

Love By Giving
Series: I ♥ My Church
Acts 4:32-35
November 6, 2016

Before we begin today's message, I want to say something about Tuesday's election. I would venture to guess that no matter what side of the political aisle we are on, we are all tired of this presidential race. There's been so much mudslinging that a decent pig doesn't have a place to go anymore. It's just ugly.

GUY ON UPPER MIAMISBURG PIKE.

My friends, let me share some advice with you. I'm not going to tell you who to vote for. I will not give you Bible references for one person over the other. Instead, I will share with you something that John Wesley, the founder of Methodist said back in the 18th century:

"I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them:

1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy.
2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against.
3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."

That's good advice.

So be sure you vote on Tuesday. There were men and women who died in the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, so that our country would be free from England and that you could have the right to vote. There were men and women who died in the American Civil War so that a whole group of people would be free and eventually be able to vote. Beginning in 1840 and going for 80 years, women and men strived, suffered, even died, so that women would have the right to vote. It is our duty as Christian Americans to honor their sacrifice and go to the polls, asking for the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit. So go vote, and leave the results to the Lord, for He is still King of Kings. Right? He is still Lord of Lords.

Ok, back to our series, "I Love My Church."

VIDEO

Trunks. They're made to hold things that are precious. By the end of our time together, I hope that this one holds a bunch of love for our church.

How many of you either had a hope chest someone kept for you or are keeping a hope chest right now for someone else? Maybe you didn't have an actual hope chest, but you did have something precious that you wanted to save and pass down to future generations.

These treasures we hang on to – we do it not for the pleasure of hoarding. (Well, I'm hoping that's not why!) We hang on to them because they mean something to us, and we know they might mean something to those coming behind us. Possibly the value of the item will skyrocket and become an *Antiques Roadshow* moment for your grandkids. Maybe it's great-great-grandma's change purse with a story attached about making it to a new life in the land of opportunity. Regardless of the reason, it's being saved because it holds hope, promise, memories, and value for the future. And to put it

in a box for the time being is a sacrifice. You can't use it right now because you want it available for someone else to have and hold in the future.

It's the exact concept we see played out by the early church – and one very serious way we get to love our church!

Turn to page 7 in your bulletin. We have a space for you to take some notes. I have also listed today's Scripture passage from Acts 4:32-35. Follow along as I read:

*All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.*¹

When it comes to possessions, the first church knew how to help one another, to love one another. Yet, I wonder how long it took before someone decided they needed to hang on to some of their stuff? And I wonder if, when we start holding tightly to our bank accounts, sometimes this is what we sound like to God when we start talking about our money and our stuff. Check out this clip from "Finding Nemo":

VIDEO: FINDING NEMO, "MINE, MINE, MINE"

I wonder if sometimes that's exactly what we sound like to God when we start talking about our money and our stuff. It's all mine – MINE, MINE, MINE, MINE, MINE. How do you avoid that? How do you avoid being a seagull?

First, **Release your grip.**

Acts 4:32 reads,

*And they felt that what they owned was not their own...*²

The first church had a loose grip.

And in case we're quick to say, "Well, they just didn't have a lot so it was easy for them to have a looser grip," remember Ananias and Sapphira – struck dead because they lied about how loose their grip was.

This is simply not the place to make excuses for being seagulls. Because the truth is, it's not ours. It never was. It's God's – and we're the bank. Let me say that again in case you missed it: All our stuff is God's – and we're the bank. He invests with us and hopes to see a good return on His investment. And His measurement for that good return is how we love others with what we have.

So release your grip. It's not yours.

Now, this is not a simple message of "Give to the church." This is not the standard "giving" message folks like to grumble about: "Every time I go to church, they're asking for money."

That's not at all what this passage is teaching. It's not at all what I am preaching. It would be easier to say, "Give it all to the church and we'll be your clearinghouse – and of course, we'll keep some for 'administrative costs.'"

But the truth is, the first church didn't demonstrate their love by giving to the corporate entity called the church; they loved by sharing everything with one another, by giving to the personal entity called the church, the people. And though the apostles were helping with distribution, clearly they weren't maintaining lawns and purchasing

¹ Acts 4:32-35 (NLT)

² Acts 4:32b (NLT)

curriculum. And hear me say, there isn't a thing in the world wrong with that – lawns and curriculum, I mean.

The fault comes when we fail to meet the needs of people **because of** lawns and curriculum. So, to avoid being a seagull, release your grip.

