

**The Acts of an Easter People:  
Compassionate Sharing  
Acts 4:32-37  
Acts 2:37-42**

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It has been a year.

It has been a year since we awoke to the horrible news of the shootings in Colchester County. The largest mass shooting in Canadian history, right here in Nova Scotia.

This afternoon across our province we will remember the lives lost, but also how we did come together in the days following—Nova Scotia Strong. The words seemed to appear everywhere. They were a statement, as much as they were a prayer.

God give us strength for the living of these days.

Little did we know how much we would need those words, that prayer. For the past year has been one that has tried our souls, our lives, the very fabric of our province. As John DeMont<sup>1</sup> reminded us in his column this week, that horrible event was followed by the Snowbirds crash, the disappearance of a 3 year old in Truro, the crash of a helicopter from the HMCS Fredericton, the 6 lost in the sinking of a scallop trawler—all while Covid was ravaging Northwoods Centre, while all of us were hiding in our homes because of the pandemic.

It has been a year. Quite a year.

DeMont wrote of his fear that all these traumas would change us as a people, that the sense of community that marks this province would disappear replaced *“by a feeling that we are all alone in a cold land devoid of logic or morality.”*<sup>2</sup>

He continued that he has come to realize that all these events have revealed that we are who we have always been. Over the past year the paper has bulged with tales of selfless acts, of people doing good, of staying connected.

As I read his column I felt as if I were reading our text for today. Acts is the story of the early church. It is volume 2 of Luke’s gospel, the next chapter in the Jesus story. It gives us a picture of how the early church lived out the fact that Christ has Risen!

So what?

What does it mean for us now? Now in those immediate days after that first Easter; now in the immediate days after Easter 2021?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/news/local/john-demont-did-nova-scotias-mass-shooting-change-us-576492/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

What are the acts of an Easter People? How are we to live? That is the question we are going to be exploring in the next few weeks.

Our story today drops us into the life of First Church Jerusalem in the aftermath of a few tumultuous days. Peter and John had been going to the temple when they were stopped by an invalid. Every day people would bring him to there to beg for a livelihood. When these two disciples came by he called out to them, just like he called out to everyone. I think there was a sense that these two would reject his appeal, just like so many others.

But Peter's response was different. *"I don't have any silver or gold, but I will give you what I have. In the name of Jesus get up and walk!"*<sup>3</sup> And the man got up and walked!

What caused Peter to make such an audacious claim? How many people had he healed? What if the man wasn't cured?

So many questions, but isn't that what Jesus has told them to do—all the things that you have seen me do, only greater? Well, apparently Peter took him seriously!

Immediately the man began to make a ruckus! He was shouting and dancing (you know you can't do that in church!!!) The authorities were called, Peter and John were arrested and thrown in jail.

They had seen how this played out! A disturbance in the temple, arrest by the temple police—they knew the next chapter.

Only they were let go with the injunction that they cease and desist. No more preaching, healing, causing a disturbance. Just don't do it!

But when they were released they went back to their friends who had been praying for them and they were shaken by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the aftermath of this past year, with all the challenges we have experience, have you been shaken by the presence of the Holy Spirit? Has there been a time when you felt the intimate presence of God's presence with you?

How did you respond?

How do you respond?

How do Easter people respond?

If there was ever a verse where we pick and choose our meaning it is Acts 4:32.

*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.*<sup>4</sup>

They were were of one heart and mind. That is not as much Bible as it is Hellenistic philosophy about friendship. Matt Skinner says these verses speak of *the kind of cooperation and interdependent identity that other ancient people hoped to accomplish through a just and ideal political system Acts sees coming into being through a community enlivened by the Spirit to embody the power of Jesus' resurrection. Hope not for a golden age*

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 3:6

<sup>4</sup> Acts 4:32. NIV

*created by mighty emperors or wise philosopher-kings. Look instead, Acts urges, to the Spirit poured out by the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ.*<sup>5</sup>

How often has that been held up as a directive that we all have to agree? Any dissension, any disagreement is a sign that the spirit is not with us?

But the rest of that verse...

