

## What Shall We Do Now?

Sunday, APR 11 – Easter II, Year B

Acts 4:32-35 / Psalm 133 / I John 1:1 – 2:2 / John 20:19-31

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for

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On the cover of Pink Floyd's 1979 album *The Wall* there is a clear, two-dimensional black and white drawing of a brick wall. Pink Floyd's sound explorations are not a two-dimensional experience, with rich colors of guitars and synth pads that give great depth to their lyrics. In fact, throughout the album we hear many rhythm patterns and musical motifs that give their writing a thematic unity and stamps their sound in a very evocative way. Their themes of internal exploration and search for meaning become anthems of great resonance and critique. One of the most famous songs in that album is *Another Brick in the Wall*, through which Pink Floyd critique institutional control and offer an anthem to liberation and rebellion "Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!"

This sermon is not intended to provide you with a review of that 1979 album, but there is a song that was intended to be on that album but it only appeared in the 1982 film *The Wall*. The song I'm considering is *What Shall We Do Now?* I suspect the Church in Acts was looking for answers like the ones *Roger Waters* is searching in *What Shall We Do Now?* The lyrics say:

*What shall we use to fill the empty spaces where waves of hunger roar?*

*Shall we set out across the sea of faces in search of more and more applause?*

*Shall we buy a new guitar? Shall we drive a more powerful car?*

*Shall we work straight through the night?*

As if in direct answer to Pink Floyd wondering how they should fill the final gaps in their wall, they consider many desires and vices that keep us from truly connecting with others and ourselves. The implication is that when we base self worth and identity on the external, we are never satisfied, but constantly panged by roaring "waves of hunger" for "more and more applause" (that is, more and more acceptance).

Let's go back to our text, when *Luke* presents in Acts a remarkably different world from the one we remember from the Gospels. The resurrection changed everything. The disciples in Acts are achieving clarity of insight about what Jesus was doing while he was with them. This only comes after Jesus ascends, and the

discernment the disciples are now gaining is a marvelous gift of their new identity, Spirit-filled by Pentecost.

Our text in Acts describes two themes of the newly transformed community, the first of which is missional “unity”. This theme of unity in mission is important because of its relation to the second theme of the passage, which is that possessions were held in common. Unity of mission leads to and supports an attitude of community towards material things.

### What Shall We Do Now?

*Tertullian* was an early Christian author from Carthage – located in our modern-day Tunisia in Northern Africa. His writings inspired the early Christian church to remain focused on the Gospel truths of resurrection and justice. In his writing entitled *Against Marcion* he shares a few ideas about that unity that I believe are very helpful for us as Church today. *Tertullian* writes:

*Not only does the Lord command that we give to those who ask, but the Lord demands that there are no needy among God’s people, it means that we must strive to ensure that there are no more poor people.*

In fact, *Tertullian* refines an idea that would become important to early Christians: *Cura ultro ne sit pauper* (Take care that there is no poor among you). We live in a time of great for sharing. Money plays no decisive role in our religion. We who live united in spirit and soul, in Christian community, mustn’t hesitate to put our goods in use for the common good. There is no such thing as a Christianity that hoard resources.

*Tertullian* offered the Church another important statement: *Deus semper pauperes justificat, divites praedamnat* (God always justifies the poor and condemns the rich.) These harsh words seem incredibly dissonant during a time of increased wealth hoarded by the very few. These harsh words seem impossible during a time when we need to take care exclusively of our own family, of our own need. In a time when vaccines for COVID-19 are a commodity of rich countries, we must remember that the Church is called to serve the poor and learn from the inequalities of access to health and resources that were so clearly amplified by the global pandemic.

### What Shall We Do Now?

The Church in Acts offered themselves radically as a community. Not without fault or corruption – I’ll let you read ahead in Acts about Ananias and Sapphira – but with a faith and a desire to serve God through their resources, by sharing everything with each other.

From the perspective of the Gospels, the poor are not only recipients of the Good News of Jesus, they are also the content of it. The poor, being poor and not being good, are the object of the Father's love and the choice of Jesus. Jesus chose to be poor. God as the God of life and Jesus as the bearer of life - and life in

abundance - are inclined towards the poor who lack life exactly because of a requirement of the divine nature itself. It is in the poor that we perceive the nature of God: not a being disconnected from our miseries, but a God who hears the cry of the oppressed, a God who acts in history, building his Kingdom for men and women in freedom. No form of Evangelism should lose this perspective if it does not want to lose God himself and the Lord Jesus who presented himself in the form of a suffering Servant among the poor.

This way forward for the Church in Acts and for us, during a global pandemic is complex and challenging in every way. We are moved and inspired and empowered by a Spirit that knows no bounds.

This Spirit that inspired and instructed the Church in Acts is with us today.

This Spirit does not allow Herself to be framed.

This Spirit is responsible for the growth and mobility of the Church.

This Spirit is responsible for our constant discomfort in the face of poverty.

This Spirit suffers with us during a time of inequality and oppression.

This Spirit boost us with courage to rehearse new ways of justice and liberation.

My new friends at South Yarra Community Baptist Church: you are called to share. You are called by our Lord to pray courage and discernment on how to use your resources. You are called to a Resurrection Imagination, where you go to dream of a world where there is no poor among you.

Is that not what this table before us is all about? It is together, followers walking the hard road of heartbreak and despair, struggling to make sense of our lived experiences, finding our way in the way of Jesus, that we come to this table.

Here at this table, we sit still. We slow the hurried pace of our walks so we may rest. We pause on our frenetic paths to listen. We stop our chasing, chasing, chasing, and we invite the stranger to come in, to teach, to share, to give us the strength to alter our paths. We hear: "Peace Be With You!" and we touch the nail-pierced body of our Lord Jesus.

May you long for an authentic Resurrection Imagination. Our eyes that once longed to truly see our risen Lord Jesus walking with us may now open into glory. Come to this table of self-giving welcome. And may our eyes of resurrection faith be opened. And may we run to tell our story. With all that we are, may we live fully into another way of seeing and going.

Let us pray:

*Lord of Our Lives,*

*May we know you through sharing.*

*May we serve you through giving.*

*May we open our hands and hearts to you, today.*

*In Christ's Name,*

*Amen.*