

May 7, 2017

"All Things in Common"



(4th Sunday of Easter)

Acts 2:42-47; 2 Corinthians 9:7-15;

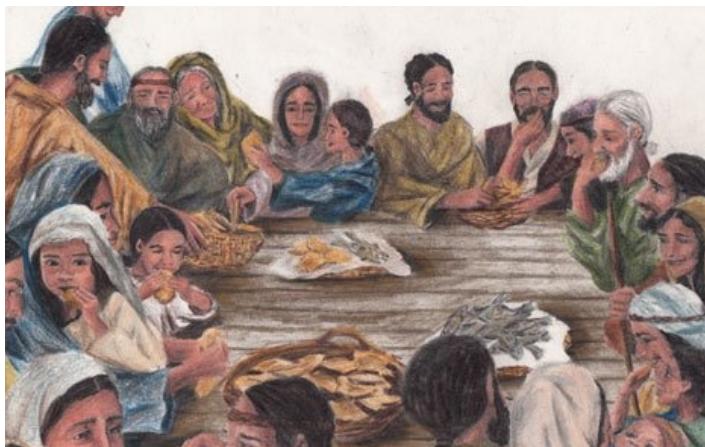
Malachi 3:8-10

What we give is just as important as what we receive.

To be sure, in order for giving to work, someone must receive. As is made abundantly clear from the Easter story, God has given all to us. And for God's gift to work we must receive, we must open it.

But if take turns giving and receiving, what is it that God receives from us? Our thanks? Our regard? Our love? Our money?

In the end, there are a lot of ways to measure what's important to us. But if the Biblical record is any indication, few things are a better measure than our practice of economics and our willingness (or unwillingness) to embrace generosity as a way of life and a matter of faith.



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Acts 2:42-47

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. **43** A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. **44** All the believers were united and shared everything. **45** They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. **46** Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

- What do you think v.44 really means? What should that look like nowadays?
- Why do you think the author included this story as a part of Acts? Why is this memory significant?
- How should you take the point of this story (whatever you think it is) personally?



2 Corinthians 9:7-15

7 Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. **8** God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. **9** As it is written, He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever.^[a]

10 The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. **11** You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. **12** Your ministry of this service to God's people isn't only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. **13** They will give honor to God for your obedience to your confession of Christ's gospel. They will do this because this service provides evidence of your obedience, and because of your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone. **14** They will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you because of the outstanding grace that God has given to you.

15 Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!

Footnotes:

2 Corinthians 9:9 Ps 112:9

- So is giving supposed to be on our terms or God's (v.7)?
- v.11 seems to say the purpose of God enriching us is to increase our generosity. Is this really how it works for you? For others? To what degree is generosity a reaction versus a choice?

Malachi 3:8-10

8 Should a person deceive God?
Yet you deceive me.

But you say,
"How have we deceived you?"
With your tenth-part gifts
and offerings.

9 You are being cursed with a curse,
and you, the entire nation,
are robbing me.

10 Bring the whole tenth-part
to the storage house so there
might be food in my house.

Please test me in this,
says the Lord of heavenly forces.
See whether I do not open
all the windows of the heavens
for you
and empty out a blessing
until there is enough.^[a]

Footnotes:

Malachi 3:10 Or "Until what is required is lacking."



Commentary on the Acts passage by Mitzi J. Smith

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/
preaching.aspx?
commentary_id=895](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=895)

...Immediately preceding our text, the new believers are told that they would receive the promise of the Holy Spirit (2:38-39). There is no immediate Spirit manifestation such as speaking in other languages, but the narrative immediately shifts to our summary about the community of new believers implicitly anticipating the promise of God's Spirit. This mirrors the command to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Spirit in chapter 1 and the subsequent meeting in the upper room. The appropriate response to God's promise is active expectation that God will continue to do what God promised.

Mutual commitment shapes and maintains community

It is important that community building starts on the right foot. Verse 42 begins "And they were committing themselves (*proskartereo*) to the teaching of the apostles and to the *koinonia* [fellowship, community]..." This is the first mention of the apostles' teaching in Acts. Many persons have now joined the Jesus movement who may never have heard Jesus'

teachings. It is not clear in the Greek text whether the breaking of bread and prayers at verse 42 constitutes the *koinonia* or if they are activities distinct from the *koinonia*. Nevertheless, *koinonia* signifies mutuality and commonality among the new believers beyond potluck meals; it consists of building a shared existential reality and anticipatory future.

