

Series: Building the Bridge

June 3, 2018

Title: The Shared Life

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Text: Acts 4:32-37

One Heart/One Mind

33,000' high:

A modern jetliner routinely cruises at an altitude of over 30,000' above sea level. The air up there is thin and smooth (most of the time), making for a very efficient ride. You look out the window at the world below, sipping a Coke. But outside your window it's a different story: The air temperature is -40 F. And the air pressure is a little over a quarter of what it is at sea level.

Neither passengers nor crew could ever survive such a hostile environment. In the early days of flying, pilots could only dream of achieving such altitudes. Sitting in their open cockpit biplanes, they bundled up against the cold and risked fate by flying up as high as 19,000' for brief periods of time.

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All of that changed in 1937 when Lockheed reconfigured a Model 10 into what they named the XC-35. The XC-35 boasted a reinforced fuselage, stronger windows, and a mechanism for raising the air pressure in the cabin. It could fly up to 31,500' with the cabin pressure the equivalent of 12,000'.

Gone were the days of silk scarves and funky goggles. But to make this happen, the plane had to be stronger on the inside than the forces around it.

One heart/One Mind:

The first generation church in Jerusalem faced tremendous opposition as it took off and gained altitude in its quest to become a living example of God's New Creation. In order to stand up to the pressures placed upon it, it needed to be *stronger on the inside than the environment around it*.

Luke gives us a glimpse of the inner strength that knit this church together when he writes:

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Acts 4:32 NIV

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.

Here was a group of believers who had developed such a love and concern for each other that they rewrote their economics. They had an “all for one and one for all” mentality that made them stronger than the institutional and political forces that were arrayed against them.

But this strength was far more than a bunch of people determined to be nice to each other! It was nothing less than God’s New Creation in action.

Resurrection Power

Power source:

To pressurize a plane for high altitude, you have to do two things: First, you need a cabin that can *hold the pressure*. Second, you need a power source to pump pressurized air into the cabin. The Lockheed engineers who built the XC-35 used high pressure air from the engines to continually pressurize the cabin. That same technology is used to this day.

The church in Jerusalem found its power from the resurrected Lord Jesus:

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Acts 4:33–34a NIV

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.

God’s resurrection power was the engine that drove the plane through the air. But at the same time, it also worked a transformation *within* the church itself. They became a community that took such good care of its members that Luke could say “there were no needy persons among them.”

Resurrection Power:

So what did this resurrection power look like in action?

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Acts 4:34b-35 NIV

For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Jesus had said:

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Luke 6:20-21a NIV

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied."

Now, in this resurrection community of believers, Jesus' words had taken a very practical reality. The believers, who in many cases had come from the far-flung reaches of the Roman Empire, were in dire need. But God gave the church a special empowerment – a grace – to not just cope with the problem, but to turn it into an opportunity for building an entirely different economy. It was New Creation in action, powered by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!

The Shared Life

Exhibit A:

Exhibit A for this New Creation model was a man named Joseph:

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Acts 4:36-37 NIV

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Joseph was a Jewish man from the world outside the Jewish homeland. When he became a part of the church, the apostles gave him a new name: Barnabas. It was his resurrection name, if you will. It described him as a man who showed God's encouragement and compassion to others. Acting in his new identity, he exemplified the resurrection power that made this

church stronger on the inside than all of the opposition and difficulties facing it from without.

Barnabas would have a long and distinguished career as a servant of Jesus. He is the man who went looking for Paul, when non-Jews began joining the churches outside the Jewish homeland. The same generosity and grace that enabled him to divest himself of a piece of property in the church's earliest days, would motivate him to share the Good News with people outside his cherished ethnic group. That's what resurrection power looks like. This love and grace strengthened churches comprised of both Jews and Gentiles – so much so that they were able to thrive despite 300 years of Roman persecution!

The Shared Life:

Resurrection power in the church could be described as The Shared Life. When you board an airplane, First Class doesn't get a stronger cabin than Economy. Everyone shares the pressurized air and comfortable temperature. The same is true in God's Family. We are commanded to be a people who live The Shared Life.

This Shared Life will take different forms in different circumstances. In the early Jerusalem church people pooled their resources and allowed the leaders to administer them according to need. In other churches, the Shared Life took the form of hospitality, forgiving a runaway slave, visiting a friend in prison, or sharing the Lord's Supper without barriers of economics or social class.

So what will this Shared Life look like in our church? Whatever form it takes, it will look like and feel like God's love in action. As Jesus said:

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John 13:34-35 NIV

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."