



Everything in Common

What if our theology could get up out of our armchairs and into the real world? That would be something worth talking about. This is The Armchair Anabaptist podcast.

*Father, we've forgotten
that you've called us together
to bear each other's burdens
and worship you as one.*

“Community loneliness - that might be the great evangelistic opportunity of our time, the great wound in the world that needs healing.”

“Mixing our faith with a political party is like mixing ice cream and horse manure. It doesn't do much damage to the manure, but it really messes up the ice cream.”

“It's very early. It's very primal. It's very deep within the human community, is that we are people who do not want to be alone.”

“I'd love to see us stand more in solidarity with one another, not looking down on one another, but together finding that level ground at the foot of the cross of Jesus and sharing in the hope of the resurrection.”

*One church,
One light,
One body,
Found in Christ.*

Introduction

Jesse Penner: You're listening to The Armchair Anabaptist. I'm Jesse Penner.

Andrew Dyck: And I'm Andrew Dyck. This is episode six: Everything in Common.

JP: We're taking a look at the early church and specifically we're going to be taking a look at a passage of Scripture that is key in the history of the church because it really points to the formation of the church as we know it today.

It's in Acts chapter two, and it's this moment of Pentecost, this moment when the Holy Spirit is released to the people of God. And Acts 2 paints a powerful picture in all sorts of ways of what it looks like when the Holy Spirit is active and present within a community of believers.

We see it show up as tongues of fire. We see the people speak in languages that can be understood by all around them. We see Peter preach a real barnburner of a sermon that shares the gospel. We see many converted, and then we have a picture of how this church behaved, of what they did, of what characterized them, of how they treated each other.

And so this has become a passage that is a real anchor point for us, I think, as we think about what it means to be the church. And, Andrew, I think you've got that cued up for us there. Can you read that passage?

AD: Yeah, I want to read Acts 2:42 to 47, and this is what it says:

“And they devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles and all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

JP: So there's some pretty radical stuff happening in this passage when you look at how this group was behaving and we stack it up next to our modern church practices, there's a bit of a gap here, I think, in terms of trying to understand how it is that we are living a church today and what it looked like in this very specific time and place when the Holy Spirit had been unleashed and people were gathering daily and everything they had was shared and everything was in common.

And there's this debate that has gone on probably through the entire history of the church looking at this passage and trying to understand the question of how much of this was descriptive of a moment in time and how much of this is practically prescriptive for us as the church today?

AD: Well, absolutely. And this can be somewhat of a - I don't want to say controversial, but maybe unpopular passage. We are affluent and we are individualistic in the Western world, in the Western church.

So, I mean, hey, if we are people with lots of things that we can call our own, then maybe we lean towards this is more descriptive of a certain time, a certain context. I mean, do we really have to share all things, have everything in common? It just really isn't very reflective of the way that we operate.

But maybe we don't have that luxury. Perhaps there's a bit more here that is prescriptive for how we ought to be treating one another and living and so this is a question that we brought to our guests.

How much of Acts 2:42-47 is prescriptive for the modern church?

We talked to Shane Claiborne, Steve Bell, Kara Mandryk and Travis and Rosey Zacharias and asked them how much of this passage of Acts 2 is prescriptive for the modern church.

We are going to first hear from Kara Mandryk. Doctor Mandryk is the coordinator of the Henry Budd College for Ministry, as well as a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Archdeacon for Ministry and Training in the Diocese of Brandon. And here's how she answered that question.

Dr. Kara Mandryk: It's very funny the way you frame that question, because I'm assuming that you're talking about the end of Acts 2, but I'm also thinking about the beginning of Acts 2, the idea of living embodied and guided by the very real and ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit within our lives, which is, of course, what Peter's doing there and as the believers are filled with the spirit.

So, I recognize that Acts 2 is a pretty big chapter with a lot to say to us. I think when it comes to the framing of your question, what's prescriptive?

Well, the ongoing filling of the Holy Spirit who leads and guides and inspires us and fills, especially those of us who are preachers. Who fills us with the truth of Jesus to speak to those that need to hear the truth of Jesus. So I guess I would say that's pretty prescriptive.

To respond to the word when preached with abandon and change. So those 3000 that were then brought into the family of God because they responded to the words of the Spirit with an immediacy and with a tangible change, in this case, baptism.

But of course, in our cases, if we are already baptized, then it's some kind of tangible change, a way to make a change in our lives. So I'd say that's pretty prescriptive from Acts 2.

The call to repentance, I think, is also prescriptive. Peter's call to repentance and to be in a space—and I would maybe extrapolate from there a little bit—to be in a space of walking in humility in a way that we are always aware of the pitfalls around us, the places of our own brokenness, and how that brokenness then affects the way we interact with each other, both Christian and those who are who do not yet know Christ.

