

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2026
9:30 AM

Texts: Acts 4:32-35 & 2 Corinthians 9:6-12

Theme: Hope: Generosity Begets Hope

[prayer]

This morning's report from the Book of Acts gives us a glimpse into how the earliest Christians practiced their faith. It tells us that in the early church all the believers shared their possessions in common, meaning there was no private property. And those who possessed substantial wealth in the form of land or houses would sell it and then give the proceeds to the church to distribute to people in need.

If this report sounds a little unbelievable to you, you're not alone. Luke, the author of Acts, is reporting on a kind of community-centered generosity that is rare among Christians today, or at least in the North American church. We live in a capitalist, consumer culture that idolizes wealth. And even though we know Scripture openly rebukes those values, our relationship to wealth as modern, American Christians has been shaped more by an interest in the "bottom line" than by what the Bible has to say about money and generosity.

Case in point: I have a meeting with a banker this week to discuss investment options for an old savings account that has been languishing for some years. I seriously doubt he will advise me to liquidate the account and give the money to the poor. It's his job, after all, to convince me to keep this money invested in his bank. But my conscience was pricked as I prepared this sermon. Shouldn't I consult God, as well as my banker, on what to do with that money? Why haven't I already asked God what to do with that money? Now, God might agree with my banker and tell me to grow that money for the future. But God might also tell me to do something radically generous with that money right now. The question before me – before all of us who strive to steward our money according to biblical principles – is this: When God asks us to put all we have under His sovereign

control, do we actually do it? Especially when what God asks goes against the conventional wisdom of our age?

I typically hear two kinds of reactions to Acts 4:32-35. The first is that the early church was socialist and therefore all Christians should be socialists. This is an inaccurate interpretation of what the early church was doing. Socialism is a modern political and economic ideology enforced through government power. The early church did not compel its members to give up their property. A person who has been saved through the power of Jesus Christ will of their own free will participate in acts of radical generosity. Generosity is evidence of our salvation. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn’t give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work” (2 Cor 9:7-8 CEB). When Paul wrote that letter, he was taking up a charitable collection for the church in Jerusalem. He was not taxing the Corinthian Christians; instead, he appealed to their generosity as evidence of God’s transforming grace at work in their lives.

The other common reaction to the communal practices of the Acts 4 church is that they simply aren’t realistic. *That’s a nice story, pastor, but that wouldn’t work today.* To which I say: Why not? There have been and continue to be Christian communities that practice communal living where goods are held in common. Where there is a will, there is a way. The problem is we often do not have the will to live the radical Way of Jesus.

Here’s the thing, friends: Generosity isn’t meant to be practical. It is meant to be countercultural. Radical generosity, the kind that the early church practiced, is designed to oppose the love of money, which is at the root of so many evils in our world. John Wesley teaches us to earn all we can, save all we can, and give all we can. The end of our money making and money stewardship should always be generosity.

There are two types of generosity: Giving out of our excess and giving out of our poverty. Giving out of our excess costs us very little; we get to feel good about ourselves without giving up very much. But giving out of our poverty, giving when

it costs us something, when we go without so someone who has even less than us can have their needs met – that is the kind of sacrificial witness Jesus demands of his disciples. Practicality, efficiency, sound fiscal policy – these may be capitalist virtues, but they are not virtues in the kingdom of God. Quite the opposite – what Jesus defines as good is rarely practical or efficient. It is costly.

Today's Scripture lesson challenges us to believe that the Acts 4 church is not just a nostalgic example from the past. It is what the church is supposed to look like in every age. It points to the kind of Gospel-centered values that should guide Christians and the Church even now in the 21st century – values like uncommon unity, Christ-centered community, and radical generosity. When we commit to embodying these values together, we make a powerful witness to our neighbors of God's vision for the world and the hope we have in His kingdom come.

In Luke 4, Jesus stands in the synagogue on the Sabbath in his hometown of Nazareth and announces:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (vv. 18-19)*

Jesus was quoting the Prophet Isaiah, who declared a “favorable” or “jubilee year” for the poor where debts would be cancelled and property redistributed among the community so everyone's needs were met (cf. Isa 61). God's salvation is not just for individuals, but for institutions and systems, too. God longs to bring about a world where there is economic justice, where our economic practices cultivate the flourishing of all people, rather than a select few.

