

#76
June 30, 2019
Acts 5:1-11
Spiritual Authenticity

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² 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.

³ Then Peter 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? 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."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Have you ever exceeded the speed limit? Imagine speeding not too much, but just a little bit. Suddenly you see far in front that there is a police car. Do you slow down? I do. Why? Because I not want to be caught. But I have been speeding. If I did not get caught it doesn't mean I was not speeding. Right? Whom I am fooling? Why not live in such a way that I am not afraid of being caught?

(examples Kim)

I do not know how many sermons you have heard about this story but this is my first time preaching from these verses. I hope you have lots of grace as we together will be challenged through this story that is recorded by Luke.

On the one hand we feel sorry for Ananias and Sapphira. We all have been dishonest at some point in our lives. In our minds the punishment does not fit the crime.

At the same time, we do not have much tolerance for lying. President Nixon and the Watergate Scandal is a prime example. Ananias and Sapphira got caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

Many people talk about the good old days when your word was more valuable than a contract. You kept your word even if you end up at the disadvantage. If you shook hands on a deal it was as good as done.

Now we have to sign pages of small print for every business contract. We have

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

Acts 4:32



highly trained referees at every game just to keep everybody honest. There are government watch dogs all around us because so many people lie and cheat to get ahead and so many companies want to cut corners to increase profits.

Since Pentecost, June 9th, we have been witnessing the amazing things which happened to the believers after Christ ascended to His Father. Twice we learned of the Holy Spirit coming into the lives of all believers. Peter healed and proclaimed the gospel without no fear. The third person of the Trinity was alive, powerful and continuing God's work through Jesus' followers. The Christian Church started to form and, for the first time in Bible, we find the word "ecclesia". "Ecclesia" means a gathering or community. In the Bible it is translated as "church".

I believe the main reason we have this story is that Luke wanted us to see the same community that was filled with love, unity, and generosity must be filled with integrity and holiness.

Our story in chapter 5 is continuing what has happened in chapter 4. The community, after experiencing the Holy Spirit, was moved to a different style of life. Personal possessions were not a priority in their lives. They all had everything in common, because they were in “one heart and mind”.

Recently, I received a helpful insightful from my favorite daily devotional entitled Seedbed. The book of Acts is not so much a book of what the disciples did, but what the Holy Spirit did. It is more important, not to just follow exactly what the disciples did, but to follow the activity of the Holy Spirit. I understand that. If I try to do everything they did I would expect to experience precisely what they experienced. There is no formula for how to make the Spirit act the way I would like. First and foremost is to believe, to trust, and surrender to God’s will and to allow God to be God.

In this first community of believers was a man, named Josephus. But the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas which means encourager. Isn’t that a beautiful name to have? Barnabas was not only good with his words but also with his actions. He owned a field. He sold it and brought the money and placed it in the care and under the authority of the apostles.

It is not written anywhere that this was a requirement. Ananias and Sapphira also owned a piece of property. They were part of the community who gathered together to pray, to fellowship, and be devoted to the apostle teachings. This couple, of course, saw what Barnabas did. They probably wanted recognition and maybe to be praised. So these two sold the property and decided not to give it all to community. So what is the problem?



Clearly we can see from Peter's response that the problem is not that they did not give all of it. Peter said to Ananias: "It was your property. Nobody asked you to sell it. Even if you sold it, you did not have to give to our community. So what was the problem?"

The problem was not telling the truth. The issue was pretending to be someone that they truly were not. Do you ever pretend that you are such a giver but really you are not? In our Bible study, Kyle Idleman wrote, "The biggest check I write is to the church.: I thought: "Wow! That is big!" It was challenging to read but also very inspiring.

Peter 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?" That evil filled your heart. Sin is always a matter of the heart. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts--murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander (Mt 15:19).



Particular sins reveal particular things about the heart. Think about it. We all sin because we want to, not out of duty. We sin because our hearts long for something. If we don't address the motivational issues behind our sin, we will only treat it superficially, adjusting our behavior, not our hearts. God doesn't want just behavioral adjustment.

The children of Israel entered the Jordan River into Promised Land went from one victory after another. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. The next stop was town called Ai. The spies came back from Ai and said, "It is a small town. You will only need 2 or 3 thousand soldiers." They were shocked when this little village defeated Israel.

After much anguish, discouragement and prayer they discovered sin in the camp. The instructions had been to utterly destroy everything in Jericho. All the gold and silver was to go the Lord's treasury. Achan decided to take some and hide it under his tent. The one man's sin affected the entire nation.

One or a few, acting out of selfish desires, can negatively impact an entire group.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to impress other people. They lied. They planned all of it. The two wanted to keep some money for themselves and hide it. They told others they are giving all they have but they didn't. They kept some money secretly for themselves. For what? Was it because they did not really trust that community? Were they simply being greedy? Were they trying get the advantages of both sides – be part of the Christian community and have the comforts this world has to offer?

God tells us in Numbers 32:23 that we can be certain that our sins will find us out.