Instructively, the Greek verb *proskartereo* describing the believers' mutual devotion is the same verb used for the disciples' commitment as they gathered in the upper room waiting for the outpouring of God's Spirit (1:14). The presence of *proskartereo* in both texts and other linguistic parallels may demonstrate a paradigmatic relationship between Acts 1:14 and 2:42-47. That is, Acts 1:14 is the model upon which the first (and subsequent) major summary is based. Our text reflects the charismatic growth of the community quantitatively and qualitatively expanding upon that first upper room gathering. *Proskartereo* occurs a second time in our summary at 2:46 where the focus shifts to how the believers committed themselves to the Temple and to house-to-house breaking of bread. *Proskartereo* indicates the devotion of Cornelius' slaves to their master (10:7) and of Simon to the Hellenist Philip (8:13). If it were not for the *proskartereo* of the

believers, their attention to the apostles' teaching, prayers, eucharistic celebrations, and participation in signs and wonders would be less than *koinonia*, but merely activities that they engage in simultaneously and in the same place. *Proskartereo* engenders *koinonia* mutuality--the giddy sharing of goods, self and time for the welfare of all.

Luke repeats here two other phrases introduced at 1:14 to describe the pre-Pentecostal assembly: "at the same place and at the same time" (*epi to auto*) and they "were having all things common (*koina*)."¹ It is not enough to share space and time, but an intentional act of *koina* is required. Verse 45 delineates more tangibly how the believers held all

things common: "they sold their goods and their real property, and they distributed the proceeds to whoever among them was in need."² Commonality and sharing was not limited to spiritual things, but included material possessions. This *koina* is what many scholars find least credible. We can read these words as descriptive of actual events or as a prescriptive ideal picture of how Luke envisioned a *koinonia*-governed community.

God's Spirit engenders signs and wonders on the earth

The Greek adverb *homothumadon* (in one accord) also occurs both in our text at 2:46 and at 1:14. In both texts *homothumadon* follows *proskartereo* demonstrating a unified devotion among the disciples in the



second floor room and among the early community after the Pentecostal increase (cf. 4:32-35; 5:12-16; 7:57). *Homothumadon* also signifies the Samaritan people's united attachment to Philip (8:6, 7, 13) because of the powerful deeds he performed. The harmonious commitment of the early believing community could be partly motivated by the many signs and wonders that the apostles performed (2:43). We cannot deny the power of tangible and visible miracles.

The Joel quotation that Luke inserted and modified from the Septuagint states that in the last days wonders (*terata*) would occur in the heavens above and signs (*semeia*) on the earth below (2:19). Our summary does not agree with the Joel quotation. The apostles like Jesus before them perform both signs and wonders on earth. We are called to bring about tangible signs and wonders on the earth, not just in the church. Signs and wonders signify that God's Spirit is at work on the earth. When we act with *homothumadon* to do our part to eliminate hunger, homelessness, child abuse, discrimination, and inequality in education, God's Spirit, in and through us, performs signs and wonders on the earth. Mutual and unified commitment engenders marvelous acts of social justice within the community and beyond.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"Luke's narrative focuses less on theology than on ecclesiology, on what it means to be the church. Specifically, Luke portrays a church that lives in an attractively countercultural, joyful community, a church that prays, praises, breaks bread, and to which God keeps adding. This rather rosy depiction will develop shadows, contours and fractures later in Luke's narrative."

**—Margaret Aymer
(reflection on Acts passage)**

Our summary finally describes how the community praised God and demonstrated favor or grace toward one another. And the Lord (God) saved many more who were brought into the community. **Ultimately, it is God who saves and expands the community, but not without our cooperation.** God worked in and through people willing to teach and be taught, to believe in, perform and receive signs and wonders, and to create mutual *koinonia*.

Additional Thoughts

- What is your philosophy or theology about giving? Is this the same as the theology you were taught growing up?
- What role does generosity play in your life?

What is the purpose of money?



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