



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### April 21, 2024

## 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***