

November 7, 2021 | Journey Worship Service**TEXT:** [Acts 12:32–37](#)**THEME:** Harvest**TITLE:** Common Things*By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

Since the beginning of creation, land has been of major importance in the lives of God's chosen people—Adam and Eve were created to care for the land and when they sinned, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden to forever toil in the land. God's chosen people were given the Promised Land, and because of their unfaithfulness and sin they lost dominion over it. According to one source, the ancestors of living Native Americans arrived in what is now the United States at least 15,000 years ago, and possibly much earlier. Land has been the subject of disputes and many wars have been fought over the possession of land. And we know that in this country, during the indigenous holocaust nearly 90% of the first nations people lost their lives to violence and disease.

God created land and said it was good, and humanity was commanded to care for all of God's creation—and it would provide everything we needed to live, to be nourished, survive, and thrive. Yet, we have ravished, abused, and polluted the earth, overplanting and not giving it time to restore itself. We have taken the very minerals it contains out of the earth and left the by-products to contaminate and poison the waters and lands in South American countries, and right here in this country. Neighbors, families, kings, and kingdoms have fought war against one another over ownership of land, and lest we forget, in these United States of American, the ownership of land delineated the gentry from the rest of us, commoners, the public, the working class, dare I say it, people of indigenous and African descent—Welcome to Native American Heritage Month, the month when we celebrate our Indigenous siblings *and* the mythological version of Thanksgiving, the ultimate American harvest festival, and a day of degradation, trauma, and hurt for many Native Americans, as we worship on land that was inhabited by our indigenous siblings, who did not consider themselves to be owners of the land, but caretakers, stewards of God's creation.

Today's scripture tells us that all who believed were of one heart and one soul and no one claimed ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. The believers, followers of Christ, believed that everyone was equal, everyone was to be cared and provided for, no one should hold all the riches in their community, while others went without. They believed that the community would raise together, and there was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. And along comes Joseph of Cyrene, a landowner and Levite—a man set apart as a religious leader, to whom the apostles named Barnabas, son of encouragement, who sold his land and brought the all the proceeds and laid it at the feet of the apostles. A man who gave up everything he possessed, that others would have as well.

In our lived experienced, holding all things in common is a not something that is ascribed to, much less practiced. In the words of Billy Holiday, *“Them that’s got shall get, them that’s not shall lose. Yes, the strong gets more, while the weak ones fade, empty pockets don’t ever make the grade. Mama may have, papa may have, But God bless the child that’s got his own. That’s got his own.”* In our culture, we ascribe to materialism, consumerism, and individualism. Generally, those who have the riches do everything in their power to keep it and have very little concern for those who are on the other end of the financial spectrum. As the saying goes, whoever dies with the most toys, wins! But wins what—prestige, recognition, power?

It is unconscionable that in the richest country in the world, 37.2 million people live in poverty; some children, primarily Black and brown, do not receive quality education and many go to bed hungry at night. It is unconscionable that quality, affordable housing is not available for families and individuals who live with income insufficiency, and that the need for quality, affordable healthcare is still being debated in the halls of congress. It is unconscionable that Black, brown, indigenous people are still considered less than and then held to different standards than our siblings of European descent. Holding all things in common, absolutely not.

Truly holding all things in common would entail us giving up status and stature; giving up possessions, creature comforts, and toys; giving up what sets us apart from the commoners, the least of these. And giving up our possessions just might cause us to lean and depend on the God’s faithfulness and grace that was preached by the apostle, rather than trusting in our own abilities, ingenuity, lineage, privilege, or racial/ethnic identity. Giving up everything will absolutely cost us something, just as by giving up everything, emptying himself, that we might have all things, and dying on the cross, the resurrected Jesus secured life eternal for us.

Today is stewardship Sunday at ELPC and we will ceremonially pledge to financially support the mission and ministry of this church, as we attempt to reach out into and walk with our immediate and extended communities, and we will bring bags of groceries so that our food insufficient neighbors might eat...and I thank God for your faithfulness, and yet, there’s more that we can do. When we recognize that we have things in common as the children of God, then we understand that we are only as strong as the weakest among us, that we are only as rich as the poorest among us, and that we were created to live in community where everyone has everything they need.

Commentator Olive Elaine Hinnant, states, “The type of sharing in Acts 4:32-35 may not be the ideal way to share what we have with others, but it is helpful to return to such examples when our economic way of living has crashed....The church needs to lead the way toward an economic order based not on self-accumulation but on the sharing depicted in Acts 4.” Sharing so that everyone has everything they need, and no one has too much or too little. Economic justice that eradicates systemic poverty and dismantles structural racism, and leads to congregational and community vitality.

In the words of Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfeet (circa 1885),

Our land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever. It will not even perish by the flames of fire. As long as the sun shines and the waters flow, this land will be here to give life to men and animals. We cannot sell the lives of men and animals; therefore, we cannot sell this land. It was put here for us by the Great Spirit, and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us. You can count your money and burn it within the nod of a buffalo's head, but only the great Spirit can count the grains of sand and the blades of grass of these plains. As a present to you, we will give you anything we have that you can take with you, but the land, never. (<https://shec.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1543>, accessed 11012021). Amen!

Lord, hear our land, heal our hearts, heal us that we may all be of one heart and one mind, be in community loving God, God's earth, and one another, and share all things in common.

Amen!