

Be the church: share earthly and spiritual resources

Acts 4:32-35

April 12, 2015

[Play music video: "People Help the People" (Birdy)]
www.believersjournal.org/Movies/PeopleHelpthePeople.mov

*and if I had a brain, oh and if I had a brain
I'd be cold as a stone and rich as the fool
that turned all those good hearts away*

Lord, have mercy!

Lord, have mercy on us, fools that we are!
we who unquestioningly follow the prevailing script --
be smart, plan ahead to get ahead,
take care of your own, take care of yourself,
cover your bases, cover your behind,
secure your borders, don't let them see you cry

Lord, you see ...

you see us as we are, in all our frailty
and all our glory
forgive our foolishness! heal us!
let the fire of your Spirit melt our cold hearts

we pray for ourselves ...

for clarity of mind,
instead of shrewdness
for warmth of affection
instead of cool composure
for generosity of spirit,
instead of careful self-preservation

may we see as you see

seeing the reflection of your image in every
human face

may we see as you see

seeing the spark of your Spirit in every
human heart

may we be as you are

helping the people ... people helping the people

Who helped you? I know you haven't made it this far all on your own! Who helped you? To whom do you owe a debt you can never repay?

For me, it has been my father and my mother and Lynne. Dick McLoon and Rich Weisenbach and Paul Holmer. Jim Simpson and Vito Mason and Eric Kelley and Lynn Ouellette and Mike Heath. George Macleod and John Bell and C. S. Lewis and Soren Kierkegaard, and Jesus. Most of all, Jesus. I would not

be here, but for him. I would not be who I am, but for him. He is my savior, my rock, my constant help, my goad, my comforter, my teacher, my Lord. I owe him and each of these others and many of you, many of you, a debt I can never repay.

Be the church! That's the headline of the banner hung on the front of our church building facing West 4th Street, and that's the theme for our worship services between Easter and Pentecost. Be the church! And how do we "be the church?"

It's there, displayed on the banner: "protect the environment" ... "care for the poor" ... "forgive often" ... "reject racism" ... "fight for the powerless" ... "share earthly and spiritual resources."

When the church was born, after the first Easter, after the first Pentecost, what did they do? They gave witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus, and they took care of each other.

The resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out -- or the pouring in! -- of God's Spirit changed everything. Remember what they were. Timid and hesitant and unsure. Disillusioned and disheartened and distraught. Wary, hiding, grieving.

And then? A transformed, dynamic, empowered, emboldened community! Because Jesus is alive. Because Jesus is among them. Because Jesus' Spirit is in them.

Jesus' Spirit is in them. Jesus' Spirit is in us. We are, as they were, Christ's body in this world. We are how Christ -- the living Christ, the resurrected Christ -- is present in this world. We are how Christ's hands reach out to heal. We are how Christ's voice speaks out to forgive. We are how Christ's love brings comfort and encouragement and renewal and wholeness to the people who need him. Do you understand that when I say we are the body of Christ in this world, I am not speaking metaphorically?

They understood and what did they do? They gave witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus ... by taking care of each other! They shared with each other the priceless spiritual treasure that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they shared with each other their earthly treasures.

None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they shared with one another everything they had ... [And, consequently] ... There was no one in the group who was in need.

For them, resurrection did not mean escape from this world. It did not mean making retreat from the cares of this world to focus on supra-earthly matters. No, for them, the resurrection of Jesus changed everything here and now. For them, the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of his Spirit created a new tangible, very much this-earthly reality, a new community.

To paraphrase our Bible study group's definition: the purpose of the church is to create a community that embodies the transforming love of God that is expressed and embodied in Jesus. And how do we embody the transforming love of God? By sharing earthly and spiritual resources. And it starts here, among us, people helping the people. It doesn't end here, but it starts here.

Be the church! We are the church when we share with one another our earthly and spiritual resources.

Let me tell you about Lucy, Lucy Whitney. Lucy Whitney was born in 1903, the daughter of William Whitney, a journalist with the Waterloo Courier. I met Lucy early in my ministry here. She invited me to take a look at a house she was restoring on Mullan Avenue and she made arrangements with me then to do her graveside service when she died. She was then 95 years old. I did her service when she died five years late at the age of one hundred.

Lucy Whitney grew up in this church. Her mother died when she was seven weeks old and her father was not in the best of health, so decided when Lucy reached the age of three that he could no longer provide the care she needed. He entrusted her to James and Carrie Goodrich to raise her as their foster daughter. Carrie was a schoolteacher and James was a deacon of this church.

Later in life Lucy married and became Lucy Whitney Proctor and, at her death, willed \$100,000 to our church to be used to assist older members of the congregation. She asked that the fund be established in the names of James and Carrie Goodrich. She shared with all of us, her church family, her earthly treasure, because the Goodrich family had shared such a spiritual treasure with her! People helping the people.

"Who helped you?" May it be that we are an answer to that question! May we be the church!