



Weekly Update

April 21, 2024

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Worship every Sunday at 9:30 a.m. at 1820 5th Avenue, Rock Island

The deception of Sapphira

Recap of service from April 21, 2024

Scripture: Acts 5:1-11

We begin a new series today with the story of Sapphira. It seems like an odd way to start a series on “The Women of Acts,” because Sapphira’s story is not a happy one. In fact, it is a violent and disturbing one. She and her husband fail to bring a proper offering, and in response, they both drop dead in front of Peter.

I joked in worship that after the Scripture reading that we would forgo a sermon and just jump right to the offering. Of course, this story isn’t really about offering. It is not meant to be used as a scare tactic to increase giving. Peter, after all, wasn’t upset that they didn’t give enough. It was that they promised one amount and then acted in deception to hold something back. Their sin was not lack of generosity. It was dishonesty and the mistrust.

Still, the story is troubling because it feels so un-loving. Where is the grace? Where is the reconciliation? No, we don’t have any of those things, but the original readers of this story would have seen it for what it is—comedy.

Yes, I said comedy. You may ask, “How can a man and woman dropping dead at the feet of Peter possibly be a comedy?” Let me respond with another question, “Have you ever seen the films *Zoolander*, *Dumb and Dumber*, *Happy Gilmore*, or *Spinal Tap*?” These are all classic comedies that included brutal deaths. Or here’s another question, “How did you feel when Delores Umbridge was carried off by centaurs, when King Joffrey drank the poison, or when Inigo Montoya finally found the man who killed his father?” These are all deaths that would have fit into the category of comedy in ancient stories. They are deaths that we cheer. They are the deaths that come to those who we feel deserve it. These are the deaths that prove that there is a sense of justice in the world.

Dark comedy plays an important role in society. The ability to laugh at something that we typically would not find funny provides a particular catharsis. Dark comedies often arise in the midst of dark times. It is a very human experience and survival tactic to laugh in the face of desperate, fearful times. The deaths of Sapphira and Ananias fit this category of stories. For

those first hearers of the story, the death of the deceitful couple would have resonated well.

This scene also highlights the fact that the community was at risk. They were dealing with issues of life and death. Very soon Stephen would be murdered by the religious authority. Being a community was a matter of survival. Death, persecution, and arrest surrounded them. To lie to the community put everyone at risk. Sapphira and Ananias's death seemed harsh, but it was a harsh time.

The point of the story is to reveal this deeper truth—to be in Christian community means that we must depend on each other. We may not think that we go to church to survive, but maybe our understanding of survival can be less literal.

We live in harsh times too. News of war, dying children, targeted hospitals and aid workers, mass shootings, polarized politics, economic upheaval, abused children, violence in schools, tough diagnosis, and lonely neighbors surround us. It can pound us down, threaten our health, and lead to despair. Christian community is there to provide hope. We gather to depend on one another, lean on one another, and lift each other up.

I recently attended a worship service at Riverside UMC in Moline. It was a celebration of a group of people completing the “Becoming Beloved Community” program. These are the words to one of the gospel songs we sang:

*I need you, you need me. We are a part of God's body.
It is his will that every need be supplied.
You are important to me. I need you to survive.*

I know these words are true. I need you to survive. This is the good news of a dark comedy. We need each other to survive.



**Next Week: Part 2 of 4 “The Women of Acts”
*Tabitha rises up, Acts 9:36-43***

TWO RIVERS CHURCH WEEKLY UPDATE

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General Conference began on April 23 and will convene until May 3

The country's fifth largest Christian denomination, the United Methodist Church, is convening its governing body in Charlotte, North Carolina from April 23-May 3. Known as General Conference, this is the first such gathering of the church since 2019.

There are roughly 10 million United Methodists worldwide, with about 55% in the United States and 45% from Africa, Asia, and Europe. Many who remain in the United Methodist Church are hopeful that this gathering in Charlotte will pave the way for more inclusive reforms within the church, especially in regards to human sexuality, but the results of proposed legislation are impossible to predict at this point.



At the end of the first night of General Conference, Pastor Robb was able to have a conversation with four people who has worked with as a part of the IGRC for Unity group. Pastor Eric Swanson is a clergy delegate. Pastor Jennie Edwards Bertrand is an alternate clergy delegate. Anish Herman and Christina Krost are both lay delegates. They recorded their conversation for an episode of Pulpit Fiction, which has available to listen to at PulpitFiction.com/umcgc. IGRC for Unity has identified three goals, known as "The Three R's." 1) Removal of harmful language (around LGBTQ+ inclusion). 2) Revise the Social Principles. 3) Regionalization. The episode goes into greater detail about what each of these means. You can watch all the plenary sessions of General Conference live at ResourceUMC.org.

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK OF APRIL 28: Acts 9:40-41

[Peter] turned to the body and said, "Tabitha get up!" She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and say up. He gave her his hand and raised her up.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Apr. 28	Sunday	Acts 9:36-43	Tabitha is raised.
Apr. 29	Monday	Acts 10:1-13	Peter and the Cornelius the centurion
Apr. 30	Tuesday	Acts 10:14-29	Peter contemplates his vision
May 1	Wednesday	Acts 10:34-45	The Spirit comes to Gentiles
May 2	Thursday	Acts 15:1-21	The Jerusalem Council
May 3	Friday	Acts 15:36-16:10	More of Paul's travels
May 4	Saturday	Acts 16:11-15, 35-40	Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth

EASTER SEASON SERMON SERIES

April 28	Acts 9:36-43	Tabitha is raised
May 5	Acts 16:11-15, 35-40	Lydia, the trader of purple
May 12	Acts 18:16-18	Priscilla, a leader of the house church
May 19	Pentecost Sunday	