And then, of course, there's the fellowship of the believers, right? That little section at the end which, you know, as far as my understanding of whether that's prescriptive or not, I would say what is prescriptive in that section is living in an ongoing spirit of generosity and gratitude. I think that's what is prescriptive from those lines.

I have, in my life, struggled with—many, many Christians probably have also had this struggle—of what do I do with the things that I have? I am a human with many good things that I can offer. And so, I have struggled, as probably many, many people have, with what do I do with those benefits, those blessings that are unearned. But also, that have come to me through a variety of realities in my life.

And so this notion of, you know, selling our possessions and goods and giving to anyone that is a need—I will fully admit that I struggle with that because I don't know what it means for me in the 21st-century Canadian context.

I actually wish in some ways, I wish I could understand it to be an absolute prescription because that would be easier, right? That would be easier to say, okay, well, I can sell my house and give to people in need. And then it turns out that I'm the one in need because I no longer have a home. Right. That's just a little joke. But the reality is navigating our first world Canadian context, that is admittedly actually quite diverse.

AD: Travis and Rosey Zacharias are EMC missionaries and church planters in Minga Guazu, Paraguay. They are also involved in camp ministry with Che Roga. This is Travis' response to the question of how much of Acts 2 is prescriptive for the church today.

Travis Zacharias: I think the general principles of Acts 2—we are referring to Acts 2:42 to 47—apply to, most directly, to study and fellowship together, the breaking of bread and praying together, having everything in common—that one's maybe up more for debate nowadays—meeting every day in the temple courts and the need to be hospitable and generous.

The general principles that do apply to us as Christians and maybe wear them a little bit differently, but definitely we need to be studying the Bible together under the leadership of people that have studied more, we need to be fellowshiping together, and to be praying together and to be generous and hospitable.

As we read this passage, I think the context of Acts 2, at the beginning of the chapter, in Acts 2:5 it talks about the 3,000 people who accepted the message that was being preached. I mean, there's 3,000 people there, right? That were baptized and they were God-fearing Jews from every nation on earth.

And so, the context here, to me seems to be, there's visitors from all over the world in Jerusalem, and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship. They're not necessarily people that live in Jerusalem, but much more they're there as visitors, not working. They have the time to meet every day. And they depended on the generosity of the people living in Jerusalem to eat and to have their needs met.

And so, in the long-term context where in fact, in a couple of years, eventually they'd have run out of the land to sell, people wouldn't be able to be quite so generous with each other. And I think the context here, I'm not sure how close the timeline fits together with this conversion of 3,000 people and these verses in Acts 2, but there seems to be some of that, where there are a lot of visitors in Jerusalem that are from other parts of the world.

And so it makes sense in that context that they were meeting together every day, that they were sharing everything, that they had because they were there as visitors. Later on, as you read the writings of Paul, some of these concepts come through, but maybe not in the same way.

Paul talks a lot about unity, talks a lot about treating each other with love, but not necessarily that they share everything that they have in common and not necessarily that they're meeting together every day. Some of those things maybe have to be changed depending on the context.

AD: Seeing as Travis and Rosey are church planters in Paraguay, I asked Rosey in particular how she sees Acts 2 principles working out in that context.

Rosey Zacharias: In our church plant here, these are definitely goals that we're striving to meet, to live in this kind of context of fellowship and meeting together and encouraging one another. And it's not easy to live this out in the church plant that we're working in. We're working with a lot of people who come from very worldly perspectives, very sinful lifestyles. And so, they become believers, but there's a huge trauma in their past, a huge... the worldviews are not godly. And so, it's a process of changing those worldviews.

JP: Next, we'll hear from Steve Bell. Steve Bell is an award-winning singer, songwriter and storyteller from Winnipeg, Manitoba, who's been performing for over 30 years. In 2022, he was inducted into the Order of Canada. He's also an author and has released a seven-book series on the spirituality of the Christian calendar year called Pilgrim Year. This is what Steve had to say in response to this question: how much of this picture we receive of the early Church and Acts 2 is prescriptive for us as the church today?

Steve Bell: Well, you know, that Acts passage is unsettling, isn't it? That has kind of haunted me in the same way that the Sermon on the Mount has haunted me, in the same way that Mary's Magnificat has haunted me, you know, in the same way that, the prophets, Isaiah in particular haunts me. And I really wonder, are there any Christians anywhere? You know?

