**A Healthy church**

Key verse Acts 4:33

**With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.**

We thank God for giving us a new direction and a vision through his words at the beginning of 2020. **Even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life for many. Blessed is the one who meditates on his law day and night.** As God has given us his gracious words, I pray that we each individuals may learn of Jesus this year by serving others and meditating on his words on a daily basis. After many weeks of break, now we go back to the study on the book of Acts. As I meditated on this passage, I could read the heart of God toward his church and his desire to keep his church pure and strong. Let us learn from the passage the way to build up a healthy Christian church community.

**I. One in heart and mind (4:32-37)**

Verse 32a states the character of the early church community in one sentence. **All the believers were one in heart and mind.** There were about 5,000 people, coming from all different life backgrounds, and with different characters; some people were residents in Jerusalem, while others were from foreign countries. But all the believers were one in heart and mind. What does ‘**One in heart**’ mean? It means that they had the same hearts’ desire for God, for God’s ministry. What does ‘One in mind’ mean? It means that in their willful decision or in planning, all of them had the same direction to serve God better. They were one in heart and mind; in their understanding, in their desires, in their future plans, in everything, they were one like family members.

Verses 33-37 vividly show how this oneness was at work in the church community. **No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.** It was obvious to see the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. People met the risen Jesus personally through the message of the apostles. People were voluntarily sold their properties such as lands and houses to help out needy people so no one was in need in the church.

How could they form this kind of a beautiful unity, oneness and selfless community among themselves? We knew what had happened to a selfish tax collector, Zacchaeus when he met Jesus. He sold out his property and gave it to the poor. He could do that because Jesus he met was far more valuable than earthly wealth. Same thing had happened to the people in the early church ministry. They valued Jesus and his people more than materials and they were happy to participate in the giving ministry. They all met the risen Jesus and they were all committed to him seeking his purpose, no more self-seeking life, and no more self-centered life. While church members were establishing a giving and sharing church community, what did the apostles do? **Look at verse 33 “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all”**

The apostles never stopped testifying the resurrection of Jesus. They remembered Jesus’ commission to be witnesses of his death and resurrection and they continued to reach out to the perishing with the words of truth. This was the regenerating work of the gospel. The number of new believers were added continuously as God’s grace was so powerful at work. If Christian fellowship is just about enjoying happiness among themselves, that kind of fellowship cannot last, because they lost the main purpose of the church of God. We should always remember Jesus’ words in acts 1: 8 “**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Preaching the gospel must be continued until the gospel reaches to the ends of the earth and God’s grace will be powerful at work on the church that declares the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 36 and 37. **Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.** Barnabas was introduced in these verses as a man of encouragement. Maybe, he was the first one who sold his own property to give the needy. It was a great sacrifice and good offering. When others saw this, they were encouraged greatly to do the same thing. Then, such an act of offering became a good practice of love and thanks in the church. Because of this one man’s good act of faith and offering, a beautiful custom was created in the church. People were willing and happy to participate in giving practice and no one was in need. Thus, the church itself became a kingdom of God where Gods’ grace was abundant.

There are always people of encouragement in the church where God’s grace is abundant. The people of encouragement spend materials to fill the need of others. They are the people who have the heart of Jesus and these people build up a strong bond of love in the house of God. I am always thankful to our church members when I think of their support. When I didn’t have a car, our missionaries lent me their vehicle whenever I was in need. Once I was urgent to go to the hospital early in the morning because my wife started birth pain to give birth to Peter. I didn’t need to call uber or taxi. M. Rebekah graciously lent us Echo a whole day. So far I had many movings here and there around 5 or 6 times. Whenever I needed hands, our brothers and sisters helped me out to move from the Bible house to Vanhorn APT and from North York to Scarborough. I thank God for forming a family of God here in our Scarborough church. I pray that we may give and support our church members with the words of encouragement and with the practical help so that we all may share the abundant grace of God.

**II. Do not test the Spirit of the LORD (5:1-16)**

How wonderful the early church community was! They shared everything out of love of God. All church members practiced giving and sharing, being influenced by the people of encouragement. The apostles continued to testify the resurrection of Jesus. All believers tasted the glimpse of the kingdom of heaven on earth while they were being members of the church of God.

