

Our scripture lessons this morning, both the new and old testament lessons, discuss the sharing of property. As noble a concept as this is, I wonder even in those times how long it worked. Even in the early Christian communities, where most likely the individuals already knew each other, there had to be an abundance of problems in personality types and quirks. However, their mutual love for one another and commitment to Christ most likely was their unifying bond. Notice the section of the psalm that states, “..how pleasant it is when the kindred live together in unity.” Even in those patriarchal days of authoritarian society, I doubt how well they managed to live in total unity. It is easy to remain in unity when there is a very serious common problem and **unity** is a must, but given day to day living, egos, and personalities begin to get in the way. If a change in course comes a long, necessary or not, usually there is an uproar from at least one or more individuals; be it a new method, or change of procedure. As soon as a riff in a group begins, it is apt to divide the group. Upon a close reading of this passage, notice that even after the new believers sold their property and laid it at the apostles’ feet, the apostles distributed it as any **had** need. My interpretation is that everything was not immediately distributed. This would ensure that there was a small amount of funds in case an unexpected need arose.

Also, this passage leaves some questions to my mind. The New-believers sold off their houses, land, and belongings but in doing so, there must have been some accommodations for these new believers. You ponder where they lived or how food was distributed to them.

This group effort and commune experience was shown on 60 Minutes on April 4<sup>th</sup>. A group of about 8 college age students stole a sail boat and set sail in the Pacific Ocean. After several hours at sea a severe storm set in. The wind ripped the sails, tore the rudder from the boat, and they were adrift: NO compass, No food, No communication and No idea where they were. Eventually they drifted to land which was a tiny island, called Ata. It is nothing but a tiny dot on a map. They were able to find food, Create a shelter and eventually were able to build a fire. They were on this island for 15 months before they were eventually rescued by a fisherman. They admitted there were times that arguments broke out, disagreements raged but they were able to overcome and stay united. These friends had a common cause: **survival**, Unity was a **MUST**.

Similar group efforts are to a degree alive today. In Americas, Georgia, there is a group called Koinonia (koy no nee ah) which is a Greek word meaning fellowship or community. It began as a farm by Clarence and Florence Jordan. They farmed the land, and sought ways to work in partnership with the land, ‘to conserve the soil God’s holy earth”. They hired black and white employees during harvest time and as needed and all were paid fair and **equal wages!** In the 1950’s with the inaction of Civil Rights Bill, the Klu Klux Klan brought bullets and intimidation but they Koinonians were pacifists and did not respond to the violence. However, business dropped off as no locals would buy their products because of the racial issue and also fear of retribution from the KKK. They adapted to the situation by using mail order. The farm still exists and mail order is an on going feature. The leaders of this organization were following an important concept of this Acts passage: To distribute funds to those who had need and to pay fair and equal wages. The leaders were working to preserve and protect the land and create a community, a true Koinonia(KOY no nee ah), marked by love.

While this Christian concept is noble, in today’s social and business structure it is truly idealistic and achieved by very few communities – like Konnonia in Americas, GA. But this country, to look at the larger picture is facing an on going need: The need to distribute food and housing to those in need.

There are several food pantries in this area and many in this congregation assist personally at the Newbury Food Pantry both as volunteers and as contributors. We as a church community have several fund raisings for the Pettingill House in Salisbury and also Our Neighbor's Table in Amesbury. There is so much need in this area. Our Federal Government has several food programs: I looked up and there were 8 Federal programs to assist hunger SNAP( Supplemental Nutrition Assistance), TEFAP(The Emergency Food Assistance Food Program), CSFP(The Commodity Supplemental Food Program), CACFP(The Commodity Adult and Child Food Program.) NSLP(The Nutritional lunch Program), SBP(The summer Food Program), WIC (Women in Crisis). Yet, despite these programs it does not seem to be enough. // To be sure, Covid has only made a bad matter worse. Many small businesses have had to close down which created an entire work force on limited hours if they could work at all. Musicians could not perform due to limited gatherings, wait staff laid off as many restaurants closed or had limited menus, doctors tried to go "zoom" . Many sales people could sell their services but often the projects/services had to be postponed due to government regulations, which for salespeople no commissions.

