

11.25.20 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: For Sale

Scripture Reading: [Acts 4:32-5:4](#)

Reflection: Rev. Amy Schenkel

The way the real estate market is going in Michigan right now, ‘for sale’ signs pop up like moles in front yards and disappear just as quick, so when we read about persons in 1st century Jerusalem selling property we might not fully grasp the implications for the early church.

The early chapters of Acts tell the story of Jesus-followers being knit together to form a new community. When birthing any new community, such as a new family, church plant or project team at work, the values and practices that are set in the beginning stages are embedded like DNA into the life of the community. The early actions will contribute to or destroy their best intentions for the type of community they want to have.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind.” (Acts 4:32)

Of utmost importance to this community is that they are committed to follow Jesus and they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Pastor Doug talked in his message this past Sunday about the importance of their relationship with God. They speak God’s Word with great boldness. They come together to worship and pray.

But this community is also trying to embed a new way of being with each other. Their relationships with one another, the love they show to each other as image-bearers of God, is what draws others to want to be part of this community. They were one in heart and mind- not that they agreed on everything, but that they, together, had the heart and mind of Christ. They were striving for a new way of living that mirrored Christ’s humble laying down of his own life for the sake of others.

“...from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 4:34b-35)

That type of community sounds attractive until you consider the ramifications for actual individuals. Who had to make personal sacrifices for the sake of this new community? Those who own land or houses, people we would call landlords or property owners, held a position of respect and influence in society. Unlike the recent immigrants struggling to find work, or the elderly who came to Jerusalem to live out their last years, these were the wealthy persons who enjoyed a place of privilege in society. They had to give up their status for the sake of the common good.

The new community they were developing was defined by a new way of being, where the status of an individual as defined by society no longer mattered. In this community, each person’s status is defined by one thing: the presence of the Spirit of God within them. The Spirit was at work, drawing them to God- but also drawing them to one another. Some people, like Joseph (aka Barnabas), believed in this new community so much that he was willing to lay down his own status for the sake of the whole.

“Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for this land?” (Acts 5:3)

Ananias, however, couldn’t fully give himself over to the values in this new community. Numerous commentators have made it clear that the selling of property was not a communist-type requirement for

everyone in the church. Rather, it was a voluntary choice. So, what was the harm in keeping some resources for himself?

The Scripture tells us that, in so doing, Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit. Instead of giving of himself for the sake of others, he believed the lie that he needed to keep some of that status and privilege for himself. Instead of finding his identity in the One they worship, he bought into the lie that his identity was tied to his monetary value. In so doing, Ananias is lying to the Spirit found in each member of this community, proclaiming through his actions that it is okay to hold onto his place of privilege and to hide the truth from his Spirit-filled brothers and sisters in Christ.

I wonder if the biggest reason that Ananias and Sapphira's punishment was so severe was that their actions were destroying the type of community that God longs the church to be.

I wonder what this means for the church today. What is the DNA that persists in the church today? How closely does it reflect the DNA the early church was trying to instill? Is it a community that others will be attracted to, where others will find a new way of living and loving like Jesus? Is it a community that you or I are willing to give up our social status to be part of?

Prayer:

Lord, too often I see more of myself in Ananias, and his unwillingness to lay down his life for others, than in Jesus who gave his life for me. Please fill me, fill your church, with your Holy Spirit, that we can be the radical loving community you intend us to be. Amen.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

Every time you see a "For Sale" sign in someone's yard this week, take time to pray for the church, that we all may have the attitude of Christ Jesus, humbling ourselves for the sake of a Spirit-filled community that is striving to have one heart and one mind.

Songs for today:

[May the Mind of Christ My Savior](#)