

THERE'S A RIGHT WAY AND A WRONG WAY**Acts 4:32-5:11**

Intro: Several years ago on a windy New Year's Eve, Kathy and I were gathering snacks and drinks for a family New Year's Eve Celebration at Emily and Evan's house. I can't recall exact details, but I expect that we probably were supposed to be there by 8:30 or 9:00 PM. We were almost ready when the lights went out in our house. The wind had caused something to happen, somewhere, and our power was gone. So, we made ready and went to Emily's house where they still had power. We took along what we needed for an overnight stay since our power outage was an opportunity for a campout if it lasted past midnight. We enjoyed New Year's Eve and, of course we watched the ball drop, and then, very soon after midnight, we went off to bed. I slept in Grady's bed and Kathy slept in Fiona's.

The next morning I texted my friend Randy, who lives right across the street from us, and asked him if our power was back on. It was not. Where it had been quite warm the evening before, the weather changed and thus the high winds, and also the temperatures dropped precipitously, Because of this I felt that it was necessary to get home and hook a generator up to our furnace, refrigerators and freezer.

Andrew and I drove to the house and pulled out the generator. Now it's always hard to start and it's worse when it's cold. Both of us took turns pulling the starter rope and we pulled and pulled and pulled and it wouldn't start. Not even Andrew could get it going and he's got a lot more ummph! than me. He asked me if I had the gas turned on referring to the gas shut off valve right above the tank. It was a good question and I was not insulted by such a basic question and I assured him, that it was indeed turned on – I had made sure of that. Randy moseyed up the driveway from his house and the noise of his own generator, and he asked me the same question, "Do you have the gas turned on." I was starting to get irritated at everybody asking me this but I replied that it was turned on. Then Andrew reached under the generator and he turned the knob for the gas cut off valve. And after what had to be an hour of futility, the generator fired right up. I had turned the valve the wrong way. At this, Randy leaned over and out of the side of his mouth said, very sarcastically and patronizingly, "Righty Tightly Lefty Loosey"

I was humiliated! My daughters know Righty Tightly Lefty Loosey! Kathy knows Righty Tightly Lefty Loosey! EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW THAT IT'S RIGHTY TIGHTY LEFTY LOOSEY. I had failed as a man.

My family, who love to recall and recite Randy stories, love to remember that particular story. And every time we have a screw driver or wrench or even a faucet valve, and certainly when we are firing up the generator, we remind one another, in a Randy kind of voice, Righty Tightly Lefty Loosey.

On that New Year's Day several years ago there was the right way and there was a wrong way and I chose the wrong way. And it made things infinitely more difficult for me. When we got it the right way everything went well.

There's a right way and there's a wrong way

The world doesn't want to hear it. They like to do things their own way because it's actually human nature.

There isn't any one of us who is not tempted to do our own way. But, here is the rub, the theme song of Christ Followers is not I DID IT MY WAY. Instead our theme song is

Have thine own way, Lord!

Have thine own way!

Hold o'er my being

absolute sway.

Fill with thy Spirit

till all shall see

Christ only, always,

living in me!

We can try it doing it my way, but we will find out that the consequences can be grave – no pun intended – but you might think I'm playing with words as we look at our text for today:

(Read Acts 4:32-5:11)

This is quite of contrast here in these verses. The first half is a picture of abundant life lived together. The second half is a picture of the loss of life, plain and simple. Let me break it down, first of all there is . . .

The right way (Acts 4:32-37)

