

"Christian Socialism?" – April 23, 2017  
by Wayne H. Schneider – Credo in Unum Deum

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Acts 4:32-35

This a good news bad news sermon. First the bad news: It is not possible to preach a sermon on our text from the Book of Acts, and make it obey the rules of Western capitalism. The good news is this applies to every passage of Holy Scripture: not one of the verses follows the rules of the current cultural status quo. For "Followers of the Way," Holy Scripture is the fair expectation, by which the status quo is always measured. Any misalignment in the ways of the culture needs to be transformed by the Word of God, not vice versa.

Those who live in the power of the resurrection own a fundamentally altered value system. The more you live like the world lives, the more uncomfortable you will be with this passage. If it is of any comfort to you, I think many of us are feeling a bit queasy. And, you need to know that as I write every sermon, I am challenged by the passages that keep me awake at night (or ought to). "*Everything they owned was held in common.*"

Because it 's hard for some of us to stay focused on what we don't want to hear, let's just jump right in. First, we won't pretend that these words apply only to those early believers who were expecting Jesus to come back RIGHT NOW, and therefore, possessions had no value to them.

Dr. Luke wrote the Book of Acts somewhere around 70-85 A.D., and people were not expecting the second coming of Christ to be RIGHT NOW! anymore. **This group of believers was living in the 'between time' just as we are, using the** teachings of Jesus and collected stories that were passed down from generation to generation. They did not possess any other "spiritual graces" that we do not have available to us. They were not exempt from the desire for worldly success. Just reading the five verses following our preaching text, you discover these people are wrestling with the same issues you and I are.

Second, we will not overlook this passage as a hypothetical case that no one took seriously. "Followers of the Way" are expected to live this way because this is how Jesus tells us to live. Often. Contemporaries of Jesus commented that none of the members of the community were impoverished, because everything was held in common, and shared when there was a need. This activity was often written about by outsiders.

The entire community believed as one heart and soul, no one believed in the individual rights of anything; everything was held in common. You and I may not like this teaching. We may find it inconvenient. We might not practice it. It is, however, the undebatable expectation of the followers of Jesus, and the practice in many Christian communities.

But, that is not the point, is it? It's not important what some people did, some time or some place else as an example of their discipleship. Discipleship cannot be appropriated vicariously. It must be incarnated by real people in real time, usually accompanied by real struggles.

The point is who WE believe God to be, and how we intend to live, and so reflect that image with integrity and joy. It should be no surprise when I say God is not a Capitalist. The universe is not a capitalistic system. Nor is zero-sum economics its foundation.

The sun does not need someone to light it. And, if the sun should stop shining, no amount of money is enough to turn it back on. And the sunlight on my face does not leave less sunlight for you. Every blessing is free, and prodigal, and universally available.

The faith community of Jesus knows that private ownership is an illusion. All things originate from God and have been created for the common good. It is possible for me to stop this generous cycle by personal or corporate hoarding, but that is not God's way because that is not who God is. And, in a community of Resurrection people, we practice a trust that abundant life is so available nothing can stop it, even death.

Is this undemanding? Of course not. The effect of our culture is startling. It **cries, 'scarcity is the last word.'** But, **the Resurrection proves that to be a lie. We** can live today with the same trust of the early disciples. We just need to start here. Now.

IF it is too intimidating to sell everything? You could start by selling your third car, or your boat, or that bicycle you never ride. You could cut-out the middleman and give it away to someone in need. Or some clothing from your full closet to that street person on the corner who is shivering. OK, how about those gloves and a hat? You could up your giving to ten percent of your annual income to the church and community needs. Can you envision what would happen to our hearts and our cities, if everyone would just do one of these things regularly? Anne Frank once said, "*No one has ever become poor by giving.*"

Private ownership is a fantasy that Wall Street uses to keep us enslaved. Manumission, freedom, is possible. We can dance with joy through our years with God and each other, as God intends and Jesus taught. We can have confidence in the endless abundance God has created for us, to share God's real image in the world. The choice is ours. Alleluia. Amen.