

No Holding Back! [Text -Acts 2:37-47]

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Having grown-up with five sisters and two brothers, I learned early in life about the importance of sharing. Fortunately, both my parents were pretty good role models for this. My Dad was the entertaining extravert, who would spontaneously invite people to stay for supper, if they happened to be around our house around dinner time. My mother was the more reserved and practical parent, who somehow could make a meal intended for ten people magically multiply, in order to feed as many people as happened to be there. [Now that I think about it, she did seem to serve a lot of fish and loaves of bread....]

Anyway, our home was a place where anyone could feel welcome, and everyone would be fed. We even had a little gimmick we'd use, when a larger-than-usual group crowded our around our long dining room table, kitchen table, and extra card tables. Prompted by a look from our Mom, our Dad would start the dinner conversation with a sentence that included the letters F.H.B.. "Well, we had another F.H.B. contract dispute today that's going nowhere...pass the potatoes, please." Of course all of us kids knew that there was no F.H.B. contract. What there *was*, was a potential problem with the amount of food, for the number of people present! F.H.B. meant "Family, Hold Back" - in other words, everyone take smaller portions, to make sure that all our guests get fed. My siblings and I certainly didn't mind. In fact, it made us all feel kind of special and grownup, to know that we were doing our part to pull-off this slick, secret strategy to make others feel welcome and comfortable in our home.

Being part of a large family with an open-door policy, definitely taught my sisters, brothers, and me some valuable Life lessons about hospitality, generosity, and sharing. And being active members of a Church Family certainly helped reinforce those lessons. I imagine these are the kind of values that most of us want our children to learn. They're also the same values practiced within the early Christian community, as highlighted in this morning's New Testament reading from *Acts* Chapter 2: "The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and companionship, to the breaking of bread and the praying of prayers.... All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions

and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread in their homes, and shared their food with glad and generous hearts...”

Now that’s a truly touching image, which should have provided me one of those perfect Mother’s Day, family-friendly, feel-good sermons on the joy of sharing and caring. However, I just couldn’t leave it alone and keep it simple. [It’s probably some Large Family, Oldest Son, Third Child Birth-Order thing - but I had to take it apart and delve deeper!] As I thought about this passage from Acts, I kept wondering, “What would actually happen if we tried this approach in our world today? It does sound a little naive, and a lot like *socialism!* And a lot of people already think that ‘Obama Care’ is some devious, diabolical Communist plot; so how could we possibly pull-off something like this?”

The truth is, this Scripture passage strongly suggests that we Christians should divest ourselves of the notion of private ownership, and recognize that the welfare of our entire community is found in the welfare of the individual. [And now I’m preaching about Welfare and Socialism - Paul Ryan’s ears must be burning!] But that’s how things were in the early Christian Church: Everyone gave everything they had to the community, to be distributed according to each one’s needs. Now that’s a difficult Scripture - not in a theological sense - but in regards to the social and political positions of most American Christians. It’s also problematic in regards to our *faith*: again, not our theological definition of “faith” - but our genuine faith and *trust* in God, and in one another. For example, if I give everything I own to the Church, can I truly trust that you folks will take care of me? [Well, *maybe...*] If I divest myself of all my money and material goods, can I truly trust that *God* will take care of me? [Well... that one might actually be a bit tougher!]

Regardless of how you or I might feel about it, we have to face the fact that the call to share *all* our stuff is not only in the Scriptures, but it also seems to be the way in which the early Church operated. Plus, there are still Christian communities in the world today that strive for this ideal. So, what’s holding us back? Personally, I think that it’s our over-whelming *appetites*, and our under-whelming *faith*. In the United States, we consume an absurdly huge proportion of the world’s resources. We diet, while millions die from hunger and malnutrition. The majority of us are wealthy beyond imagination, compared to the majority of the world’s population, who live on

less than a dollar a day. Our corporations span the globe to find people who will work for pennies to make our clothes and cosmetics, our cars and computers. And then, there's our military spending, which is *more* than the other top 18 countries in the world combined!

As Five-star General and Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower said: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. And this world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children....This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense...it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

And here's the real kicker: Our over-whelming appetite for weapons, like our all-consuming appetite for more money and more things, actually does relate to our under-whelming *faith*. Again, I don't mean "faith" as a complex theological understanding, but as a basic and genuine *trusting* in God and in God's care and provision for our lives. "In God We Trust" - but let's pile-up more and more of that money that has those words printed on it, just in case. "God is our Refuge and our Strength" - but we better make sure we have the fire-power to blow-away anyone who scares us, just to be safe.

That's one way to think, and exist. Or we could think, and *live*, this way: Our Loving and Gracious Heavenly Parent provides the resources for ample security and shelter, food and clothing for all of God's children. And God says, "F.H.B. - If you really understand our relationship and truly trust Me, then Family, Hold Back - and make sure that everyone gets what he or she needs to live!" The amazing thing that happens when we do this, is that tensions and strife within our communities and around the world actually do diminish, and there really is plenty for all. And *then* God says, "F.D.H.B - Family, *Don't* Hold Back! Scatter that abundance, share the love, spread the Good News throughout the earth!" It's as simple as that. So simple, that even my littlest brothers and sisters could figure it out.