

Acts of the Apostles study 2:-

The Acts of the Apostles chapter 5 includes a story that I would rather not tackle! However, there it is and, as always, it is there that we may read and learn from Scripture which is the Word of God for us.

Read Acts chapter 4, verse 32 - 37;

As Luke records the work and fellowship of the early days of the Christian Church in Jerusalem he says “*Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul . . .*”. Yes, there was some persecution by the temple authorities but this led to a renewal of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. In their recognition of the Lordship of God the disciples “*held everything in common*” (verse 32). However...

Read Acts chapter 5, verses 1 – 11;

Ananias and Sapphira were counted among those who “*were of one heart and soul*” - they were part of the united fellowship of believers. The story of their wrongdoing must have been an important part of the development of the early church – otherwise Luke would not have included it in his narrative, so positive up to this point.

The property belonged Ananias and Sapphira. It was theirs to do with as they wished and they could have sold it and openly given part of the proceeds to the fellowship. In selling the property they would be seen to be an integral part of the early Christian fellowship. Part of the core group! Virtue signalling? Instead of giving the entire proceeds to the church they chose to keep back part for themselves and make out that they were giving the whole sum. Peter in his judgement states quite clearly that this was an option (verse 4). It was the fact that they lied that was the sin! Notice that here Peter does not ‘pronounce sentence’! Maybe the implication of his words was enough and the full realisation of what he had done killed Ananias. Sapphira is caught out in a direct lie! (verses 8 – 9). Here Peter does make a direct accusation and pronounces judgement.

Notice that in these verses the Holy Spirit is identified as being God! The same wording is used in verses 3 and 4. Ananias had lied “*to the Holy Spirit*” (verse 3) and “*you have not lied to men but to God*” (verse 4). In verse 7 they are accused of “*agreeing together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord*”. No wonder that “*great fear came upon the whole church and on those who heard of these things*” (verse 11).

Remember - “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have those who practice it*”. Psalm 111, verse 10.

Read Acts chapter 5, verses 12 – 16;

The events of verses 1 – 10 would have had a sobering effect on the infant church! The spiritual authority of the apostles was such that when they met for worship in the Temple porch “*none of the rest dared join them*” (verse 13). However their ministry continued to be effective and the message of the Gospel was spreading. The healing ministry of the apostles was the means of outreach not just in Jerusalem but into the towns round about.

I may be wrong but I think that Acts chapter 5, verses 1 – 11 are not used in official Sunday Service readings. As there are no obvious hymns appropriate for this week here are some verses from Psalm 51.

HAVE mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness: according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.

Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:

Make me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence: and take not thy holy Spirit from me.

O give me the comfort of thy help again: and stablish me with thy free Spirit.

The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.