We all know we cannot fool God. So why do we hide? We pretend. God wants to forgive sins. God's grace reaches to other people's sins, even those that you and I think should never be forgiven. God is merciful and loving. God forgives. Jesus gave his life so we will not be separated and trapped in slavery of sin. However, He cannot forgive the sins you do not confess and repent from. He cannot heal your wounds if you will not let Him. We try to hide them.

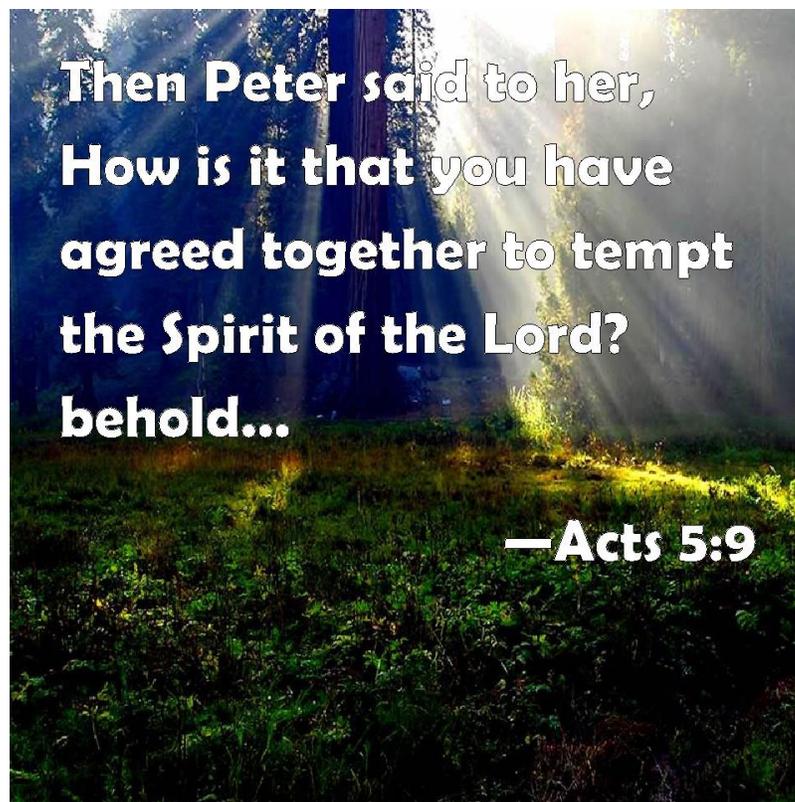
Adam and Eve tried to hide from God after they sinned. They covered themselves in shame. Then when confronted by God they blamed someone other than themselves.

We have to be honest. Once I almost lost my best friend because she confronted me daily with my making bad choices. I am so grateful she continued to speak truth to me. When we are sinning, evil loves that. Evil tells us lies. We convince ourselves with thoughts like these: I need it, it is not that bad, it helps me, it is the only way I can live. That is a lie.

Adam and Eve were tempted when they decided to take a second look at the forbidden fruit. The more they looked at it and thought about it, the less dangerous it looked. In fact it looked delicious. Our minds do that. We rationalize and convince ourselves that the sin is not really that bad.

Truly, I tell you, God is the only source that can satisfy your deepest desire. If you continue to struggle find somebody you trust, talk about it. Let the light of Jesus shine in your darkest places. Come to the Lord with an open heart, pour out your struggles – all your struggles. God sees and knows your heart and He still loves you. He desires to give you a life of abundance, where there is no shame, no guilt, no lies

Ananias and Sapphira desired to look good in front of other Christians. They wanted to be recognized. We all desire to look better than we are. We love the praise—or at least acceptance—of our peers. Our desire for acceptance can cloud our judgment, making us more concerned with what others see than with what God sees.



Peter reveals another reason in his response to Sapphira: "You've put the Spirit of the Lord to the test." What does that mean? It means she wanted to find out how far she could go and still get away with it. We move forward into sin and deceit believing that we'll later confess and be forgiven. That's how the enemy wants us to think. Don't harbor sin. Don't provide sin a safe place to hide in your heart.

At this time the church was in infancy, it was impressionable, it was delicate and God took this sin very seriously because it threatened the very heart of the church much like Achan's sin threatened the moral fiber of Israel. God is a righteous God and God calls us to be holy. There are so many good people in the world, but God call us to be holy. This is a reminder to us that the community of faith is to be a model community of integrity, purity and holiness.

Ananias' and Sapphira's demise sounds like a story out of the Old Testament. We emphasize the love, mercy, gentleness and grace of Jesus and rightly so. Here we are at the beginning of the church after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and we are confronted with the fact that the all-knowing God, who looks on the inside, will not tolerate sin. God is to be feared!

Perhaps most surprising of all is verse 14 right after the passage we read. "Indeed, more and more believers in the Lord, large numbers of both men and women, were added to the church."

Truly the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways

Praise God for his mercy we have today. Praise for the Holy Spirit who is able to lead us into all truth and to warn us when sin lurks at the door and to strengthen us so we have courage to live life that brings glory to God.