And I can't just sort of dismiss it saying, "Well, that's not practical," You know, that's nice that those people had all this passion. But we can't forget that, for one, when Mary found herself carrying the seed of God for the life of the world, she broke into the Magnificat. Right? Which is all about a sort of a reshuffling of resources. The mighty have been brought down, the low have been brought up. That's the first words out of her mouth.

David Bentley Hart, you know, it's funny, I just read this the other day, says, "Let's face it, Mary was a Bolshevik." and he says, "You can't get around it. Do not dismiss that."

And then when Jesus sort of launches his ministry, almost the first words out of his mouth had that same flavour. I've come to redress all these things, you know, good news to the poor, sight to the blind. Sort of taking the resources from the over-resourced and sharing them with the under-resourced. I mean, it's clear. It's unambiguous.

And then the Sermon on the Mount, same thing. These are fairly unambiguous. And then we've got to remember that the church that lived in living memory of Jesus saw it as unambiguous. Right? And so, you can't dismiss it. You just really, really can't.

I understand that in our world that we have bought into so much of an individualistic sort of theology, it's very hard for our brains to get around it. But we are... our society does not

promote the teachings of Christ. And I'm not talking about sexual ethics, although those are there. I'm not talking about all kinds of very economic and political in the non-institutional ways of saying that. Jesus was extremely political. That's not partisan. Political. There's a way of being together. Right? And he says it's a different way altogether.

So... even in terms of violence, you know, and all that kind of stuff. So, when he comes out preaching forgive enemies. I mean, he wasn't talking about people that you disagree with on Facebook about masking. You know, his enemies were the people that hung his kin on crosses. Right? When Jesus heals a centurion's daughter—a centurion was responsible for murdering Jews that were rebelling against Roman occupation. So, when he says, love your enemies and forgive your enemies, there's it's almost immoral what he's asking us to do. It's unthinkable. How can you do that to animals? They're animals. Right?

So, we have, what's the word...? We have so sort of pacified the teachings of Jesus and the understanding of the first church that we can actually think that these things are not prescriptive. I can't go there. They unsettle me pretty much every day.

JP: Last up here, we'll hear from Shane Claiborne, who's an author, speaker and activist who worked with Mother Teresa and founded The Simple Way in Philadelphia. He's also the founder of Red Letter Way, along with Tony Campolo. We talked with Shane about the same question. How much of this passage in Acts 2 is prescriptive versus simply describing what it is that happened to this group at that time?

Shane Claiborne: What happened in the book of Acts, the birthday of the church, the infilling of the Holy Spirit in the upper room, at Pentecost has so much to offer us today. As you look at this, I mean, certainly like times are a little different than they were 2,000 years ago, and yet God's the same yesterday today and forever. And the Spirit may have new forms and ways that the Spirit moves, but it's the same Spirit that moved back then.

So, I think we need to pay attention to what happened at Pentecost. And, you know, especially as we're thinking about what it means to be the church today, there's something about the innocence. Right? And the newness of what God did there in the Book of Acts in chapter two and four.

And there's a few things I think that stand out to me. One of them is, you know, as much as we focus on the speaking in tongues or the, you know, the tongues of fire, one of the things that's so important is that they started sharing everything that, you know, the Book of Acts says that no one claimed any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. And it says, this is so important, "there were no needy persons among them."

And it literally says that they put their offerings at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed as folks had need. But this idea that they ended poverty, that that was one of the initial signs of Pentecost, the birthday of the church. I mean, that is massive. And it was relational. It was in a new system.

We sometimes say the sharing of possessions wasn't a prescription, but a description. Right? It wasn't that they had community because they shared everything. It wasn't communism or socialism, but it was that they loved one another and out of that, one of the signs was that they held their possessions differently.

There was no way that someone would have more than they need while someone else had less. And I mean, if you kind of dig a little bit deeper, you see how radical their economic vision was. I mean, it was far more radical than Karl Marx, you know. I mean, it was rooted in this reckless love that Basil the Great, he would say it like this, "If we steal a person's clothes, you call them a thief (if someone steals a person's clothes), but shouldn't we call a Christian a thief if they have extra clothes in their closet while someone is cold on the streets?"

I mean, and they said, the money in your bank belongs to the poor. St Vincent de Paul said, "When I give food to the hungry, I get on my knees, and I ask for forgiveness because I'm only returning what was stolen. I'm only returning bread that was rightfully theirs."

God didn't make a world where some of us have piles of food while others, you know, are groaning with hunger. So that vision is so beautiful and it's at Pentecost, it's rooted in love.

That's what God did. And it makes so much sense. I mean, this is the theme all through Scripture—that there is enough for this day, our daily bread. As Proverbs says, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, for in my poverty, I might be forced to steal and in my riches, I might forget my God."