- A perfect description of the right way is wonderful unity. Some have described this early Church as an example of Christian communism, but it was not. Instead it was wild generosity in action. It would appear here that they were living in a commune with no private ownership, but as you really look at it, there was still private property. Albert Wynn says *“To abolish private property is to abolish giving.”* That’s truth because Christ Followers are givers. Furthermore, and certainly in the case of the Church here in Acts 4, it’s all voluntary and never forced.
- It says here that . . . *those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said any of the things that belong to him was his own, but they had everything in common.* Acts 4:32. There is a Spanish adage is *“¡Mi casa es su casa!”* which means *“My house is your house!”*. That’s the way the Church should be: My house is your house. My rototiller is your rototiller. My trailer is your trailer. What’s mine is yours, because I choose to share it with you.
- This Acts 4 Church didn’t **HAVE** to care for one another’s needs, they **GOT** to care for one another’s needs. This is a key characteristic of Christ Followers: they are generous. This is because generosity is an outward display of the deep work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Believer. Albert Winn puts it this way *“If I have more than I need, and a brother who shares with me in the Spirit is in want, it is unthinkable for me to hold selfishly what I have.”*
- And here is the cool thing: the tenses of the verbs here in this passage are the same as what we find at the end of Acts. 2, where it’s also said of the believers that they shared everything together. The verbs in both places are in a continuous tense. Unity and generosity are not once and done – instead the early church was continuously being generous with one another. The incredible unity brought about a wonderful and continuous generosity. That should be true of today’s Church too!
- At the end of the passage then is a picture of generous giving in the person of Barnabas. Listen to the description of him here. *Joseph, who was called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native a Cypress, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet.* Acts 4:36-37
- I’ve often taught on this topic of giving that we are to give thoughtfully and prayerfully. I’ve used the example from 2nd Corinthians where Paul seals his teaching with, *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* 2 Corinthians 9:7. Now, this doesn’t mean that God doesn’t like you if you don’t give, he loves you no matter what – in fact he loves the selfish person just as much as he loves any wildly generous person. But the point is God’s pleasure is what brings joy to the giver. Barnabas was a cheerful giver as he sold a piece of land and brought the money to the Church.
- Something else about the right way is that there was power in the preaching of the apostles Acts 4:33. Specifically, it says that their testimony was powerful. I believe that it wasn’t just the apostles, that, indeed, it was all the Christ Followers who were, by the Holy Spirit, sharing about the good news of Jesus Christ and his Resurrection. This is what brought power. In the end the same power that Jesus had, in his teaching, his healing, and his power over nature, was now displayed by his disciples. They were open to the Holy Spirit and as a result people were moved to God. The Good News of the Resurrection and the unity of the people meant that people were changed. People looked at them and they knew that something was different.
- Here’s my point, the right way meant that people liked the believers. In Acts 2 it said the same thing – it says there the believers were . . . *having favor with all the people.* Acts 2:47b. Here in our chapter 4, in the second half of verse 33 it says, . . . *great grace was upon them all.* Acts 4:33b. Commentators point out that this was an older meaning for the word “grace” which is often defined as undeserved favor – which is indeed what God’s grace to us means. But here in this connotation, grace basically meant the believers were graceful. One commentator describe this older meaning by describing the Acts 4 believers as winsome and attractive. It is important that Christ Followers are attractive since too often people have the idea, right or wrong, that the Church is not attractive. They see the angry actions and words of some who call themselves Christians and judge the entire Church by those few.
- Here’s the truth: Christ Followers are the real deal – they’re not fake. Barnabas was the real deal. These believers who made sure that there was no want in the community were the real deal and so as a result,

even though things were rough in Palestine, these early Christ Followers suffered no hardship, or in the words of verse , . . . *there was not a needy person among them.* Acts 4:34

- That's the right way! That's the way it should be. But then there is. . .

The wrong way (Acts 5:1-11)

- This is a shorter treatment because it's pretty obvious, here in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, what the wrong way is. First of all, people are confused by this story. And it is, indeed, intriguing and disturbing.
- This is not a story about a power play by Peter. For sure Peter was on fire for Christ. He could not help but teach about Jesus and the way of the Resurrection. But it's obvious that he wasn't letting it go to his head. In this case Peter didn't want this to happen it was not his desire for them to be killed. Instead it was the work of the Holy Spirit after the couple attempted to deceive him.
- Additionally, this is not an example of God zapping sinners. There are some who believe that God zaps people for not following his way. For instance, they'll say something edgy and look at the sky, half-jokingly, and say "*I hope lightning doesn't hit me.*" Well, hear this: God doesn't work that way! God doesn't zap you. Any kind of punishment we get as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira here, is what they brought on themselves. This is a good place to point out that God does not send anyone to hell. Anyone who ends up there go on their own steam. They choose the path they go in life and if that is rebellion and walking away from a relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the only way, then the destination is hell. So this is not an example of God zapping Ananias and Sapphira.
- Ananias and Sapphira were the exact opposite of Barnabas. Barnabas was selfless and generous and encouraging and he's remembered for that. This couple did the exact opposite. They too had a piece of property that they sold. They too brought it to the disciples in the way that Barnabas had, but they implied that it was the proceeds of the entire sale when it wasn't. The problem was they were lying to the Holy Spirit.
- It may have been that they were jealous of or envious of Barnabas's notoriety, and they wanted to have the same recognition. Regardless, their giving was from a completely wrong motivation. Remember, we already pointed out that giving is voluntary and so Ananias didn't have to give the proceeds of his sale. The problem is he lied that what he gave was the entire amount. It was deceit.
- Our text makes it clear that Ananias, and then later, Sapphira, lied to the Holy Spirit. This is crazy! They are lying to an all-knowing God so don't insult him by trying to do something other than what he knows is the truth. The right way is the truth, the wrong way is deception.
- It says here that all who heard were afraid. Well, they needed to be. Deceit is serious. We deal a lot with it these days. The truth often seems to happen only when it's convenient. Let it not be true of us, Church. Let's simply resolve that we will have nothing to do with deceit. Let's always be people of our word. Albert Winn says "*It is a sobering thought that the severest punishment that occurred in the primitive church did not fall on a murderer or a thief. It fell on a "respectable" couple, who falsified their church pledge in order to appear generous when they were really greedy.*"
- So, there you have it, the wrong way was laid out pretty quickly. Be truthful because it's right and because deceit grieves the Holy Spirit.
- The right way is unity, care, powerful testimony of the resurrection, winsome grace, and wild generosity.
- The wrong way is deceit, self-deceit, seeking glory, and it ends up in death.
- There's a right way and there's a wrong way. I'm sure you know the direction you'll take. Amen.