

Koinonia

A recent NYT article (Monday, April 6th, 2026) highlights an ultra-luxury airfare on Air France. \$16,000 will buy you a ticket from Paris to NYC where you can go in style. You get a limousine pick-up from your hotel directly to your plane at Charles de Gaulle airport. IN the plane, you have your own room, floor to ceiling curtains and personalized, high-end service. Another limousine picks you up at JFK airport and delivers you to your ultimate destination. The article's author, Sarah Lyall, asks what you are really getting for \$16K and comes to the conclusion that it's insulation from human contact. I suppose if you really want insulation (and you have the money) you can buy your own plane and self-driving limousines.

Acts chapter 2 shows us a community that shares wealth among its members. Like the miracles that Jesus performed, one wonders if it actually happened or, if it did, how long it lasted. I'm not sure which was greater: that everyone was filled with awe, that signs and wonders were performed, that the believers lived in peace and shared all things, or that each day Creator sent more people who were being set free to join them.

From our modern perspective, the very existence of this community seems like a miracle. Maybe even a greater miracle than turning water to wine or raising someone from the dead, given the social context. Jeremy Williams teaches New Testament at Brite Divinity School and he says, "Acts presents a community that resists some of the hierarchical, dominating, exploitative and violent organizing principles of Rome. Rather than mimicking and taking away what people need, this community shares... Rather than despising the common, this community co-creates

the common. Rather than using wealth to make others more vulnerable to death, this community uses wealth to develop more opportunities for life.”

This was true koinonia. This Greek term can mean fellowship, partnership and/or community. “Koinonia” sounds so nice when you say it that way. But make no mistake, koinonia represents a real threat to our way of life if we really lived it out. The Acts community was a living example of the vision laid out by Karl Marx in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program* (a party platform adopted by the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany) in which he wrote these famous words that would become the conceptual foundation for Communism: “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” These words and, in particular, the word “Communism” causes visceral reactions in many in our country today. I find it interesting that invoking the word “Communism” causes many to picture the worst historical examples; indeed there are some. There are also examples of hierarchical, dominating, exploitative and violent organizing principles of Capitalism (def: an economic system based on the private ownership of goods). We’re living witnesses to one of those examples right now in the U.S. where the wealth gap - one of those “violent organizing principles” - is widening between rich and poor (the top 1% of households have 31.7% of all wealth in 2025, while the bottom 50% have just 2.5% according to Federal Reserve data). Further, we’re living witnesses to the frustration of people who are being left behind economically, and whose frustration is being exploited by an autocratic regime. Who knows? Maybe the word Capitalism will cause visceral reactions in 100 years. (It already does in some parts of the world.)

Koinonia presents an entirely different reality. Koinonia in Acts was an early form of Marx’s vision where individuals contributed to the best of their capacity and received resources based on need, rather than output; where the goal was to

establish a society focused on human development rather than economic profit; where scarcity was eliminated. In short, where people lived out the Beloved Community.

Wealth is neither good nor bad, though, like power, it can be, and often is, abused. How people use their wealth reflects their values and their faith. Once, Jesus was approached by a man who asked Jesus to require the man's brother to divide an inheritance (Luke 12:13-15). If I can make a few assumptions: the two brothers didn't get along well and the focus on money seemed to be a large reason for that enmity. Jesus' response to the request didn't acknowledge social custom where the oldest male DID have primary claim to an inheritance. (Jesus was the oldest brother in his family too.) Nor did he say that he would appeal to the older brother. In fact, he refused altogether to decide how their wealth should be divided up, saying only, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." In what DOES it consist then? That's a very important question.

The community in Acts likely had a few people who had wealth and many more, I'm guessing, who had little wealth. Somehow they found a way, not only to be together, but to live in peace and to share what they had. This seems incredible to me; I - who have grown up in a culture that has taught me how to save for my retirement, invest in stocks (if I have extra money), establish good credit so I can take out loans for a car, a house, college for my children - I've been taught to store up wealth for myself. And I've learned. I've learned how to play the Capitalism Game relatively well. If I have extra and give it away, I'm praised for it. I might even get my name on a plaque!