So there's this vision of enough that, as Gandhi said, "there's enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." And it has massive implications in how we live today, in a world where we have such disparity between the super-rich and the super-poor, where right now less than a hundred millionaires and billionaires, less than 100 people own the same amount of wealth as half the world's population. I mean, it's just mind-boggling that three people own the same amount as the combined economies of 50 countries.

So that's not a safe and sustainable world where masses are living in poverty, while a handful of people have more money than we can ever imagine. You know, I think the two richest people are making like \$2,000 a second or so. You know, just you can't even make sense of it. Right?

So there's this vision of Pentecost. And the other thing I would say about the early church, so there's a sharing, there's the community, is that there is also something important about the unity that we see and sharing resources was a part of that.

But the Book of Acts goes to great lengths to show how diverse this community was. They were urban, they were rural, they were speaking different languages. They have different accents, they had different foods and clothing, you know, and it goes through like exhaustively this list of how diverse the community was. But then it says they were one.

They were one in heart and mind. And they even had this unifying language where they could understand and hear each other.

And I think it's important, as many theologians have done, to juxtapose Pentecost with the story of Babel, the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament, because this is a story where it was monoculture. There was one language, one culture, and humanity was very impressed with ourselves and we tried to do a building project to bridge the heavens and the earth, the Tower of Babel. Right?

And God is not happy and, you know, topples the tower of Babel, scatters the people. And that's also where we get language and culture at this time. Diversity is born, right?

And now you move to Pentecost, and you see all this diversity, but there's a unity. And what it teaches me, and I think offers all of us, is that unity doesn't mean uniformity. Oneness does not mean sameness. That there's a power in the context of diversity that God wants to bring us together.

And unity is most powerful when we're more diverse because we're all prone to monoculture, to homogenous circles, We're all most comfortable around people who are just like us. But that's not what God's up to, is not monoculture, but this unity in the context of diversity.

So sometimes in our community, we say, "If it's all white, something's not quite right." Because this is as Dr. Martin Luther King grieved, he said, one of the most segregated hours is 11:00 on Sunday morning when the church gathers for worship, we often levitate towards segregation, towards monoculture rather than diversity.

So, Pentecost is a corrective. It's a rebuke of that homogenous world. And part of what we're trying to do at Red Letter Christians, one of the movements that I'm a part of is we say that we're going to change the narrative by changing the narrators. And one of the things that we talk about is harmonizing, but not homogenizing, harmonizing, but not homogenizing.

So, God wants that diversity. We're all made with a unique fingerprint, with unique DNA. We've all got our own personalities and skills and blind spots, right? So God wants that unity and we are all better and wiser together than we are on our own.

AD: When we introduced this topic at the top of the episode, we even went so far as to read a specific chunk of Scripture from Acts 2 that focused on the fellowship of believers having everything in common. And yet when we brought this question to our guests, even though they were well aware of where we were looking in Acts two, many of them wanted to ground this at the beginning of the chapter, and I think that was rightfully done, where this is all still an outpouring of the spirit.

This is the spirit now arriving and in-dwelling and abiding in believers; flowing through them. This is an example or a natural consequence of what it means to live the spirit-led and spirit-filled life. And so, because of that, I think we find elements of prescription in this.

I mean, if we are to live as believers now indwelled with the spirit, then there are some ways in which it must echo what we see happening even at the beginning of Acts 2. And so, I appreciate how they brought us back, tethered us back to this spirit-filled life. And yet there was still much to be said about what it meant to live and have all these things in common.

JP: Right, there is this danger in hearing Acts 2, maybe the worst case scenario in some ways would be to hear the passage in Acts 2 and to hear the story of these early believers and what they all had in common and how it is that they behaved and walk away going, “Yes, this is prescriptive and it's something that we have to bring about by our own mettle, in our own sort of grit and determination.”

It would be completely missing the point of what is happening here. And like you said, I appreciate that our guests were careful to walk us back to the beginning of the chapter and go, look, this has very little to do with what a group of people got together and had a meeting about and said, hey, this is a good way to live and everything to do with people being open to the receiving of the Holy Spirit and its outworking through them as a community.

And unless we're coming at it with that same perspective and that same desire today, we're going to be missing the point no matter how our churches are structured.

AD: So clearly begins with being filled by the spirit. And yet we were also, I think, given responses that didn't allow us the luxury of writing this off as descriptive alone as much as, again, I think there's this temptation as affluent and well-to-do people, there's still is elements of prescription in this.

And while our context is radically different, I mean, we don't live 2,000 years ago. We don't come from a group of largely Jewish believers. We are in a different culture, different context. And yet this spirit-filled life must still have elements that are the same. And so, while translation needs to be done, we need to do some work in translating from one context to the next, there are elements of this that are still necessary and prescriptive components of the spirit-filled life and community.

