**Practical Love**

***32****Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.****33****And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.****34****There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold****35****and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.****36****Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,****37****sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37, ESV)*

 As the people of Christ, God has called us to express love practically. Greetings in the Lord as we continue today to look at the events during the early years of the church. The episodes in the book of Acts are examples to us of how to treat each other as believers. Luke the Evangelist tells us that the church was in a unique state in those first few decades after its initial organization. All the members enjoyed a special unity, especially given that the Apostles were still living and were bringing a lot of attention to the church through their ministry. Today, we are talking about this atmosphere and its fruit for a few minutes. In a word, a Christian’s life ought to be a life of practical love. Again, as the people of Christ, we are called by God to express love practically. Let’s go into a bit more detail…

 Practical and Godly love is generous in nature. To have unity, each member in the church needs to sacrifice something – and especially the need to be right, when such a stance causes tension and division within the church, and the issue at hand is not a key doctrinal one. That state of “one heart and soul” that the church had was an answered prayer from Jesus’ lips. He prayed it in John chapter 17, asking the Father that His own would be one. However, that unity did not magically appear out of nowhere: the Apostles did their preaching, and the followers, though they may have been regular people, actively kept the unity by their mutual sacrifices. No one was in need because those who were well off financially were sacrificing from their own possessions so that no one would fall into a needy state. What’s more, the people absolutely trusted the Apostles with their financial gifts since God was already bringing forth the fruit through their ministry. Even the example of Barnabas is given because he truly moved in the right Spirit by bringing what he owned, which was probably a significant amount, and submitting it to the Apostles’ discretion. The atmosphere was one of trust, love, and generosity through expressions of practical love.

 This is like when someone you know needs your time. Yes, you may be very busy, perhaps so much so that you do not even have time for yourself(!) However, the Lord’s love through us is a self-giving love. The Lord’s love through us sacrifices so that the other is healed, consoled, or given relief spiritually. Sometimes the Lord’s love through us, if we choose to act in it, will bring the needy around us to faith, if they are not there yet.

 Today we have opportunities to express our love practically all the time. God has put members of our church in front of us from all age groups, so that we can care for each other. Some need our time. Some need our “hello” or a meal together. Others need our money, and still others need teaching, advice, counsel, or prayer. Each of us is called to express our love practically according to our God-given ability.

 The Church is called to be known by her internal practical expressions of love and not her external looks or her denominational label.

 God has called us to live a life of practical love. May the Lord help us to love not only with words, but also with our deeds. The Lord bless you all, Amen.