

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Supporting and Sharing

The Acts of the Sent Ones - Acts 4: 32-37

One of the things we have been stressing since the beginning of lockdown is the importance of sharing. Even though for many weeks we had to stay isolated from one another, we recognised it was important for us to stay in touch - alongside, supporting and praying for one another. This is the second description of the fellowship of the early believers - the first being in Acts 2:42-49. They have a lot in common and have much to say to us about how we can encourage and grow closer to one another during this time when we are unable to meet for worship.

Sharing is at the heart of these descriptions – the believers ‘had everything in common’ (Acts 2:44). They shared their possessions, their money, their food. They also shared their needs and concerns with one another, as they knew who needed help (v35). And it would only be known they were ‘one in heart and mind’ (v32) through their sharing together about their faith, their experience of Christ’s Spirit at work in their hearts, and their belief about how they were to live it out together. It would never have occurred to them that faith could be thought of as something private and individual that you didn’t talk about to others, that you just lived out unobtrusively without bothering anyone else. And yet that is the mould we have found ourselves being squeezed into in recent decades. So, spending time immersing ourselves in this picture of how the Holy Spirit prompts us to live is vital.

Sharing is something we like to think we are good at. Whether it be baking a cake or buying someone a coffee, we think of ourselves as generous. We might therefore take note that the level of sharing described here is on a far more sacrificial level. People shared, not out of their surplus, but out of all they had. These would not have been rich people with bottomless bank accounts. If money was needed, possessions had to be sold. Selling houses and fields was not a universal policy or community requirement (see Acts 2:46, 12:12 and 16:15) but it was a regular enough occurrence for it to be recorded in both Acts 2:45 and 4:34, as the Spirit led them when the need arose. That it could be said that there was no needy person among them (v34) is quite a statement, but clearly reflects the vision God had given to his people of what life lived in his blessing would look like (Deut 15:4).

For a church to be one in heart and mind, there needs to be both a wide and deep level of sharing amongst the whole fellowship. It needs the whole group to be relating together, rather than only to a limited number. And it needs the things that are talked about to be things that really matter rather than just the weather, what we have done during the week, the people we have seen or the meals we have eaten! None of these can be said to have much influence on our unity and purpose. Yet many of us find it hard to move beyond this superficial level of relating. The apostle Paul speaks of unity as something that has to be worked at (Eph 4:1-4). It involves bearing with one another, being patient with and forgiving one another and living at peace with one another. This doesn’t happen by default. It comes through understanding how others tick - what their approach to life is and what are their personal struggles and challenges. Then points of conflict and differences of opinion can be worked through and resolved rather than escalating into misunderstandings and division. And we only get to know one another this well through sharing on a deep and meaningful level. This involves a willingness to trust, a willingness to be open about our weaknesses, concerns, struggles and failures, a willingness to be vulnerable with one another. It is risky, costly and can be daunting, but the reward is the deep bonds of love and oneness in spirit that we read about here.



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What is at stake is far more than whether people can see us as nice, friendly people. There are many secular community groups for which that could be said. It is the integrity, authenticity and intimacy of their relationships, and community life as a whole, that witness to the transformation brought about through God's grace at work in them producing Christlike, selfless, agape love and unity. It is this that people found so attractive so that more and more acknowledged Christ as their Saviour and joined them (Acts 2:47).

Read the passage again. What are the things that particularly strike you in the life of this community of believers? What aspects can you relate to in your own experience of Christian community?

Read 1 John 3:16-18. Consider how God is prompting you to respond. Are you aware of needs of others which you could help meet? Have you possessions which could be given to others or sold to raise money for others?

That there was no-one in this group of believers living in hardship would have been a powerful witness to the community at large in which poverty was commonplace. From the start of lockdown this time of pandemic has been characterised by extraordinary acts of concern, generosity and kindness from community members up and down our country, as many people found themselves without the means of providing for their daily needs. If our church is to stand out as a people committed to demonstrating that Jesus is good news to the poor, how is the Holy Spirit seeking to be at work in us to make this a reality? What could be your part in this?

Think now about our church. What are the things mentioned in this description which you can see reflected in our fellowship for which you can praise God? Are there any aspects here which we find harder to reflect? For what do you feel challenged to pray?

Broadening and deepening the level of fellowship we share has to begin with us. Who are the people within our fellowship that you do not have a close relationship with at present who you could work at getting to know more during the next few months? Who are the people with whom you could begin to share with on a deeper level, and pray with regularly, so you grow closer together in Christ?

Pray, based on 2 Thessalonians 1 and Ephesians 4:1-4

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of one another.

May your faith grow in us more and more

and the love we have for one another continue to increase

so we are at one in heart and mind through the unity of your Spirit.

Through your power at work in us may we be a powerful witness

of perseverance and faith in all the trials we are enduring

and may we accomplish all the good things your faith prompts us to do

so through your grace we are worthy of your calling

and our Lord Jesus is glorified in us, and us in him. Amen.

