
Sunday 11th April – Second Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 4 :32-35 & John 20:19-end

Acts 4:32-35

The believers share their possessions.

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. 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 that there was no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

John 20:19-end

Jesus appears to Thomas

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'

Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

The purpose of John's gospel

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

I'm always challenged by Acts 4:32-35.

All were of one mind.....no-one claimed that any of their possessions were their own.....they shared everything they had....there were no needy persons amongst them...

From time to time.... those who owned lands/houses sold them... bought the money.. put the sales at the apostles' feet...and it was distributed to anyone who had need...

There are many situations in the bible that make me question whether I am doing what God wants me to. However, I've never seriously asked myself whether I should sell my house and all possessions to ensure everyone has what they need.

This behaviour of the early church giving so freely to ensure everyone's needs are met comes in the immediate aftermath of Pentecost. Pentecost was a BIG change which inspired very selfless behaviour amongst a large number of people. It's as if they were thinking "we are blown away by the incredible and very good things now happening so will give up the idea of ownership for the common good of all." A radical change in behaviour.

Yet we only see this replicated today in small pockets of the church family, Monasteries, Convents and other communities. It isn't widespread in mainstream Christianity or in mainstream society. Principles of shared wealth are embedded in our taxation; 0%, 20%, 40% and 45% tax paid on earnings between £0, £12,570, £50,270, and over £150,000 respectively. A greater return to the centre from those who earn more, for the good of those who earn less. As Christians we are encouraged to give over and above that, with tithing (giving 10%) as a model. I've heard many a discussion about whether people should tithe their gross or net income. The answer usually given is it depends whether you want God to bless your gross or you net. It is certainly true the more you give the more others benefit (which is probably the blessing for those giving).

Back to Acts 4,

"there were no needy persons amongst them".

Can we say that? I don't have answers to why this model of giving up (all) possessions for the good of others isn't more widespread today. I find it an awkward, uncomfortable question. Our lives in Kingston make it difficult to do something like this. We have so much invested living here, more than just money. It would be nice

to have more definitive answers. I think each of us has to consider our own situations, our own attitude to possessions and to the needs of others.

I would however give three suggestions to consider. Talk it through with others; there are many wise people in the church and beyond. Plan; there is a risk of giving too much and for the wrong reasons. And most importantly don't give out of guilt; the early Church in Acts gave because they wanted everyone to share in the good things from Pentecost and for everyone to have their basic needs met. Now that's good motivation for giving.

Iain Beith