

One Heart and One Soul

1st Sunday after Trinity Sunday

Acts 4:32-37



32 But the multitude of believers was of one heart and one soul; neither did one say of his goods that they were his but it they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles testified about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was with them all. 34 There was no one among them who was needy, for whoever among them had land or houses, sold them and brought the money from the sale 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet; and

they gave everyone what they needed. 36 But Joseph, who was called Barnabas by the apostles – which means son of comfort - , a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 had a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

In southern Africa, there is a very funny legend that explains how the bushmen lure a monkey into a trap. Since the monkeys are very greedy, the bushmen know that they can manipulate the monkeys' greed. Here's how it works: monkeys love pumpkin seeds. And a few of these seeds are scattered around the countryside. The seeds lead directly to an ant hill where lots of pumpkin seeds are stored. The monkey can only get to this pumpkin seed treasure through a very small opening that is just big enough to fit the monkey hand but cannot be pulled back out when the monkey's hand is full of pumpkin seeds. Because the monkey has a hand full of pumpkin seeds, it is too large and cannot be freed from the small opening. So the monkey is caught by his greed. The bushman, who knows the nature of the greedy monkey well, can calmly go to the captured monkey because he knows the greed of the monkey is greater than his fear of the bushman. Sometimes we humans are just as inconsiderate and greedy as the monkey in Africa. And it is this greed that ultimately drives us from one disaster to another. There are many things that keeps us humans trapped in exactly this way. Money and fame are typical things that all people strive for. There are also many other things that can be just as dangerous. And the consequences are always the same. First, something fills the entire heart and soul that we would do anything to achieve this one goal. Only when we hold our hand for the desired money (or it could be fame, etc.) do we realize that we are prisoners and are no longer free.

In today's sermon text, we see an example of how we can be freed from such things. Today's reading describes the first Christian church. And the first characteristic of this church is that the church was of one heart and one soul. Heart and soul means everything that makes us humans. Our feelings, our desires and goals. Everything... Everything in this church was directed by God and fulfilled by God. In this way, the first Christians were one. This does not mean that all Christians in this church were suddenly all the same. It means that they all drew strength from one source and lived for one goal. And the goal was God. What changed and liberated them all was the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God came among them through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God's power was visible and active. We never find the unity of heart and soul among humans but only in God. Unity is an essential characteristic of God. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one from eternity to eternity. There is no inequality or difference of opinion with God. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constantly give themselves continuous and undivided love, are there for one another, and pursue exactly the same goals. Therefore, one can say at the same time that God is both three and one. And when this God, who is so full of love, comes to earth, some of this love will be visible and active among us humans. The first Christians could therefore share everything they had with one another. No matter if they were rich or poor.... no one considered what was his as his own property but distributed it for the good of everyone. And this new way of life impressed the whole vicinity that the people around the world were astonished. How it be that one who distributes his goods and belongings becomes happier and freer? And how can it be that the Christians gave away all they had? And yet not one of them was in need. Everyone had what he or she needed. This description of the first church makes me happy and sad at the same time. The situation of the first church makes me happy because I can feel the power of the Holy Spirit that was present at the time even after 2000 years. I can understand the happiness of Joseph who was so enthusiastic about God that he sold everything he owned because he wanted to become richer in God. The story also makes me sad. It makes me sad because I know that our world doesn't work as it did in the first church. The Bible is so honest that it reports right after this impressive story that there was disagreement. There were some who secretly established something on the side. (See Ananias and Sapphira). In addition, the Greek Christians were badly mistreated by the Jewish Christians and racism rose in the first church and destroyed peace. Unfortunately, we are people and not God. And we cannot bring the love that is in God into the world the same way God does. In addition, our world is built on selfishness. Everyone must fight for their own rights, must also take of themselves. Everyone also has their own personal goods and belongings that they want to hold onto. Attempts to abolish such private property has brought even more poverty. Selfishness is unfortunately the root of many problems in our world. More and more people feel that they are being treated unjustly. Because of this, everyone is afraid that someone wants to take something from them. And so, we humans cannot trust. Like the monkey in front of the ant hill, we clasp our fingers around our little belongings that we still have and will fight for these things down to the last drop of blood. And

if we have everything we need, we want to gain even more. In the end we lose ourselves. We are prisoners of ourselves.

When God lives in us, something changes in us. Through God's Spirit we realize that our money, our education, our dignity.... in fact, everything that we have are gifts from God. Because these things are from God, I see God and His work in everything I have. My heart and soul belong to God. And not just the things that He gives me. That's why I am free from everything that I am and have here on earth. For a while, I hold in my hand my health, my money, and my possessions. But I am also ready at any time to let these things go. I look to God – that's why I'm not afraid if I must give up something here on earth. If it is God who gives me so many things, I cannot close my eyes and my heart to my brothers and sisters. Too many people in our world have too little. Not enough food or water. No education or healthcare. Some don't have peace. And far too many people cannot feel the love and closeness of God. Because of that, we can never be satisfied with how this world works. And as long as God's Word is proclaimed in this world, we will carry God's love into the midst of hate and selfishness. How this may look for everyone can be very different. One part of this love is the offerings that we voluntarily give. Our church can only exist because many people freely give money to the church. Since the first church in Jerusalem, our church has survived because of such offerings. Without these voluntary contributions, the church could no longer exist. Other people help through translation work, through practical work like cleaning the church. And other people help when they feel an urgent need. They give up their precious time so that another person would be better off. When all of this happens, the same Spirit is active that was there in the first church.

There are many tasks and many gifts that God has given each of us. But it all comes from one source and from one power. The God who loved us in Jesus Christ. The God who has become very close to us through the Holy Spirit.... It is He who works in and through us. Through Him we are one heart and one soul. Amen