Second, **Tighten your belt.**

Making room in our budgets to help people. That's exactly what the first church was doing. Verse 34-35:

*There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.*³

The 1st century church wasn't keeping hope chests. They were not storing up for a rainy day. They weren't even hanging on to their personal property! They were liquidating, folks. They were getting rid of it so they could demonstrate their love for their church.

Now, I'm not proposing we all sell everything we have and move into the fellowship hall together! I'm simply suggesting that often our lifestyles keep us from being generous.

I've heard people say, "I can't afford to give like that." I know that sometimes, it is very tough. I didn't really give during seminary because it cost so much to go to school. But if we choose \$200 satellite or cable bills, \$200 cell phone bills, new car payments, eating out 5-10 times a week, a membership to a club, minimum credit card payments of \$500 per month, then it's not that we don't have the money – we don't have discipline to say "no" to stuff.

MYRA WILL TELL YOU "I LOVE TO FLY." HAD TO BE SURE WE WERE PAYING OUR TITHE BEFORE I COULD START FLYING AGAIN.

If our lifestyles keep us from being generous with the people around us, it's time to tighten our belts just as those in the early church were doing. Maybe I need a less expensive car or it's time to drop cable/satellite television, or maybe I just need to live on some kind of budget so I can meet needs when they're presented.

The single mom who's riding the bus to work because her car is broken down. The family whose dad just lost his job and who might lose their home. The retiree who has to choose among his prescriptions because he can't afford all of them. The promising college student who may have to drop out for lack of funds.

See... I'm not talking about the homeless folks on the street corner. We need to help them too, but the way we communicate love for our **church** is by making sure we aren't neglecting the needs of one another. And here's a hard statement to say: The only way we can do that is if we know what those needs are!

Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying it's your responsibility to tell us what those needs are. I'm saying it's our responsibility to know one another deeply enough to recognize them. To look well past the fences each of us have erected and **know** each other.

And when we're finally able to peer past the fence, we need to be ready to act on what we see... because we've tightened our belts.

And once we've loosened our grips and tightened our belts, then we have the opportunity to finally **Give it away.**

³ Acts 4:34-35 (NLT)

Once the first church ditched its “mine, mine, mine” mentality, no one ever had need. Needs were always met. So fervently met that this passage says:

*The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them...*⁴

What was the result of that generosity? They testified powerfully to the resurrection of Jesus.

People knew the truth of Jesus because the apostles and the 1st century church were busy giving their money and possessions *to one another!* It wasn’t a service project. It wasn’t a homeless shelter. It wasn’t a missions program. It was **one another!** The testimony was present because they were loving one another!

There’s something somewhat awkward in this passage. We talk a lot about going outside these walls to impact the community. And now it feels like this passage is saying we got that wrong.

But that’s not what it’s saying at all. I think what it’s illustrating is simply this: In our passion and fervor to reach beyond our walls, we can never forget to also reach within them.

We have needs represented in this room right this second that none of us knows a thing about. Maybe you recognized your situation a few moments ago as I was illustrating. Maybe it’s another need. We **must** be loving **our church** – these people who are our church – enough to see those needs. And then, like the first church, we must be willing to sacrifice it all to meet those needs.

So, let’s do something courageous. Let’s do something crazy.

I’m probably not selling my house or getting rid of my car today. But in my wallet right now is _____ dollars cash. It represents all I have right this minute.

What if we each did this? What if each of us gave just what we have in our wallets or purses right this moment? Maybe it represents our Starbucks run or a lunch after church. Maybe it’s just the change we have left over after our recent run to the grocery store. Whatever it is – it’s all we have in this moment, right? Just like the first church...

And what if we asked God to bless this offering we’re about to give and to use it to communicate **love** for His **church** – His people, not His building? And then what if what ends up in this box was exactly what verse 36 says: “to give to those in need.”⁵

APPEAL REGARDING A FAMILY

I’m just asking you to simply pray and see if this might be one time where you could part with everything to love someone who sits next to you every Sunday.

Understand me – this exercise is as much about making sure everyone’s needs are met as it is about making sure we’re willing to share those needs as we have them.

This is a hard one, folks – loosening our grip and giving. Loving our church is knocking down fences, dipping the toe, and giving it all. As we sing our song, *They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love*,” consider giving like the first church did; give as God prompts you.

⁴ Acts 4:33-34a (NLT)

⁵ Acts 4:35 (NLT)