

Acts 5:1-11

1 But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; 2 with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" 5 Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. 6 The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. 7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things (NRSV).

We see in Acts the ideal church because this is the church that Jesus built. Peter had given his bold testimony and a multitude repented, were baptized, and all who believed were together. It was the ideal church because the whole group was of one heart, one soul, and all were together as one. There was not one needy person among them. The prevailing attitude of everyone in the group was that we are all in this together where everyone pitches in for the good of all without holding back. They sold their possessions, give the proceeds to the disciples, who in turn distributed to those in need. This is the ideal church where the group takes care of its own. This is what God intends for all. It is like the lessons on gleaning where the surplus is given to the needy. In this brand new Christian church the people that joined the church continued to live in their own homes. They did not sell everything. They were not homeless. They gave according to how they have been blessed in order to create a charitable distribution.

Acts chapter four gives us an example of Barnabus who sold a field and laid the money at the feet of apostles. Acts chapter five shows a contrast to Barnabus where people of the same social class (landowners with extra property) Ananias and Sapphira sold their extra property but withheld some of the proceeds. We might not see anything wrong with that and might say "thank you, God bless you" and promote legacy giving because they gave a good gift. But everybody was as one; the whole group was of one heart and one soul. So, when Ananias and Sapphira withheld some it was a betrayal of trust. The problem was not a matter of withhold finances. The problem was deception. They were not one with community. This is a matter of a lack of faith, lack of trust, and lack of solidarity. They were living by the theology of scarcity rather than the theology of abundance where you put your trust in God - the one that provides and sustains. They failed to recognize that the church is a spirit filled community where everybody is one for the whole body of Christ. Their lack of faith caused the deception. Peter's perspective is

theological. He proclaims “Satan has filled your heart . . . your lie is not to me but to the Holy Spirit . . . you lie to God and put the Spirit of the Lord to the test.”

The contemporary lesson is always a matter of what we can take from the Scripture and apply to daily living. The Bible is not teaching to go sell everything and give it all to the poor. The Bible teaches give your surplus so that no one else is lacking. The Scripture lesson is on unity, trust, and benevolence. Today’s Scripture takes place during the beginnings of the church where everyone is together as one - one heart, one mind, and one body with no one in need. The ideal body of believers is one body that is one with the Lord where people pitch in to benefit the whole body. Since Jesus taught the word of God, many New Testament lessons parallel Old Testament lessons. Take a look at **Deuteronomy 15:4** There will be no one in need among you . . . the community was one of generosity. The church that Jesus built is one body united together in love, devoted to God, and serving those in need.

Within the realm of COVID-19 pandemic we are being careful and safe as a church but I see some people at stores with no face masks. I understand some have difficulty breathing due to asthma or lung disease. But some have a pompous “No one can tell me what to do” negative attitude. They refuse to wear a mask because they were told to wear one. They have a blatant disregard for the safety and well being of others. Then we see on the news stories of people who are sorry because they did not play it safe and plead with others to be safe not sorry. There seems to always be one or two who fail at solidarity and don’t care about well being of others. However, in the Bible we see that those who complain anger God and those who go against God end up sorry instead of safe. Do what is right in your heart. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide. Be the church that Jesus intended you to be and continue to be safe not sorry.