

Do unto others what God has done for you

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, my rock, and my Redeemer. Amen.

In my first year of Seminary, I learned about the minimalist lifestyle from a friend whose goal was to possess 100 items or less in his lifetime. I still remember when we visited his dorm, which was so bare. The only furniture he brought with him other than the bed, desk, and dresser the Seminary provided us was a standing desk and two bookshelves. Unlike myself and my peers that decorated our rooms to our preference, my friend's room seemed to be like a room in a monastery. When I asked him why he chose this lifestyle, he told me he was inspired by two things - first is the conversation of the rich man who asks Jesus what he must do to attain eternal life other than following the commandments and is told to sell all his possessions and follow Jesus. The second is a popular documentary released in 2016 by Netflix called *Minimalists*. The documentary follows Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus and their desire to spread Minimalism worldwide, living with fewer things. As top executives in their corporate jobs, Josh and Ryan had a six-figure job that allowed them to splurge their hearts desires. When Josh lost his mother to lung cancer, he realized that the best way to honor his mom wasn't to rent out storage space for all her things but to donate most of them to organizations that could benefit from them. He began to ask himself - What is important to me? He realized a hole in his life, which was just filling up with things but remembering his mother's life taught him to value-creating memories instead.

What is important to us? I feel that is the question Jesus was trying to ask the young rich man who asked him how he can attain eternal life. Jesus lived as a simple man; therefore, he wanted the young rich man to see that life is more than gaining riches, especially since those earthly riches have no value in eternal life. By saying, "sell all your possessions and following me," I think Jesus was trying to help this man let go of his attachments to physical things if he wanted to spend eternity with God. This conversation led the community in our first reading in Acts to live out Jesus' commandment differently. We have no idea exactly where this community is, and there are no mention of names, but if we hold the Book of Acts to be a story on the origins of the growing church, we can assume that these were the followers of Jesus that's all that matters.

What's interesting about this passage is how the community of believers understood "sell your possessions, donate them to the poor, take up your cross, and follow me". First, they shared each possession they had with each other to the point that no one claimed private ownership of any possessions. Wow, that must be amazing to do this. I know it would be difficult for that to be a reality in our current 21st-century neo-liberal capitalist world. How many of us who lend our items to others expect them to return them asap? Yet, here in this beautiful imagery of a unified church community, we see these individuals celebrating the community they have with each other through the transformative work of Christ's love. Christ's love inspires the church to serve each other in ways we couldn't imagine, but now the love of Christ transformed these individuals to share what they had with each other where they felt they didn't need to label any possession as their own.

What's even more impressive was any individual who owned land sold it and brought the money to the feet of the apostles? Living in unity wasn't enough for these believers, but it was to share the money they gained from their possessions to strengthen the church's mission. All of this was possible because the members of this faith community believed in the resurrection power of Jesus that gave them hope and helped them to trust each other in this way.

During our Lenten season, five individuals from our Anti-Ministry team led a session in our Bible-Study series on Immigration which was put together by our team. We talked about immigration through a Biblical perspective interwoven with a spiritual lens and ended our last session with economic injustice. As Ron K. shared the statistics of immigrant families in terms of house ownership and unemployment, I couldn't help but reflect upon a time when my family and I migrated to Hong Kong when I was only a year and a half. After my father chose to walk away from a job due to misuse of funds, we struggled to make ends meet. My mother was a seminary student, doing her fieldwork and tutoring jobs to take care of her tuition and seminary housing. When my mother told the seminary, she had to drop out, the seminary community showed up for our family in ways we didn't expect. They provided a scholarship for my mother, both tuition and housing. My mother's bible study group from her internship church, which consisted of all women, mothers to their only children, would volunteer to babysit me whenever my mom could not pick me up from school. People would invite my family and me for dinner and pay for our meals now and then. All of these actions really helped my parents and me, and we were able to pay that forward during our ministry in NY. Just like those church members who supported our family, who were immigrants, my parents set out to support other immigrant families in their ministries.

Even if we weren't literally following the beautiful vision of this Acts 4 model of a unified community, we incorporated this vision the best we could as a 21st-century church community. I have seen how all of you here at Redeemer have lived out that model in your social ministries in this community. I give thanks to those of you who have lovingly knit or crocheted blankets, scarves, hats, and even gloves for those in need. I give thanks to those of you who donated to SHARE through physical and financial resources. I give thanks to you who have contributed and put together bags for the homeless every year. I give thanks to God those of you who participate in Rise Against Hunger every year. I give thanks for the ways you have helped a refugee family settle down and feel loved. I give thanks to God for all of the various ways you serve God and your community. I give thanks to God for your love and support, which means so much to all those who receive it.

When God called us to be stewards of creation, money, and time, this is what God had in mind. This is how we can live out the vision Acts 4 model that we read this morning. This is what it means to live out and share the love of Christ in our lives as we experience God's amazing grace in our lives. Therefore, I hope we continue to serve God in all of these ways and more.

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.