus. But, honestly, we aren't going to grow in faith until we can lay it all before God in open confession, admitting where we are struggling. Once had a spiritual mentor who said the most simple yet profound thing. He said, "The only way to move forward is to start *from where you actually are*." Because at the end of the day, when our loved ones will be singing a requiem at our funerals we want them to say that we lived lives that started in faith, and continued the best we could in faith, and struggled in faith, but ultimately...are resting in faith.

At the end of the day  
I want to say  
I have loved you well  
I have loved you true  
I still love you

Beloved, you are made in the image of a generous God who gives freely and openly. Our faith doesn't grow the same when we are holding back. And in those moments when we find ourselves doing it, we can be honest about it. Because at the end of the day, the only way to move forward is to start from where we are. And God? Well, I'm pretty sure God can work with that. Correction: God longs to work with that...

At the end of the day  
I want to say...