

## **Acts 4:32 – 35, 1 John 1:1 – 2:2, & John 20:19 – 31**

I am not a very jealous person, by nature. However, jealousy is something we all wrestle with to some degree from time to time, it's just part of being human. Capitalism to a great degree sort of relies on this human characteristic. If all we bought was just what we actually needed it would be pretty hard to make a profit. Companies rely on our desiring more than just what we need, that's what advertising is geared to do, to create a longing within us, a dissatisfaction with what we already have and a restlessness to obtain more. The bible of course, warns us to be ever on guard against jealousy- lest it rot our souls from the inside out.

But I have to say, when I first read the opening words of our reading from the book of Acts today, I found myself a little- jealous. Luke writes in the book of Acts, *now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul...* man, wouldn't that be something! I mean, we're pretty fortunate in our congregation, but even as good as we are, we don't *always*- agree on *everything*! Just think what it would be like if everyone in the church were of one heart and soul, if we all believed the same things and agreed on everything, no arguments or disputes, no hurt feelings or discord- just everyone always on the same page... I mean, when I read this, I'm pretty jealous.

And think if it went even further, if it really was ALL believers who were united in heart and soul like that... no denominational disagreements, no divisions, no conflicts, no wars. Think what we could do if all denominations joined together to serve the world and make Christ known as one! It's hard not to be jealous of such an ideal situation, the kind of situation the early church had. Reading these words from Acts makes me feel like we've failed somehow, that *we're* less than what *they* were, that we're not as good, or that there's something wrong with us because we're not always united in heart and soul as they were. I am a little jealous...

But as with advertising, things can be misleading. Now, we have to remember that this passage from Acts comes very soon after the resurrection, and almost immediately after the Holy Spirit has come to them with power. So the people were still on an incredible spiritual high. It's easy to see why they would *still* be united in such a dramatic way... But if you go ***just two verses***

**further**, you see how short-lived this unity really was. First, Barnabas joins the group, which reminds us of the disagreements he and Paul will later have before they part ways. Then, in the *next* verse we get the story of Ananias and Sapphira who sell their property and make a contribution to the church, but conspire with each other and lie about how much they made on the sale- so they both drop dead on the spot, one after the other... So it seems, we don't have anything to be jealous of. The amazing unity the church shared— lasted *just two verses*— and then, human nature set back in. Two verses... I've known groups of believers who I'm sure could last at least 3!

The real trouble with jealousy, is that it is never grounded in reality... ever. The unity, or the sports car or the money; or the marriage or the looks or the accomplishments, whatever it is- it isn't how we believe it to be. In the haze of our coveting- we don't actually see things as they are. A number of years ago, the facade was finally blown off the modeling industry as a story ran about how air-brushed and photo-shopped the images were that we see in magazines and advertisements. When it was shown what the models looked like before all this digital "fixing" — we could see, they looked pretty much just like the rest of us.

In our Gospel text today, even Thomas was jealous of the experience the rest of the Apostles had... and I mean, well, who wouldn't be, right? We are all, just like Thomas, we'd like a little more than some fantastic story, we need to see for ourselves. Jesus says, *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*. And, that is all of us- here. We have not put our fingers in the wounds... but don't we really want to? Maybe not that exactly, that's kind of gross- but aren't we all a little- or a lot- jealous of those who were able to wrap their arms around the Lord?

Jealousy, no matter the object- whether material or even spiritual- is an insult to God. It is sort of the equivalent of putting a lot of thought and energy into picking out just the right gift for someone you love. And then, upon opening it and seeing what it is- they say, *this isn't what I wanted*. In the same way, what we have in our lives is what we have been given by God. Our present circumstance, the good and the bad of it, is a gift of grace- given to deepen our compassion and strengthen our faith.

Contentment is one of the most important spiritual virtues. Contentment is the acceptance of who you are, what you have, and where you are on life's journey. If we believe that God cares about us so much he even knows the number of hairs on our heads... why not trust God? Why not trust that God has made us just who we are, has given us just what we need and has put us just where we needed to be? As we accept these gifts of God, we find great peace.

Of course we would have loved to be among those John writes about in the opening statement of his first letter, when he says, *We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...* but God has not chosen us for that kind of experience. We have been chosen to have faith in the testimony of those who *have seen...* so let us not reject our gift and desire someone else's!

Besides, thru the Holy Spirit of the risen Christ we are given all the gift we need. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is given to believers upon meeting the risen Christ. The two are linked, not, as in Luke's version, separated by 50 days. For John, when you encounter the resurrected Lord, he gives you the Holy Spirit. What's more is that in the original language of the text it says, Jesus breathes *in* them, not *on* them- but *into* their very beings. He breathes the Holy Spirit into their souls. From that point on, every step they took, they took in God. Every move they made, every thought they had, every breath they took, they took in God. Thru the Holy Spirit, God was with them in a way they never could have imagined. **He was with them in a way that left nothing to be desired.**

Well, we live in a world where the risen Christ is alive and among us in that same way. We live in a world where the Holy Spirit, the Holy Presence of God is poured out upon the church and upon believers everywhere.

Since God is with us in this powerful way, we can live boldly from the abundance of that Spirit and have the courage to daily ask ourselves. *Where am I not content? Why am I not content? And, what can I do about it?* First, realize that everything and everyone in your life has been placed there by God for a purpose, so trust

God to help you flourish where you have been planted. Second, if you are not content in some area of your life, ask yourself why? Why is it not enough, why do you desire something different, is this coming from within me or from others? And third, pray. Ask God to open your soul, open your heart, open your eyes so that you will be able to accept that everything in your life is perfect, that is, just how God intended it to be- all for your good. With the abundant goodness of God's gracious presence, there is nothing left to be desired. Amen.