**Sermon: 19th July, 2020 - Don’t Hold on to What We Have – Obi Hez**

We continue today with our study of the book of Acts with this shocking story of a couple, Ananias and Saphira who were members of the first church.

The Church of Jesus had just started and many thousands were coming to the faith daily. The scripture said that there was great manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit; the disciples had boldness to declare the good news, the sick were healed, the lame walked, the blind saw and most importantly they had unity and shared EVERYTHING they had with one another and **there was no one lacking in their midst.**

I would like to consider this scripture based on 3 lessons we can take away from this very sad incident in the early church:

* **Foundation**
* **Integrity and**
* **Faith**

**Foundation**

At the start of everything thing, there is a huge buzz and we all try to outdo each other and sometimes we forget the actual mission but for God it was necessary that the right foundation is laid for the church.

As result of the firm foundation, there are now billions of Christians worldwide. Beyond the entire story, I believe that the Lord was more interested in getting everything right: the believer’s behaviour, love, sharing and the spirit of oneness as we heard last week.

As terrible and scary as the story is, we are reminded of the importance of a sound foundation, without which we build in vain.

They both died in front of the other disciples as an example to the others so that the church is not dented by lies.

The great news is that, God is merciful and very willing to offer us a chance to re-start on another foundation; one built of the solid rock JESUS!

Beyond building a great foundation for our relationship with God we must also think of every aspect of our lives and consider building a fresh sand sound foundation; family, work, business and relationship.

And in our Church, if we will operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, then this is an invitation to all of us to re-examine our foundation.

The next lesson is on…

**Integrity**

Ananias and Saphira did the right thing by selling what they had but failed when they conspired to lie!

In Mark 12: 28; One of the of the teachers of the Law asked Jesus which law was the greatest and He answered:

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

The requirement here is with EVERYTHING… Which is a really tall ask because we want to be in control and hold on what we have.

As Christians, we believe that our God knows all things and there is no secret with Him according to the Psalm 139, we read today. So, whether we are seen or unseen, the Lord sees and knows. As clear as this is to us, it is extremely hard to live in this constant awareness that the Lord sees and knows our hearts inside out.

Its is interesting that Peter asked the question in verse 3: “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” So, it is possible to Satan to fill our hearts even though we are Christians, so we must stand guard our hearts to avoid this.

As Christians we believe that the Holy Spirit lives in us, so before we act, we must examine our minds to ensure that the action is powered by the Holy Spirit and not Satan.

The fruits of the spirit from Galatians Chapter 5: 22-23 are clear. This is great guide to us: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And in the same chapter we are shown the works of the flesh as well. Jesus said in Matthew 7: 16: You will know them by their fruits.

The situation required simple voluntary giving of what they had, so they had the choice of not giving at all but they decided to lie and as a result, they died!

It is crucial that we begin to audit of the gifts, talents and all the pledges we made to the Lord in the past and release them. We must spend time to check ourselves and what we offer to God whether it is good enough considering our gifts and talent.

We are grateful to the numerous volunteers who continue to go above and beyond with great talents to serve both our church and the community. However, we are invited to consider ways of doing more.

Let us look at the final one…

**Faith**

This is a current challenge as I regularly find myself talking faith and then graduating to zero faith.

Here is an example: Some asks; how are you doing? And I say; “All is well thank you!” And then I will add “Just pushing along hoping for the best, who knows?”

Ananias and Saphira were not hiding the money for the sake of hiding, they had good reasons but not faith reasons. They wanted to keep some behind just in case and that is true for all of us today.

If you are like me, whenever I give, I constantly check that I have enough left for me. However, looking at the early church they had strong faith and shared which must be one of the reasons they multiplied in thousands. They preached the gospel with power and boldness and backed it with generous giving and love.

The scripture said they sold all they had and brought it to the Apostle’s feet and **no one lacked in the church.**

**As a church we are pulling our weight here, but can we do more?**

Here is what faith says:

“Give and it will come back to you, good measures, pressed down, shaken together and running over”

“Blessed is that hand that gives than the one that takes”

And there are so many others…

**Let these be the basis of our giving, believing without a shadow of doubt that God will reward all our sacrifices in good measures pressed down, shaken together and running over.**

We are encouraged today to challenge ourselves to root all our actions (including giving time, money and materials) on the faith we have in God who is “able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we can ever think or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us”

I would like to end with these prayers from Apostle Paul from:

**2 Corr. 9: 7-9:**

I pray that we are able to give freely without regret or compulsion for “God loves a cheerful giver.” I also pray that God makes all His grace abound to us, so that in all things, at all times, having all that we need, we will abound in every good work and be people who give to the poor so that our righteousness endures forever.”

**Phil 4: 19:**

We pray that our God shall supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus and empower us by His Holy Spirit to live in Integrity, faith and firmly rooted in love for God and one another in the name of Jesus…

**Amen**