Through its practice of holding all goods in common and trusting church leaders to steward funds for the good of the community, the earliest Christians continued Jesus's mission by making Isaiah's jubilee vision a reality. They believed that the power God demonstrated by raising Jesus from the dead was not a one-time event; instead, it continues to transform lives and communities. As a result, they

allowed the grace of God to transform their relationship to their possessions. They came to value their relationships with each other and their neighbors more than their wealth. And being so transformed, they then transformed the world through their radical generosity and sharing with each other. “An abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them” (vv. 33-34).

According to Acts, one of the most dramatic signs of God’s resurrection power at work in the world is a community where there are no needy persons. I don’t think I have to remind you that there is a widening gap between the haves and have nots in our country. A huge transfer of wealth has been underway for decades now from the bottom ninety percent to the top ten percent of earners. One in six children lives below the poverty line in the U.S. One billion people around the world subsist on less than a dollar a day.¹

Imagine a world where followers of Jesus are so committed to the radical generosity of Jesus that everyone has their needs met. A world where we are so dispossessed of self-interest, and so committed to sacrificial love, that no one ever must go without because they know the Church will take care of them in their time of need. That is the kind of world God is asking us to partner with Him in building.

This week, our spiritual practice that cultivates hope is radical generosity. Generosity begets hope. It sows seeds of hope for the hopeless by demonstrating that the radical generosity and countercultural compassion of Jesus is still alive and well in our world. Generosity is yet another witness to the Living Christ. When we are radically generous toward one another and toward our neighbors, we become a living witness to the kingdom of God among us, to a new kind of community where everyone can experience the fullness of life that God intends.

Today we begin our Annual Giving Appeal for our church’s 2026-2027 budget. You should have received a Giving Guide in the mail this past week as well as a commitment card. If you did not, we have extra copies available at the Welcome Center. The Giving Guide outlines our proposed budget for the next fiscal year which begins July 1st. This budget represents what it takes to sustain and hopefully grow our ministry here at CUMC – the amount of money it takes to maintain our building; pay our staff a living wage; run our worship, discipleship, and mission

¹ Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 47-48

programs; and keep our commitments to our worldwide United Methodist connection. While our church looks very different from the early church, our practice of raising money for our annual budget is not entirely unlike the generosity practiced by the early church. Yes, we have a lot more bills to pay than they did. But by raising this money together every year, we are demonstrating our commitment to each other as a community formed around the living hope we have found in Jesus. We are also demonstrating our commitment to continue being a church that sows seeds of hope and generosity in the greater Coeur d'Alene region and beyond. Last year, because of this commitment, we gave away more than \$19,000 to our community for charitable purposes!

Two Sundays from now, on May 24th, we will consecrate our financial pledges to God and celebrate our renewed commitment to our ministry together with a Pentecost Potluck. I invite you over the next couple weeks to prayerfully review the Giving Guide and then consult with God on how you are called to financially support the mission and ministry of CUMC this next year.

Some of you have the capacity to give big gifts – to sell that land or house and invest large sums of money in meaningful ministry. If you are among that select few, I pray God's wisdom will be upon you as you discern how best to steward your wealth in the service of God's kingdom. May your giving be a radical witness that rebukes the love of money and topples the idols of wealth.

Others of you are giving out of your poverty. You pinch pennies and stretch every dollar so you can be as generous as possible. Your giving is also a radical witness because you are trusting God to provide for your needs even as you provide for the needs of others! Like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, may God's grace multiply the impact of your giving far beyond its size.

And then there are still others of you somewhere in the middle between poverty and excess, not able to give large gifts but feeling convicted to give more than just what you have left over. May God challenge you to push beyond your comfort zone, to give to the point that it hurts just a little, and to let radical generosity grow as a sign of God's grace in you. May your attitude toward your possessions and wealth be brought fully under the lordship of Christ and set apart for God's use – especially when it is hard to do so.

Wherever on that spectrum you may fall, your commitment to live a radically generous life is a witness to the hope of God's resurrecting power in a world suffering from need and neglect. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, our unity in generosity is sowing hope that will bear fruit long after our individual gifts have been forgotten.

Thanks be to God. Amen.