I particularly love how Kara Mandryk put it that we are still called to be generous and gracious, generous to give and to share what we've been blessed with by God and gracious when we're in need to receive these things with an open heart. And I think when we talk about some elements of individualism, we can be closed off in both ways. We can be loathe to share. We can also be overly independent and loathe to receive.

What does it look like to live out these Acts 2 principles today?

Having been challenged that there are certain elements that are prescriptive in Acts 2, we wanted to drill down a little deeper with our guests and get them to flesh this out for a bit and ask the question, what does it look like to live out these Acts 2 principles today? Okay, so they're not just descriptive. There's certain things we should do. What does that

practically look like? And I asked this question first to Dr. Kara Mandryk. Here's her response.

KM: I grew up in the United Church of Canada and I have a very clear memory—in the mid-eighties or early eighties when I was growing up—I have a very clear memory of going with my mom and a couple of other people from the United Church that I was a part of to a high rise apartment building in the north Winnipeg where we lived and cleaning an apartment and getting it ready for a Laotian family that our church had sponsored.

I was probably, I don't know, seven or eight. So, I helped in the cleaning and preparing the space for this refugee family that our church—and honestly, I don't know if it was our individual church or the larger group of United Churches in Winnipeg—I don't know that information. I was eight years old. But I have a very clear memory of going and preparing this place of safety and making it beautiful for this family to come in.

And we did that, and we sponsored them and there was no obligation of this family being part of our church community or anything. And they weren't. But it was a value that was held with the church community that we were able to be generous, to be hospitable and welcoming to those who were suffering across the world.

So to me there, I mean, that was a long time ago example. But your story reminded me of that, that that is a very concrete way of living out those Acts 2 principles of generosity and giving and in some cases, sacrificial giving in our world today. And I know that with ongoing conflicts in the world and persecutions and wars and horrors that there will always be people who are in need of places of safety, of hospitality, ways that we can exhibit our generosity.

And that's nothing to say about the people who are around us that live with extreme poverty or separation from their families, addictions, etc. So, there are many ways that we can embody that generosity on an everyday small basis to a larger basis, like, you know, that kind of large-scale sponsorship.

So, there are so many ways just to practice generosity in an ongoing way. But the other thing I was thinking about is there are these fundamental activities that this access to community does. And I myself did it, right? I zoomed right in with the financial piece, the sharing and giving away of property, but gathering together for teaching, for prayer and for celebrating the Lord's Supper are all on equal levels.

And so to abandon some of those communal spiritual practices and say, well, the only thing that's important is selling all you have and giving to the poor is also dishonouring to those principles that are embedded in Acts 2.

AD: Travis and Rosey Zacharias were also asked how we should live out these Acts 2 principles. And their response was again, borne out of their context as church planters. And they shared with us a meaningful story.

TRZ: Paul talks about in Romans 12 verse two I think it is, that we need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And a lot of that has to take place, especially with new Christians. The Jews in Acts 2 were God-fearing Jews before they became Christians and they became Christians, they already knew how to love each other to a certain point, they knew how to live in unity up to a certain point.

And when people come from broken homes, from broken backgrounds, they don't necessarily learn how to live in that way. And so, once they become Christians, they have to learn everything from new and obviously to have the benefit of having the Holy Spirit with them. And that does help. But people have to learn how to forgive each other. They have to learn how not to be jealous, how to show love, how to be honest.

One example of this is in our church once a month we get together and we all cook lunch together and eat lunch together. And that is great, this great unity and fellowship. But people would have arguments over, you know, do you cook the onions first and then add the tomato sauce or do you add the tomato sauce first and then add the onions. Like little things like this that aren't even important, and they would just actually cause more conflict within the church as opposed to fellowship, just because of some of the immaturity.

And over the years, we feel like as the believers mature, this has improved. And some of that is just through teaching on a weekly basis through unity, talking about unity, talking about love, trying to show an example from our lives and supporting each other. They're teaching each other to pray for each other and how to love each other.

And I think it's important in our context because everybody in our church comes from a non-Christian background when they become Christians and a lot of them from broken families that didn't even have a support system and once they become Christians, they have even less of a support system. And so, the church becomes a support system. So, the church becomes that family that they need and so they have to learn to support each other.

And that has happened to some degree, obviously not perfectly, but it's on the way. And so I see the context from Acts 2 is so different. I think because of that cultural background and people do have some religious background here, but it's a generation or two removed already and so it really is a very secular background with some distorted concepts about who God is.

