

## “Common Sense”

### Sermon – April 7, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

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About 3:23 p.m. tomorrow between Buffalo and Syracuse, NY there will be total solar eclipse—the moon will completely block out the sun with just the corona shining on the edges like a backlight.

While there is a solar eclipse about every 18 months somewhere in the world, the last time we had total solar eclipse in New York was 99 years ago!

So, people are pretty excited—like Donna and Pete Goodfriend who made reservations a year ago to go up to Watertown for the event!

Since moon perfectly blocks out the sun, common sense would tell you that the moon and the sun are the same size. But you know that is not true.

By coincidence the sun is about 400 times farther away than the moon from and also about 400 times bigger. So, it’s just a matter of...perspective.

In the couple of centuries before Christ the Greeks determined this, as well roughly their sizes and also of earth and all being spherical objects.

It took experience and knowledge for what made sense to our senses to make actual sense. Why there are still any flat-earth believers is nonsense.

Yet, there are many things that common sense has told us in the past that we learn later are not true, like going out without a coat in the cold means you will catch a cold when it all has to do with viruses.

Other things, though, remain true, particularly with human interactions. It’s only common sense that greeting someone with a look in the eye and a smile on the face and hearty, “Hello!” will get a more favorable response than if you barely notice them with a scowl on your face and grunt, “Hey.” Or so I am told.

Today’s scripture lessons challenge common sense. But let’s be fair—the whole resurrection thing defies common sense.

All of today’s scripture passages deal with testimonies to the resurrection.

Today’s gospel lesson ends with Jesus telling Thomas,

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“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Then follows the last two verses of the chapter that are outside the lectionary,

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Then there is a whole another chapter.

And the beginning of the first epistle of John 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 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it.”

And finally, from verse 33 of today’s passage from Acts 4,

“With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

OK, let’s say we accept this Jesus rose from the dead and that we now have

“life in his name.” What are we do with that? How are we to respond?

Today’s passage from Acts starts from verse 32 saying,

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.”

The latter part of that verse is practically the definition of communism! That can’t be right. That’s not even practical; it makes no sense.

I mean, how does Jesus’ resurrection result in believers having all things in common and sharing goods?

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This passage and similar one at the end of Acts 2 after Pentecost are among the most difficult for us to deal with.

Tacitly accepting slavery, as Paul apparently does in his letters?

Well, that was just a fact of life at the time (and for 250 years in our own country plus continued racism after that).

Women subservient to men and quietly banned from official religious leader positions? Well, it was (and is) a paternalistic society. Wadda gonna do?

Sell our lands and houses and distribute the proceeds to each as any had need?

Now just hold on a minute; that’s crazy talk. Let’s use some common sense.

And indeed, you’ll be relieved to know that these are the only two instances of such communities in the New Testament and it’s not clear how long they lasted. In general, there lots of conflicts in the early Christian communities, as Paul’s letters show. (Indeed—it’s why he wrote them!)

The book of Acts as a whole and, indeed, the entire New Testament attest that the communities of early Jesus-followers disagreed about many things, and that Christian communities were characterized by diversity of many kinds from the get-go.

So, these two stories in Acts of idyllic communities read best not as blueprints for today but as glimpses of dynamic experiences by a community enlivened by God’s Spirit.

Remember the first part of verse 32, “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

These passages offer a stunning display of mutual identity—an identity formed in Christ and his new life. This results in a stirring vision of

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community and mutual care. As verse 34 says, “There was not a needy person among them.”

The Greek word here for “needy” is *endeēs*. This is the only occurrence in the entire New Testament. Etymologically, it means to be “in need of”, or “lacking”. So rather than get wrapped around the axle as to the communistic implications of the passage, consider the community implications. That is, look at the result of no one being in need and not how these particular communities used to achieve that. We can debate the means—but not the ends.

Remember the end of John 20: “that through believing you may have life in his name.” Jesus’ resurrection means we have new life now—not just when he returns. And if we believe, then we are one. And if we are one, then we help all as if they are us—because they are us. We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

Every page of Acts addresses the question: What does the resurrection of Jesus make possible? The Resurrection calls and enables us to perform powerful tangible acts that coincide with human need.

Consistently in Acts, the story of salvation is a story of belonging, of being a community. The Holy Spirit pulls people together as members of a community that manifests its newfound salvation in Christ in a corporate existence through its worship, learning, sharing, and service.

So, as Christ did for us through his love for us even when we didn’t deserve it, so we must do for others. It’s just common sense.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

Amen.