

“Inflation & the Cycle of Blessings: The Currency of Relationships”  
Acts 2:42-47

Due to a variety of circumstances, our country and our whole world is facing an inflation crisis where the purchasing power of our money is decreasing at a rapid rate. We are feeling this rapid inflation when we go to the store for groceries or when we try to rent an apartment or buy a home. There are all kinds of financial and political strategies for dealing with this. During this sermon series, I would like to invite us to look at this as a good opportunity for us to reflect on our relationship to all the resources of our lives. Instead of focusing on money as a measure of our wealth and security, the challenge is to look at how the spiritual flow of all the resources of our lives can help us to experience the abundance of life, no matter what the inflation rate might be. The focus is on the cycle of blessings that is already flowing in our lives which includes the following currencies: Relationships, truth, wellness, money, time and place, and gracious leadership.

Unfortunately, most of the political solutions and economic strategies for dealing with inflation don't deal with the bigger issues of overconsumption and greed. Growth is always the measure of our economic success. Yet, with pursuing economic growth and success, we tend to sacrifice or neglect the things that truly make for a good society and thus we lose our own joy and health. Unless the resources of our lives are flowing in a cycle of giving and receiving, our lives become diminished.

Today we focus on the currency of relationships. We tend to not view relationships as a currency, but think of how impoverished your life would be without all the relationships that you have.

In her book *The Village Effect*, Susan Pinker talks about the importance of face-to-face contacts for our wellness. Even though we can connect with others online, we need face-to-face social gatherings and contacts. Pinker notes that “In a very short time, we (human beings) have changed from group - living primates skilled at reading each other's every gesture and intention . . . (changed from that) to a solitary species, each one of us preoccupied with our own screen.” Pinker says, rather than focusing on our own screens, there is NO SUBSTITUTE for in-person, face-to-face interactions. It is these collective activities - where we participate in community, connect with others, sing, act, and serve together - that actually bolster our immune systems, send positive hormones surging through our bloodstream and brain, and help us live longer. Pinker calls this “building your village.” She even says that, “building (your village) is a matter of life and death.” Here is a video clip from Pinker's TED Talk about the power of social connections: [Susan Pinker: The secret to living longer may be your social life.](#)

The early church community knew the power and importance of relationships that are centered on faith. The first followers of Jesus discovered the power of their worship gatherings. Even though gathering in the name of Jesus was not popular, even controversial, the author of the book of Acts was giving the readers a compelling summary description of the life of the early church to help them see the value in joining the church. There are several summaries in Acts about the life of the early community. These

summaries provide a general picture of the activities the new believers engaged in when they congregated under the leadership of the apostles. Our text, 2:42-47, the first major summary, follows the massive baptism that results from Peter's first speech at Pentecost. The summaries tell incomplete stories of how the early group of believers lived in community. Summaries provide snapshots; they are not designed to tell us all the details. What we can get from this scripture is a description of what a Christian community looks like when they are living in the Spirit of God. The early followers of Christ were so focused on the love of God that they knew that relationships were so essential to life. They valued community more than individual possessions or opinions. The power of the Holy Spirit moved them to share with others because relationships were seen as the way of abundant life for the followers of Jesus. Jesus could have performed miracles and done all of his ministry on his own, but he created community because he showed the world that love was the key to human healing.

I know that inflation has not only hit our monetary currency, but also our sense of community. The pandemic, the political divisions, and the focus on individualism have all conspired to rob us of the truth that we are connected to others and that only when we live that way are we able to find wholeness.

The early Church practiced this kind of community, and we follow in their footsteps. I am grateful to share that our youth are planning a community dinner with the same Spirit of Christ hoping to continue to build community both within our church and also with the larger community. Video from Paul:

I invite you to think of two people who are important in your life right now and find ways to share your thanksgiving with them. Then I invite you to think of two people you can invite to come to the dinner on the 16<sup>th</sup> who are not connected to our church.

One of our core values as a congregation is “Generous, caring, and loving relationships.” The pandemic was especially hard on us as we tried to continue to connect despite all the social distancing and fears of contagious disease. We are emerging from that sense of isolation and are working to strengthen our sense of community by being intentional about building relationships in everything that we do. Instead of focusing on only getting things done, we seek to also focus on building community as we know that the need is so great. Cigna surveyed 10,000 people 18 and older. Three out of five of these adults—that's 61 percent—reported feeling lonely. Narrow the age range to 18 to 22 and the percentage of respondents feeling lonely jumps to 79 percent. Cigna made its survey public in January of 2020! Interesting timing!

Close community is not always easy. Human relationships are often messy and challenging and yet without them, we would wither and diminish in our spirits. The early Church model of community is a reminder for us that a big part of our wealth as human beings is our connections to others. They practiced mutual love and sharing in the ways of Christ and when they failed, they worked things through to regain their focus on love, but at the end of the day, love is what matters most. Amen.