JP: I talked with Steve Bell about this same question: what does it look like to live out these Acts 2 principles today? And here too, we had some stories of practical ways in which this has been lived out and also some imagination about how it is that the church can think about these things as we continue to look to the future and what God might be calling us to.

SB: Boy, living out something that potentially would look like the... It's so very hard because we're so enmeshed in world systems. Banking, even grocery shopping, like these are all systems that actually work against anything that looks like the kingdom of God and we can't not participate in those things. It's not even possible. So how do you do that?

Well, you do it with humility. You do it with a sense of grief and sorrow. But I think more and more and... I, you know, there's not a whole lot I can do about suffering in, say, Gaza right now. And I can send my member of parliament a note or I can march or a thing. But there are things I can do in my community to start paying attention to my neighbourhood.

There's a lady down the street. I've watched her. She has no kids. She's 80, probably could use somebody to shovel her sidewalk and befriend her. Like who's going to help her transition into a home? Like, who's going to pay for that? Well, someone would have to ask. So more and more, I'm wondering if we need to stop trying to solve the world's problems and start to create resilient neighbourhoods. And what does that look like?

You know, there's a church down the street that's got a big, huge roof. We're going to have some issues with climate crisis, maybe we should be putting some solar panels on there so there's some cool air in a hot summer for people that don't have air conditioning. You know, like community organizing, looking ahead and sort of seeing things are going to change in the next 20 years.

Like when you talk about the refugee crisis, it's going to go from a couple of million people to like maybe a billion or two in the next 50 years. Well, where are they going to go? What's that going to look like? Like how do we organize our basements and our spare bedrooms and our churches and maybe a Sunday school room should look more like a bedroom.

And maybe we should be building larger kitchens and maybe those bathrooms in the basement should have showers because this is coming right. So how do we now look at the resources that we have, because we are a community, and say, look at these buildings that we have, these things called congregations that are networks of volunteer people.

We could be saying to the world as the crises are coming, call us. You know, we have space, we have industrial kitchens, we have volunteer bases, we can babysit, there's things that we can do. And to start to actually take an inventory of what we have because we're a communion and then say to the neighbourhoods, this is what you can call on us for. Right?

And start to create communities of resilience. I think that would be a way of thinking about it. I don't know how to get out of the bigger systems like banking and IT and investments, it's just so permeating, it's sort of a—that stuff is more, to my sense, what principalities and powers are about. They just so pervade our society. And we're so bought into it.

I don't think the answer is to go off-grid up north and kind of survive it out. We still need each other. We need to do it here. We need to participate in things that are probably evil, right? But we can also run a counter-narrative the whole way through: what does our neighbourhood need? How do we do this?

JP: As I talked with Steve about how to live this out in our modern contexts. I ended up talking a bit about the book of Philemon. The book of Philemon is a fascinating sort of case study in what it looks like to sort of put the boots of the gospel on the ground and live it out, to live out some of these Acts 2 principles in the real world.

Paul calls out Philemon, who is this leader within the local church there, around a relationship he has with a former slave of his, a runaway slave called Onesimus. And it's a beautiful story of reconciliation.

But in the back of my mind, I always had some trouble with this because I wondered, Paul, why aren't you simply telling this Philemon to give up all of his slaves, to release all of his slaves? How is it that you can call him into reconciliation with this one former slave, and not simply sort of flip the tables on the whole concept of slavery, which seems to be fundamentally anti-Christ, anti-the gospel.

And as Steve and I talked about this, we recognize that there are ways in which Paul's teaching here and the teaching in Scripture and the call of the church now is not necessarily to completely disengage from everything, which maybe speaks against or goes against what it is we believe our ultimate call is as Christians, but rather to find practical and simple ways to continue to change and transform and grow and become more Christ-like within our current contexts. This is what Steve had to say in response to that.

SB: And I had to wrestle because I have sort of more radical activist friends that get really tired with sort of centrist movements. I'd be more of a centrist kind of a guy or gradualist movements like things... And I think we need both. I think we need the people that kind of go, "This is wrong. This has to stop. You need to stop participating. You are part of the problem" and all that kind of stuff.

But then, you know, for so many people that haven't even begun to even wrestle with those questions, you can't throw that at them because they're just going to reject it. Right. And so the question is, how can I help you take the next step towards being open to the kingdom of God, which is coming whether you like it or not?

And I think the other thing is that for us, and I've been working with this with my music lately, is how do we wrestle with the: "Is it our job to make the kingdom of God come?" Or "Is it our job to be hospitable to it coming anyway?" And I think it's not our job to make it come. But yes, we have to work for justice. Yes, we have to oppose dehumanizing systems. Yes, we have to, as much as we can, not participate and therefore not fuel these systems.