*No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.*

Very few sermons on THAT part! It sounds like something Karl Marx might have written! *"From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."* Skinner reminds us that the Greek philosopher Plato envisioned a thriving society in which people reject the misuse of words like mine, not mine, alien.<sup>6</sup>

Those words have become the bedrock of our society, haven't they? This past week Anita and I had a long discussion at lunch when she said, "I am going to have some of your pretzels." I tried to explain that they aren't **my** pretzels, they are ours, available to everyone who is eating lunch, but she reminded me how often I say "I am out of pretzels." Who owns what? Those pesky pronouns!

And isn't that the difficulty we struggled with as we talked about our land acknowledgement statement?<sup>7</sup> Whose land is this? To our indigenous ancestors owning the land was similar to talking about owning the air. It is all a gift from the Creator. And yet in our minds....

That is why we emphasize stewardship here. Again let me quote my dear friend Hardy Clemons. "Stewardship isn't the church's way of raising money, it is God's way of raising children" It is how we grow in faith. It is how we grow in being church. This radical community seeks to turn our world upside down, and that includes how we view money. Willie James Jennings reminds us that in the church, *"Money will be used to destroy what money is usually used to create: distance and boundaries between people."*<sup>8</sup>

We want to break down those barriers, to lessen that distance. We are invited to give in order to be a part of one another, to work towards a common goal, a common purpose. We are invited to give in order to be an Easter people. So that we might be of one heart and soul.

And let me say that you have done that! In the midst of this terrible, horrible, not good, very bad year, you have responded with such generosity! I missed Scott's stewardship moment, so forgive me if I repeat him (or contradict him!) but we are in a good place.

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Skinner. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-easter-2/commentary-on-acts-432-35-5>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pwubc.org/land-acknowledgement-statement>

<sup>8</sup> op cit. Skinner.

At the end of the first quarter we are running a deficit. Our revenues are below our expenses and our budget, but that is not unexpected. We have a deficit of about \$4,200, which is about where we were this time last year. While our Finance Committee is paying attention to this, they assure me that as we continue through the year, as we are faithful in our giving, responsible with our spending we will be fine. This congregation has been faithful in sharing.

At the same time, what we have done, how we have reached out to our community and world to see that needs are met! This congregation raised \$5,000 through the Coldest Night of the Year Walk to help those who so need shelter in our cold winters. We were one of the top groups in the Annapolis Valley.

Then when it came time for our Easter Offering, where we turn our gaze to an international concern, you have given over \$4,000! Those funds are going to assist our friends in Oliva, where the combination of Covid and economic hardship and a brutal immoral embargo has compounded the suffering of that nation.

We are also going to assist Mohammad Al Maziad's brother and family who are waiting in Beirut, Lebanon to emigrate to Canada. They have experienced some health issues and our offering will assist them.

Wynn shared the need with you and you responded! I think that is the largest Easter Offering we have had since I became pastor.

\$9,000 over and beyond our budget in the midst of a pandemic.

Talk about the acts of an Easter people!

And that isn't all, Every two weeks we send a cart full of food to the Wolfville Food Bank. Our Loyal Workers have served a Soup and Chowder Luncheon (the last one this week) which has raised several thousand dollars for ministries through our congregation. And each of you in ways big and small have given time and talent and yes funds which are making a difference in the lives of people in our community and world!

Have we met all the needs of all those around us? No! But we are seeking to make a difference, and if you are going to be like Barnabas and sell a field.... Let's talk!

It has been a year.

It has been a year in which the very fabric of our province has been strained, in which we have been faced with one calamity after another. And in each case, in each case we have pulled together. We have demonstrated what Plato described as the essential of friendship—being forged into one soul. We have sought to meet the needs of our fellow Nova Scotians, from one end of our province to the other.

We have also lived out the best our faith calls from us. We have tried to reflect the truth of Deuteronomy 15 when it says that "there will be on one in need among you," the truth of Acts 4:32, where we are of one heart and soul.

It is a blending of the best of the secular world and the best of our faith. Compassionate sharing is one act of an Easter People. May it continue to be true of us.

Amen

