

# Beach Body of Christ—A Sharing Body

**Salem United Methodist Church**

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What do you do when the Bible is unrealistic?

I mean... come on. All of one heart and soul?

No private ownership? Everything held in common?

Not a needy person among them. Everyone sold their homes and land and shared the proceeds through the apostles.

Seriously? You expect me to believe that?

What a wonderful world? Not *that* world, please. I mean, it's a nice song. It's a nice scripture, maybe. But... it's just not realistic.

Don't get me wrong. Good things happen. People can be generous. This church was constructed, originally, by wood cut down in backyards, carted over, and donated. That's true. That's extravagant generosity. It's something to aspire to! But even that **isn't** selling all they own to redistribute it by need.

This scripture... it has to be a one-off, right? Something that happened because Jesus had just come back. Perhaps the people were just really excited and a bit

overzealous. They sold what they had and lived like this for a few weeks, and then it went back to normal. (Only, their new normal was filled with resentments against anyone who didn't sell eeeverything they owned. Or at how things were redistributed.)

That sounds more real, right? Giving, developing resentments, deciding you'll never give like that again? Deciding a 10% tithe is an awful lot already, so don't even mention the 100% tithe!

That Wonderful World? It's just a pipe dream.

Humans can't do that. We can't sustain **that kind** of selflessness and generosity.

Amen??

Well.

Here's the problem.

It's in the Bible.

This is where your understanding of the Bible matters. If you believe it's just a semi-historical record, you can go ahead and write this off. Turn off your computer and go back to bed. History can be learned from and ignored. History doesn't have to be our model for the future.

However, if you believe the Bible is God's revelation to us, this is gonna get harder.

That's what I believe. I believe God uses scripture to speak to us. Sometimes its historical, but that's not its vital characteristic. Scripture is a guide, a challenge, a comfort. Jesus Christ is God's Word revealed in flesh and the disciples who followed him did their very best to remain true to his words after his resurrection. We see the disciples make mistakes, learn from them, and write it all down. God uses all of that through the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives today.

That's what I believe.

And, you see, there's a passage right after this about a "what not to do when giving to the church." It's dramatic and involves sudden death. Check it out.

This passage, this teeny, little set of verses, doesn't have a "what not to do." And, we don't see it crash and burn later. And, we don't see any kind of implication of someone getting left out. So, none of our lenses for ignoring it will work.

So, try though I might, I can't write this passage off as historical nonsense.

Unfortunately, we'll have to take this seriously.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "why is she getting so dramatic? This passage is lovely! We should want this!"

Sure! Who wants to be the first one to put it into practice? Who will meet with a realtor this week to sell your home to the church? Reroute your paycheck direct deposit into our bank account. Set your retirement to funnel to us. We promise to redistribute it fairly so that you're not hungry. We'll work together to pay your

bills, but let the church, or a church chosen representative, have complete control of your finances. Who wants to depend fully on the church? Oh, and whenever someone else has a need, we'll use your retirement to address it. Don't worry, you can trust that everyone else will give equally, too, so you definitely won't get left out. Cool?

Even saying this has me cringing and uncomfortable. Anyone else?

If we wanted to copy the disciples exactly, to copy the mechanics of their faith life, that's the only option for us. I don't know that we're up for it.

Ideally, this would be living out complete dependence on God. Complete surrender. Ideally, we'd live in a world where we'd care for each other so deeply that this kind of mutual sharing would be second nature. A world where our love for God and what God loves would be so complete that we'd see God in each other's faces.

That would truly be a Wonderful World.

But this isn't a copy/paste scenario. We can't look at what they're doing and sign our community up for it. We can't opt out of the world in order to create a new one.

This model of sharing shows up in Acts 2 and here, in Acts 4. Afterwards, they do different things. Or they do community on a smaller scale. The Monasteries seem to live this out well, but most of society doesn't do this well.

Well, that's great! Does that mean we can mark this as a sweet fiction and hand it off to someone else to try? Are we off the hook?

Ah, no. Nice try!

We just need to ask a different question. Instead of asking about the mechanics of copying the disciples in this passage, how about: *what world view do these disciples have?*

They are being the body.

Right before this passage, the disciples have been living in a whirlwind of healing, accusation, threats, baptisms of the Spirit... you name it! The religious leaders told them to stop talking about Jesus, or else! They said they couldn't possibly keep silent about what's on their hearts.

Then they go home and pray for God to make them bold.

In response, God fills them with the Holy Spirit, and they speak boldly.

They are underdogs united in their need to speak of what God has done. So, they pool everything they have. They care for all their needs. They know some members of their body couldn't survive in the Roman system or the Jewish system. Perhaps they remembered the feeding miracles, or the healing ones. Or the stray people Jesus picked up and invited along the way through his ministry. Perhaps they learned that Jewish law really is all about caring for those who can't care for themselves. Perhaps they took their social responsibility to heart!

If one hurt, they all hurt. Their bonds made them share one heart and soul. They couldn't be separated. Last week we talked about the chronic pain in Jesus' body. If

you missed it, its on all our sites. So, listen! The disciples recognized that **one of their pains was need!** There were people in their body that had need. So, they dealt with it. They healed their pain through everyone sacrificing some control so that everyone had enough. Their chronic pain had a solution, so they took it.

What's our pain? In our families? Neighborhoods? Church? In our county? Our state? Our country? What's hurting?

Now, when we ask this, we don't ask if the pain is self-inflicted or deserved. We don't ask if its our responsibility. We just ask what it is. We learn to look. We can't solve things that we don't see.

Does this mean we all go out, find a world problem and relentlessly pour ourselves into solving it? Does it mean we all pick a pet issue that we try to convert everyone to? Does it mean we sacrifice our time, money, energy, and well being to try to make a difference?

No. That sounds unsustainable.

Have you ever tried to save someone on your own? Perhaps from an addiction, an eating disorder, a mental illness? From an abusive relationship, from bad decisions that Just. Keep. Coming. If you've tried this, you know that it feels like no matter how hard you work, nothing changes. No matter how many times you answer the phone in the middle of the night, no matter how many loans you give them, no matter how many times you help them pack or take them to a treatment center it doesn't make a difference.

Maybe you've tried to address systemic issues. Racism, sexism, climate change, poverty, division. Perhaps you've gone to rallies, called your friends and family members, educated yourself on the issues. Maybe you've lost relationships over your convictions. Perhaps you've called your representatives, written letters, tried to impact policies. And perhaps it feels like you hit wall after wall. Small wins, big losses.

Your fight? It's a chronic pain in our body and maybe you feel like you're the only one that feels it. The only one willing to do something about it.

These fights are not made to be fought alone.

/// The disciples **aren't** doing this alone.

“now, the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

That's it. They are baptized in the spirit and are sharing in **God's heart and soul**.

As we draw closer to God we'll start to see as God sees. Then, together, the body can make a difference.

And *that's* a wonderful world.

SONG

**Post song:** of course, this all has to start somewhere. We're starting by talking about the body of Christ. About what it looks like, feels like, cares about. This week, spend time in prayer asking God what you need to see. Then, share that with someone else in this body. Perhaps it will spark something for everyone.