But at the same time, in the same way that Mary humbly received the seed of God into her womb and bore that forth for the sake of the world, there's something about the church that needs to prayerfully receive the kingdom at the same time.

And there's something in that balance that takes the agitation out of activism. So we're not burnt out because, in the end, we can suppress evil here and it's going to pop up there, right? That doesn't mean we shouldn't do that work. Right? But at the same time, for us to have a deep faith that the resurrection actually means, you know, that the Kingdom of God, the big bang of the new creation has begun. It's coming. And we can bank on that.

JP: Last year we spoke with Shane Claiborne. Shane is involved in all sorts of ministries. This has kind of been the bread and butter of what he has done from his work with Mother

Teresa to his work in Philadelphia. He's been somebody who has been very intentional about trying to think about what it looks like to live with everything in common, to live with shared resources, in support of the people around you with communities that help each other. And so, I asked him to share a few examples out of his ministry and his time in his neighbourhood—about how this looks, kind of the warts and mess and beauty of really trying to live these things out in the real world. Here's his story.

SC: Yeah. So when we started the Simple Way 25 years ago, (we're celebrating 25 years this month). I know people might be listening to this at different times, but this year is our 25th year of life and community at the Simple Way. And when we started, we were inspired by the Book of Acts, by this idea not of megachurch, but of micro church, right?

I mean, literally the dinner table in the living room, our sanctuary, you know, that God's love is lived out of homes and on sidewalks and streets. And so, we pulled our money together and we started the Simple Way—literally a bunch of 20-year-olds that pulled our money together, inspired by the early church.

And we used to say, just like you hear many hands make for light work; many wallets make for cheaper rent. That by sharing a washer and dryer, by sharing a car, we were able to do all kinds of work, rehabbing abandoned houses, planting community gardens, working part-time jobs, and not needing to overwork ourselves, you know, to pay the bills because we were sharing the bills and we said it's you know, it's challenging, too.

We used to also say it's everybody's car until the oil needs to get changed. So, you know, I think there's ways that we've also got to share the maintenance and all the other work. But that's the challenges of community too, just as much as it's a gift.

But one of the other things that we said is let's rethink the tithes and offerings. As you look at this early church community and the book of Acts, the offering was distributed to neighbours who were in need, missions was not a budget item, it was the budget. Right? That's what they were doing.

And yet when you look at church budgets today, it's 95% or more of that money staying internally. You know, it's largely going to maintain buildings and staff and, you know, arguably a lot of that is missional work.

But the point is, I think we need to rethink some stuff and live in community. You know, I think clergy could live in community and not have to have all of the different infrastructures that we have. And we would be much better stewards of God's money and resources if we lived simply, and we created new ways of sharing.

So what we did was we created a fund that we called the relational tithe; tithe like the 10% that we give to God on Sundays. But we said, let's give 100% of that away and let's not do it just through like organizational and bureaucracies, but through relationships. So that's why it was called the relational tithe.

And so we said the only requirement for giving to someone is that you know them. We're not giving to organizations, we're not giving to something we read in a newsletter, we're giving, we're sharing with neighbours.

So when our corner store right on the corner here was robbed, we were able to pull our money together and replace the money that they lost. When my neighbour's car was vandalized, his tires were slashed and the window was busted out, we were able to repair that. You know, we've paid for funerals. We've helped send kids to college. We've got people dentures. You know, we've created little micro-jobs. All through that relational time in those relationships.

I mean, we're sharing hundreds of thousands of dollars through that. And it's very level ground, too, because 10% is 10%. Whether that's \$10 a month or \$1,000 a month, and so we're able to create community and make decisions together to share resources. So I love it.

And folks want to be a part of that. It's evolved over the years, and now we call it common change and it's just commonchange.com. You can see how, you know, folks can also start sharing locally, even just with a handful of friends. Let's live into this idea that we can do more together [than] on our own. Let's live in proximity to folks that are struggling and be better stewards of our resources.

You mentioned the housing. I mean, that's another manifestation of this. But we've got so many abandoned houses, and we started pulling our money together to renovate those. So now we get houses for pretty cheap, sometimes \$1. One of the ones I just showed we got for \$1, but it was in terrible disrepair and so we had to rebuild it basically. And we restored these houses, put a lot of money into them, and then we sell them really at a loss. I mean, I think it's a gain, but we're losing money as we sell them.

And we sell every house for \$35,000 US and there's no interest on the mortgage because Scripture has something to say about charging interest, that it's sinful. So, we don't do any interest. We hold the mortgage and all the money people put towards the house goes directly to the principal. We customize it each month so that it's based on the income, household income. So it's really doable to pay the house off. And it's awesome, right? It's building a neighbourhood and it's also sharing our resources together, just like the inspiration that we get from the early church.