However, Satan was at work to break this beautiful church community and verses 1 and 2 introduce us one family. Look at these verses. **Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.**

Ananias and Sapphira also participated in the offering but we see here that their motive was different from others. After selling a piece of property, both of them agreed to keep back a part of money for themselves instead of giving everything. When Ananias brought the part of money to the feet of the apostles, Peter right away knew his wrong doing and he said ““**Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?** Here Peter clearly pointed out what his sin was. The sin Ananias committed was not stinginess or holding back the part of money. His sin was lying to God and God’s people, saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. In contrast to Ananias, people who offered their possessions to support the early church were moved by the Holy Spirit. These believers’ hearts were filled with the Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus. But Ananias’ heart was filled by Satan. Ananias’ sin could have opened the entry for Satan to spoil the beautiful spiritual community. This act was judged harshly because dishonesty, greed, and covetousness are destructive in a church, preventing the Holy Spirit from working effectively. That is exactly what Satan does. We remember Achan’s sin in the book of Joshua 7:21 “**When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”** The Greek word for **kept back** that Ananias did is **nosphizomai,** which means “to misappropriate.” The same word was used of Achan’s sin when he coveted plunders.

The story of Ananias is similar to the story of Achan in an act of deceit which interrupted the victorious progress of the people of God. For Joshua, it was critical to make Israel’s community pure to conquer the Promised Land. For Peter, it was necessary to keep the early church community pure to advance the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Satan was at work to break those holy and pure community by tempting Achan and Ananias.

How did Peter deal with the sin of Annanias? Look at verse 4 **“Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”** Peter again rebuked Ananias here for lying to God. This was not a casual sin or a mistake but an intended attempt to deceive God for Peter said **“you have not lied just to human beings but to God”** Look at verse 5 **“When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.**” Lying to God is indeed a great sin. God directly involved in dealing with Ananias’ sin. He fell and died at the spot of lying. The same tragedy had happened to his wife, Sapphira. She too lied to God and she fell down to die. As a result, Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Some may accuse God of being harsh in an account of Ananias and Sapphira’s death. They think of God who was supposed to be loving and forgiving this family. With an emphasis on grace and mercy, it’s easy to overlook the equally important truth—God’s holiness. We must remember that God has not changed. He still hates sin as much as he ever did. Especially God dealt with sin of Ananias immediately to keep the early church from being spoiled by Satan. God’s judgement of Ananias and Sapphira produced shock and fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church. No doubt, it was a painful event to see the death of this family but all believers could have a right attitude to fear God and to purge sins out of this holy community.

As we learn from the passage, we should have a right attitude before God. Our God is gracious and merciful. He is holy and righteous. As children of God we enjoy the grace of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. But God demands us to be holy and righteous for He is holy. If the church is spoiled by sins and godlessness, the presence of the Holy Spirit will leave the church community and a church becomes hopeless.

Fearing God keeps us safe from the wrath of God and make God’s church alive and powerful. Do you know what happens if we lose fearing God? We are in danger of God’s judgment as we see in this passage. Human beings have fear of something. I have fear of rats and snakes. I feel fearful of the dark. When I feel fearful of something, I become cautious and careful. I try to keep the speed limit on the road because I am fearful of getting a fine. I fear my boss in the work place so I come on time to work and I do my daily tasks with my best because he is the one who can either fire me or promote me. These are kinds of example how fear works in our life. Fear makes us cautious, careful and hardworking. Having fear of God is little different story. We fear and honour God not because he will punish us unless we obey him. Out of love and honour to our heavenly Father who has the supreme authority, we fear, respect and obey him.

People who fear God will be very cautious of dealing with sins because our Father God hates sin. People who fear God will show his honor and reverence to God because God has all authority to judge and to reward. I pray that we may all have a right attitude to fear God and to live in his sight. Especially we may give honour and reverence to God as we gather and worship him.

Verses 12-16 explains how the church of God continued serving the ministry of preaching and the ministry of healing. The early church community had not been affected by Ananias’ sin. Rather, the work of the Holy Spirit was even more powerful than before. Many wonders and miracles were done by the apostles and all kinds of sick people got healed. New believers were added to the ministry of God as the consequence of work of the Holy Spirit.

Through the passage today I learn how much God cares for his church community to be pure and holy. It is God’s desire to use his church to spread the message of Jesus’ resurrection. God can’t use a church that spoiled by sin and Satan. Therefore great responsibility lays on each of us to build up the church of God pure. There must be many men and women of encouragement. We should be willing to give and to share our materials with other brothers and sisters. We shouldn’t let sin of selfishness, materialism and of not fearing God spoil our community. This cannot be done by human effort. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. Being oneness in heart and mind is our goal to let the Holy Spirit come and dwell in our community. May God make us one and use our church for his purpose.