

Stewardship Week 3
Redistributive Justice
October 21, 2020

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

We celebrated World Communion Sunday just a few short weeks ago. Did it occur to you that “everyone broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God”? Perhaps one of the blessings of our Covid-19 time is that we are the church of Acts in our midst, or at least we have the opportunity to be! The concept of this new church of Acts in our scripture is focusing on the basics, which ironically is what we are being forced to do at our present time in the world.

One of those basics is the concept of redistributive justice, or the act of sharing what we have with those around. Essentially, it is the socially just allocation of resources. I am not suggesting that the church of Acts was a socialist state of being, by the way. Only that what they had, they recognized was a gift from God and acted accordingly in grace. For the church of Acts, to share (initially at least) was not too difficult. They literally shared their coats with those around.

It wasn't too long, however in chapter 7, where the church begins to split. This evolved in part over one group feeling treated unjustly or unfairly. The split occurred in part because money and fairness got in the way of generosity and abundance, as is the way of our human desires.

The concept of redistributive justice demands for a shift in that power and control in our midst, giving the power of money and goods, of voice and ideas to all involved and back to God where it came from, instead of simply one group of individuals. This redistributive power of the church today might look like food

pantries and school drives, where the haves give to the have nots or it might look like everyone, no matter of their giving to the church being treated equally.

Truly, it is a blessing to be able to participate in this kind of work together, using our power for the good of others (much like MORE Justice strives to do). Redistributive power is also a testimony to our faith that God will provide enough; our job is to steward that provision fairly. In other words, we give because God first gives to us, over and over again, God gives.

One of the best-known scriptures attests to this: Matthew 20:16 says *“The last shall be first and the first shall be last”*. Or In other words, in giving, we receive. To experience this personally, please take a moment with me and breathe a deep inhale. Hold it for a second or two and release slowly in a long exhale. Did you feel that? Even in our very breaths, a gift by God, we cannot receive a new breath until we give away the old breath. So it is with redistributive justice.

If our faith really believes that the last shall be first, or that God will create food for 5,000 out of only 5 fish and 2 loaves, then we have to be like the child who offered his fish and loaves, to choose to be the first to give in order to receive and share that blessing among all of those around us. I would argue that this is also balanced with power and possibility (our second devotion) and the quest for financial freedom (responsibility). But essentially, to take is human and to give is divine. In order to experience this gift in our lives, giving becomes our state of being, our heart, our way of saying thank you Lord, I trust you to provide, just like the Israelites learn in the wilderness.

This is God’s economics throughout the scriptures. God is abundant and generous with everything. It is also our lesson in economics in the church. Shouldn’t we strive to live with the same abundance and generosity in all aspects of life? As you work this year to determine your stewardship and generosity to the church, to other worthy causes and to one another, let us all remember this generosity of God and let that reality shape what decisions of giving we will make to our church here at Seven Oaks.