AD: How good is it that we had so many personal stories that all the guests shared about how these principles look in reality, how they're lived out, what can and maybe should be done for each of us to be able to live in the light of Scripture.

One of the things that strikes me through all of these stories is that we still need to translate into wherever God has put us, and we need to look at Scripture and we see the heart of the issue there. But then how that looks as it's lived out might need to be a little bit different.

For example, with Travis and Rosey in Paraguay, they tried to do this lunch with everyone that seems to be right in line with Acts 2 and just be together, meet together, eat together.

But it was causing conflict and dissension. And for them to live out the spirit of fellowship in unity, they needed to for a time pause on those lunches.

And so we need to remember what the big thing is here, what these practices are meant to accomplish, and then make sure that we are willing to be creative and humble enough to figure out how this looks in the community that God has placed us.

JP: The things that Shane is doing in Philadelphia and the things that Steve is doing in Winnipeg may not be practical for a small town in Saskatchewan or a community in Africa or a place in Asia. There are going to be cultural differences and practical differences around the communities that we are in, which means that the ways in which we live this out are going to be unique for each of us.

And there's a danger in trying to get overly prescriptive with this or in looking at this as a recipe, to go "I need to follow these exact steps in this kind of a way in order to achieve this outcome." And that we get focused on the very, very specific process rather than the outcome that we're looking for.

I think once again, early in the episode, we talked about the fact that this wasn't something that people were trying to be the engine for on their own. Rather, they were allowing the Holy Spirit to work through them and establishing this community in a supernatural, God-driven way.

And I think for us today, too, there is significance in not getting too caught up in what is the ABC of how it is that we can achieve this and rather prayerfully and openly going "Holy Spirit, how is it that you can work through me, work through us, through our Christian community in order to feed the least of these, in order to invite people into the Kingdom of God, in order to be a city on a hill, to be light that isn't hidden, to be salt in the world."

Those sorts of things are going to look different in different places. And so we need to rely on the Holy Spirit and on our own sort of sense of where God has placed us in order to do these things well.

AD: I agree with that for sure. And I think perhaps—and we're landing back where we started—which is acknowledging that this is a movement of the spirit. Which then again, I appreciated when Kara Mandryk shared that just being generous with the things that we have, our possessions. Being generous with our finances is only one part of what we see in Acts chapter two. They had everything in common, they ate together, yes, but they also were meeting together, and they were learning from the apostles and from God's Word together.

And they were praying together. And so many of these communal spiritual practices are also every bit as prescriptive as the other things that we spent maybe even more time and energy talking about. And so if we are going to be open to the leading of the spirit and creative in how we do have this fellowship and this outward facing, you know, generosity to our community and the world, we need to be grounded in the disciplines of the spirit

together as well. And so, this can be lived out just simply by worshiping and learning and praying together as the people of God.

JP: Our closing song today is the Magnificat by Steve Bell. Steve made mention of this song in his answer to this question in thinking about places in Scripture where some of these similar things are talked about. Acts 2 speaks about this radical life of the church in meeting together and having things in common. And he points to Mary's song earlier in the Gospels when she's pregnant with Jesus, this sort of prophetic song from her that speaks to the power of the Holy Spirit to transform communities. Here's Steve Bell with the Magnificat.

The Magnificat, Steve Bell

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exalts in God my Saviour,
for He has looked with mercy on my lowliness
and my name will be forever exalted.
For the mighty God has done great things for me,
and His mercies will reach from age to age.
And holy, holy, holy is his name.

Closing

The Armchair Anabaptist is a Theodidaktos podcast. And Theodidaktos is a publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. You can check us out online at www.theArmchairAnabaptist.ca and find us on iTunes, Spotify and wherever podcasts are found.

A special thanks to our guests who have joined us today. We spoke with Kara Mandryk Travis and Rosey Zacharias, Steve Bell and Shane Claiborne.

Our intro song, as always, is Making Us One by Shades and our closing song this episode was The Magnificat by Steve Bell.

Our executive producer is Erica Fehr. Our producer and audio engineer is Jesse Penner, and our administrative assistant and social media manager is Betty Ramones.

I'm Andrew Dyck. And I'm Jesse Penner, and we have been your hosts for The Armchair Anabaptist. We certainly hope that what you have heard today will do more than stay as merely food for thought, but that it can help inspire each of us to get up out of the comfort of our armchairs and translate into living more like Jesus. Join us next time as we look at Paul's call to live as the Body of Christ in episode seven, The Body.

**Edited for clarity.*