Our children are bombarded by the messages that say, “Make as much as you can as quickly as you can.” So was I when I was growing up. I dreamed of all that I could do with unlimited cash: maybe buy one of those toasters with FOUR slots instead of just two. All seriousness aside (!), I dreamed of buying a seat on the space shuttle and traveling anywhere I wanted to. Unfortunately, the ticket to fabulous wealth was never an option for me because being an NBA star or a football legend were seen as the fastest way to Easy Street and God made me a little guy with similar levels of athletic talent. Today, being a successful YouTuber or a day trader have been added to the list of get-rich-quick schemes. (In a young teen’s mind, all things are possible.) My family didn’t go to church until I was about 12, otherwise I might have heard a different message. I probably wouldn’t have listened anyway.

We live in a very wealthy nation, one that has gained much of its wealth as Rome did. I wonder how things would be different today if the first Europeans to this continent had placed human relationship over material wealth. We’ve learned much from their mistakes, but we still have some learning to do. Some of you may know about the monthly online gathering called *Presbyterian Advocacy Hour*. Each month, this gathering invites speakers to address urgent issues of our time. The topic for April focused on establishing critical mineral agreements (CMAs) with other countries around the world as we move into the future to power our electric cars, phones and computers and to create new technologies. As the supply and accessibility of oil changes, we’ll look for new sources of energy and new methods of energy storage and energy transmission. Cobalt, nickel and copper will play a big part in that change. In the past, when mining companies have sought to extract natural resources around the planet, the main question has been: How fast can we get them

out of the ground? Our laws support this, but we have failed to see ourselves as one member of a global koinonia. If we did, we'd be asking entirely different questions: How will our actions affect the people who live on the land on which we'd like to drill or mine? How will these actions affect the ecosystem? If we move forward, how will wealth derived from resource extraction be distributed? Can you imagine Rio Tinto or ExxonMobil pondering such questions? It would be miraculous - to ask and then act accordingly! Well, that would completely transform society. Honoring the rights of living, breathing human beings as persons over the rights of corporations ... what would that society look like? If we truly lived into the vision of koinonia, our whole economic system would fall. It's very difficult for us to imagine what would rise in its place.

Jesus said, "Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Those with courage ask: Well, in what DOES life consist then? Jesus answers that question shortly after his interaction with the brother asking about his inheritance: be rich toward God (Luke 12:21) and then a little later, "Seek first God's kin-dom, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12:31) and again, "Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). In 79 CE, Mt. Vesuvius erupted violently, burying the nearby Roman towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum in more than nine feet of ash. Archaeologists have since uncovered these once thriving cities and their inhabitants who were frozen in time for at least 1700 years in the same positions in which they were buried. I find one particular victim striking: a man sitting on the floor in a room in his upper class house clutching a bag of silver. There were no others in that room with him.

I think he was poor toward God. He may well have heard the words of Jesus, but he clearly didn't pay attention to them. If he had, and if he had changed

his life accordingly, he would not have died alone in that room with a bag of silver as his only companion as he breathed his final breaths. He may have escaped the city with his family as many others did. They HAD time. He may have settled in a nearby city with them and lived out his days surrounded by those he loved. He might even have found a community - a koinonia - where everyone was filled with awe, where signs and wonders were performed, where the believers lived in peace and shared all things, and where each day Creator sent more people who were being set free to join them.

How many people today are like the man from Pompeii? Self-isolating because they have the wealth to do it. Lonely in their hearts because their silver cannot speak, their gold cannot love, their bank accounts don't offer the kind of reconciliation all humans long for. Wealth is not harmful in and of itself, but how we view it - how we use it - can make all the difference. Will we use it to cut ourselves off from others, or will we use it to foster relationship? Will we use it to co-create the common? Will we use it to develop opportunities for life?

Let's pray: Help us to hear the words of Jesus and to be rich toward you, God. May we use wealth that comes from you to create koinonia that gives life to us and those around us. Amen.