

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Acts 4:32-35

NRSV

Only in Jerusalem (to our knowledge) was the sharing of all possessions practised – and there only for a time. Our passage is the second of three summaries in Acts; they tend to generalize and idealize. V. 32 says that the community tried going beyond seeking a consensus in what they believed, to holding all possessions in common. Vv. 34-35 say something different: people of property contributed to the needs of the poor, through the Church (but note 5:4: this was voluntary.) At this time, “there was not a needy person among them” (v. 34, perhaps they took Deuteronomy 15:4 in a temporal sense, “There will ... be no one in need among you ...”). But later the poverty of the Jerusalem church was such that the church at Antioch sent relief to “the believers living in Judea” (see 11:29). Perhaps the church tried to rectify the situation in Palestinian society, at least among its members: wealth was grossly disproportionately divided. In 4:36 to 5:11, the author presents examples of selling possessions and giving the proceeds to the Church. Joseph, called *Barnabas*, “sold a field ... then brought the money” (4:37). It is likely that he retained his house. In contrast, Ananias, with his wife’s consent, “sold a piece of property” (5:1) but “kept back some of the proceeds” (5:2). He appears to have lied, claiming that he was giving all the proceeds. Both he and his wife died immediately.

Then 4:33: 4:31 says “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” – after Peter and John had been arrested, brought before the Sanhedrin, and been told to say nothing more about Jesus.

Psalm 133

NRSV

Deuteronomy 25:5 requires that “when brothers reside together”, in order to preserve close family ties, a widow lacking a son be married to her brother-in-law, and bear a son by him – thus continuing her husband’s lineage. Although not mentioned *per se*, this psalm speaks of the Temple: from which people believed God’s benefits (“oil”, v. 2 and “dew”, v. 3) flowed into human life. “Aaron” (v. 2) is the ancestor of, and model for, all high priests. A high priest was ordained with great quantities of “oil”, so living in community has manifold blessings. Mount “Hermon” (v. 3, a high mountain in Syria) provided relief from the hot climate; the “dew” from “Zion”, God, is even more refreshing, for it is life itself, flowing from the one who is “forevermore”. God has blessed Jerusalem, providing all the blessings of this life. (Life after death was unknown then.)

1 John 1:1-2:2

NRSV

1 John is set in a Christian community from which some have dissented, e.g. over whether Jesus really became human (and suffered), or only appeared to do so. In

1:1, “we”, the author writing in the name of the teachers of a church which emphasized John (which the dissenters interpreted heretically) “declare to you ... concerning the word of life”, i.e. re Christ – who has existed “from the beginning”, from the very start of God’s creative activities (see also Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1). “We”, who preserve traditions from Jesus’ earthly life, declare that Jesus could be *sensed* (“heard ... seen ... touched”): he really was human! He was both “with the Father” (1:2, spiritual) and “revealed to us”. “We declare” (1:3) so that “you” may share in “fellowship”, communion, with each other, and with the Father and the Son. These relationships make Christian “joy ... complete” (1:4). Further, “God is light” (1:5), the light of humankind, absolute holiness without taint of sin.

1:6, 8 and 10 begin with dissenting views, heresies (“If ...”). Claiming that one is in unison with Christ while living evilly, unethically, is to live a lie (1:6); but if we live ethically, in a godly way (as Christ does), we are in community and Jesus’ sacrifice removes sin from us (1:7). Claiming that one is perfect (“have no sin”, 1:8) is to deceive oneself and deviate from God’s ways; but God will forgive us when we admit our deviations, and eradicate our ungodliness. Claiming that one has never deviated from God’s ways is to assert that God is wrong in saying that we are subject to sin, to “make him a liar” (1:10): one is not Christ-like. The author writes so that we may not deviate from godliness, (which is the ultimate goal of Christian living) (2:1), but should we sin, Jesus will intercede on our behalf with the Father, as our “advocate”. Jesus, through the cross, brings us into unison with God – as he does for all who will believe (2:2).

John 20:19-31

NRSV

Early on Easter Day, Mary Magdalene has discovered that Jesus’ body is missing from the tomb; the stone door is open, so it looks as though someone has stolen it (v. 1). She has seen a man standing near the tomb. When he speaks to her, she recognizes him as Jesus. She has told the disciples: “I have seen the Lord” (v. 18).

Later the same day, Jesus joins the disciples, gathered behind locked doors. He shows them that he is the one who was crucified (v. 20). Jesus confers on “the disciples” (not including Thomas, but perhaps a group larger than *the ten*) “peace” (vv. 19, 21) and “the Holy Spirit” (v. 22). As God “breathed” life into Adam, the *proto-human*, so Jesus now breathes the new, spiritual, life of recreated humanity into his followers. Aided by the Spirit, they continue Jesus’ judicial role in the world, forgiving the sins of the faithful and holding others blameworthy (“retain”, v. 23) for their actions. Thomas is expected to believe without having seen, but he demands: *show me the evidence!* (v. 25)

The next Sunday, the community gathers again (v. 26). Upon seeing, Thomas makes the most complete affirmation of faith of anyone in the gospel (v. 28). Henceforth the faith of all Christians in all ages will rest on the testimony of the first believers. Vv. 30-31 tell us John’s purpose in writing the book. His eyewitness account is intended to help us, who were not witnesses of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension to “come to believe” and thus “have life in his name”, eternal life.