As people of faith how then do we address such economic problems? One answer came to me the other evening as I watched 60 minutes and Darren Walker's presentation on Social Justice and Injustice. Darren Walker is the CEO of the Ford Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic foundations in the US. Darren Walker feels that America takes pride in especially the idea of upward mobility and being able to ensure that our kids will have a better life. But to do this, Darren insists that the wealthy will have to give up some of its privilege. Sounds like some of Christ's teachings: Blessed are the poor, the last shall be first, the workers hired last will receive the same full day wages.

Derreck Walker feels that corporations should begin to put their **employees** first ahead of their shareholders. In the last several years many of the major corporations, in order to keep their profits rising, or appearing to be, have borrowed money at very low interest rates **not** to invest in the company but to buy back their stock in the open market. This not only increases their stock price, since there are fewer shares to be bought, it also increases the prices of the Stock Options which are usually issued to the major leaders of the corporations, often referred to as bonus incentives. The top officers of the company get an extra bonus while the employees get just their paycheck.

To compound the problem, many of the lower level employees have been replaced by modern technology. For those employees who are not computer savvy, or have other abilities, the job opportunities become fewer. But those who have had little education or as Darren Walker would say, "... did not have the privilege of more education.

Now there are those who are pushing for an increase in the minimum wage to create what they feel is a "living wage."

The topic of a "living wage" is a highly controversial and very sensitive topic. In short, there are no easy answers because a living wage involves individual expectations: what kind of life style, personal and family goals in life as well as the determination to achieve those goals. Some would suggest a national minimum wage. Even at the minimum wage of \$15/hr., is that a really living wage which amounts to only \$600/week before taxes? As a businessman this means for those who are already being paid \$15/hr. because of time with the company, those individuals will have to be paid even more to keep their experienced employees. This immediately increases the payroll expenses: social security,

medi-care, paid family leave, paid medical leave and of course Workman's compensation Insurance. So management will have to either sell more product or raise the prices of the service or product or **reduce** the number of employees.

Now there are a few companies like Equal Exchange Coffee, who work on a fair trade system whereby everybody, who does a particular job, receives the same pay. Now this may seem reasonable on the surface but how does management reward those who have been with the company for a length of time, have learned how to handle various problems which arise, what is expected from the operation or activity and when to ask for help or backup. So the altruistic model works well in some commune settings but does not work so well in most businesses that need incentives and merit pay.

In my own candy business, I had two employees who had been with me for several years. One of them did any job necessary if the job needed to be done, she just completed it and she never complained. Often the job would not be in her normal work assignment but knowing I was tied up she would complete the task. She would go the "extra mile.": Yet the second employee would say occasionally and bluntly, "That's not my job." So surely there is a value rewarding the employee who is willing to go the extra Mile.

How do business people evaluate the distribution of available profits to employees? There is always a sudden need for new equipment or additional equipment. When a machine broke or needed replacement, no employee offered to assist with the financial responsibility, it was mine and mine alone as it is in other companies. In evaluating a company's pay scale, some consideration has to be given to replacement and repair costs. Not all the funds, cash or profits, received can or should be distributed.

In conclusion, there is Good News. The Government has a plethora\_of programs which assist those in need. There are those unsung heroes in the private sector, who donate time and money to charitable causes. There are also many Christians who are striving for the Ideals and altruism of Acts 4: that there would not be a needy person among them and that funds are distributed to any having need. As followers of Christ, we all strive for more economic justice, more opportunity, more education, and a fairer distribution of profits. It should be done as Darren Walker suggests, "to make Democracy a more mobile upward society," out of love for one another and our commitment to Christ. We need to strive toward this goal of a more equitable economic society. .