

## Acts 4: 32-35

<sup>32</sup> 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 they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup> They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

*\*\*During Eastertide we are looking at what it means to be "faithful resisters" to injustice. Jesus was not only raised from the dead, but he was raised after being crucified by political and religious systems of injustice. So for the next six weeks, we will be reflecting on what we can be doing as Easter people who are called to remain faithful to the gospel by resisting systems of power which rob people of resources and dignity\*\**

### Trinity Presbyterian Church April 8, 2018

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#### "Faithful Resistance: One Heart and One Soul"

The recent president of the NAACP, and Moral Monday organizer, William Barber, says that our country finds itself in its "Third Reconstruction." After "pressure cooker" moments of national tensions, we search for ways to resolve the tensions by reconstructing a new society. The first reconstruction, was the adjustment the nation was forced to make after emancipation and the Civil War. The second was the tearing down of oppressive legislation toward Black people during the Civil Rights movement. And the third, he says, is the tension we find ourselves in today. All three reconstructions are grounded in two fields of reality: economics and race. When we look to the beginning of Acts, we find the early church is in a reconstruction phase. They are trying to reconstruct a new society after Jesus' resurrection by redefining who is in and who is out and by creating communities where no one has a need. They too are reconstruction themselves according to the two same fields: economics and race.

Economics and race. Race and economics. The two go hand in hand, perhaps they always have. Take a Sunday drive around Winston and notice all the amenities—shopping malls, hospitals, Starbucks and Panera Bread Co.—all on the west side of town. Why do we think that is? I remember being a fresh Winston Salemite, inquiring about where the hospital was so I knew where to visit parishioners:

"Which one?" they asked.

"Oh you have two, wonderful! Okay, so where are they both?"

"Well, the one is about a half mile away."

"And what about the other one?"

"Well, it is about a half mile away."

Now friends, wouldn't you think the hospitals would be a little more spread out than they are? But no, it is about economics. Drive down Hawthorne and Strafford toward Five Point. There's Food Lion, Trader Joe's, Harris Teeter, Publix, Whole Foods all in the same vicinity. Why are there five grocery

stores in a one mile radius? Wouldn't it make more sense to put grocery stores where people don't have access to food? It's about economics. Recently heard about real estate prices plummeting on the east side of town. Houses being appraised well under value. How is it that the same exact home on the east side is 30K-60K less expensive than on the west side? Answer: Not as many amenities; schools, like Ashley Elementary, have mold issues where teachers and children are getting sick. Disparities get stuck inside the interconnected web of injustice. Economics and race. Race and economics. The two go hand in hand.

Read through the first few chapters in Acts and we see the early church is attempting to reconstruct a new way of being in the world. The good news of Jesus' resurrection has emboldened their spirits. We see followers of the movement cashing in pensions, selling property. They are laying all the proceeds at the disciple's feet. Now, I used to read the passage as an idealistic stewardship text. As in, we are to place our belongings before God, because everything belongs to God. After all, no one is claiming private ownership over anything. They are living out Jesus' command to "sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor." It has always sounded to me like a fine stewardship message. But I believe I've been reading the story all wrong. In light of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. King's speech to striking sanitation workers in Memphis for equal rights and pay I no longer think the church is practicing good stewardship *per se*. I think the early church's first response to resurrection is *to work at making economic justice a reality*. I mean, think about it: they are holding everything in common. Resources are being distributed as needs arise. With great power, it says, they are testifying to Jesus' resurrection and great grace is upon them all. They are all of one heart and soul. They all see that there is a problem with how the system is operating and they believe it is their job to do something about it. As Dr. King once said, "I refuse to believe the bank account of justice has gone bankrupt." That is what the early church is doing: refusing to believe the bank account of justice has gone bankrupt. The passage is about the church invested in making economic justice a reality.

Well it makes me wonder, what is the church one heart and soul about these days? Has resurrection's zeal worn off? We have to confess we hold ourselves up to the image of the early church and we seem rather insipid. Now I'm not saying churches need to sell their property, but I do hear a lot of talk about the amount of resources that go into preserving a church building. If the church is investing more into its building than it is into witnessing to the resurrection, then perhaps it is time for reconstruction. Now I'm not telling anyone to stop writing checks to good causes—and this is one of the most generous churches I have ever heard of—but just imagine what could happen if we knew the names and stories of the people we were supporting. If we don't, perhaps it is time for reconstruction. There was a study done awhile back that divided society up into 99 people. One-third from the wealthy class, one-third middle class folk, one-third lower class people. The research suggested that if all 99 people were distributed the same amount of money and then left to themselves, it would only be a matter of six months before the old class system would reemerge all over again. Why? Because it takes more than our dollars. It takes a community willing to be invested in each other if real change is going to occur.

So maybe we showed up to the rally for our city workers to earn \$15/hour last Wednesday, on the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> year since Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. You were investing

in community. Maybe we decide we are going to buy a \$150 lifetime membership in the Food Co-op grocery store that the Institute for Dismantling Racism is launching. They are looking for investors, by the way. Maybe we volunteer at the Bolton School Food Pantry or we take our personal savings, and our church savings, placing them into a Black owned bank, investing in community. What is the church one heart and one soul about these days for the sake of economic justice?

You know, reconstruction is a good thing. Maybe it is even the work of the Holy Spirit. During reconstruction we begin to take notice that there are serious problems with how the system is operating. And with great power and grace we get to testify to Jesus' resurrection by trying to do something about it. Amen.