

Hey. Let me ask y'all something. Have y'all ever seen somebody get so mad they looked at another person and said, "I wish they would drop dead"? (pause) Have y'all ever heard somebody say that? (pause) Have you ever been so mad you told someone to drop dead? (pause) Have you ever actually seen someone drop dead? I am not talking about seeing someone pass away. I am asking if you have ever seen someone just die all at once (pause) It is not the kind of thing we see every day. I have never seen it, but we know it does happen. In this morning's passage it happens twice. In just one day two people drop dead. It's like something from an Indiana Jones movie. These two people lied about their tithe and the Holy Spirit struck them dead. (pause) What's that all about? (pause) Let's find out.

Back in Acts, chapter 2, verses 43-47 Scripture says the people who repented and accepted Jesus Christ as their lord and savior, "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. And fear came on every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need." (pause) This needs to be unpacked. First, the difference between the haves and the have-nots was literally who had food to eat and who did not. Who had clothes to wear and who did not. These first followers of the Way of Jesus Christ were not socialists or communists. It was not about trying to make the rich and the poor financial equals. The selling of possessions was about making sure men, women and children did not starve; or die from exposure.

To put it in context; imagine Uwharrie Real-estate purchases a foreclosed home. They put just enough money into repairs to flip the house for a profit. Uwharrie Real-estate sells the home and donates all of the profit after the cost of the repairs. The funds are then used to provide a meal, music and message ministry to the poor and working poor in southern Davidson County. Children from the elementary school receive tutoring and the working poor receive job training to either bring better jobs to Denton and to help Denton workers find better jobs. That was work the Acts 2 church was doing. It was not socialism. They were trying to give people the means not to starve and to find work to support themselves. The result of this ministry is many people came to receive Jesus as their lord and savior. They were baptized and devoted themselves to becoming more like Christ themselves. Their devotion to be like Jesus was so powerful that in the town of Antioch these followers of the Way of Jesus Christ were made fun of. They were called "little Christs," or Christians (Acts 11:26).

You might imagine the people who sold land or possessions for this cause were very well thought of by their church and their community. This kind of generosity gives someone a good reputation, right? (pause) Well this brings us to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter five. We can infer they wanted that good reputation. However, they did not want to give all of the money from the sale of their property. So they conspired together to lie about it. It might not have looked bad if they told people they were only giving half the proceeds of the sale to the church, but they certainly would not have been thought of as well as if they had given all of the proceeds to help the poor. (pause) The Holy Spirit was not having it. The Holy Spirit, working through Peter, confronts the couple. First Ananias and then three hours later, Sapphira. The problem was not that Ananias and Sapphira wanted to keep some of the money back for themselves. The problem was not that the apostles were counting on that money to feed the poor. The problem was Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would not take being lied to.

Bear this in mind. In Genesis, chapter 2, God formed man from the dust of the earth. God then breathed into man God's breath of life. God's breath was a portion of the Holy Spirit. It appears when Ananias and Sapphira lied

to the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit took their portion of God's breath back. Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead; right then; and right there.

So what are we to do? (pause) What are WE to do? (pause) How are we called to respond to a passage like this one? (pause) Perhaps we could start by examining the oaths we have taken, and the promises we have made. (pause) When we joined the church we made promises. Every time a new person joins the church we renew our vows of membership. It is a fancy way of saying we make those promises all over again. Do y'all remember what those promises are? (pause) We promise to support the Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

Let's take a hard look at those promises for a minute. Without a show of hands how many of y'all pray for our church on a regular basis? (pause) How many of y'all pray for each other, and for those on the prayer list? (pause) Especially after the last couple of weeks the Church needs your prayers. I don't have to ask how many of y'all support the church with your presence. The numbers speak for themselves. Our attendance has been down the last couple of weeks. Two weeks ago we had 71 in worship. Last week we had 79. Last year we averaged 85 in worship. When I was first appointed here three years ago we had 100-120 in worship. Where did everybody go? (pause) Listen to me when I say this. Too many of us assume it's okay if we miss church one week here or one week there. Pretty soon we are missing one Sunday a month or more. While that sounds like no big deal, it really is a big deal. It's a BIG deal because worship is about reorienting our lives to put God first instead of tailgating, watching TV, playing video games or sleeping in. Putting God first takes the focus off of ourselves and puts the focus back on God. Putting the focus on God is a good thing because the better we get at putting God first the better our whole outlook on life becomes. I'm not gonna tell you the Holy Spirit is gonna strike you down, but the truth is when you don't attend worship it cuts down on the work the church can accomplish. By a show of hands how many of y'all know the phrase many hands make for light work? (pause) That's why coming to church is a Big deal. If don't believe me try worshipping up the road at Clarksbury UMC sometime. Oh wait, you can't because they're closed. The Conference just closed two churches in Randolph County, and I expect more to come before this year's Annual Conference in June. Church, do you love God? (pause) Do you want to serve God through this church? (pause) Then regular worship attendance is a big deal. We shouldn't take it for granted.

Our gifts are important as well; both financial and spiritual. Spiritual gifts are very important. They give life to the individual and provide opportunities to share the light of Christ with the community, but it takes money to make that happen. When we join the Church we promise to support the Church with our gifts. Money matters. Our relationship with money also matters. I have heard people say money is the root of all evil. (pause) That's like saying a hammer is the root of all evil; or a pocket knife; or a gun. These items by themselves are meant to be useful tools. However, put to evil ends they can inflict great harm. The love of money shifts our focus away from our love for God and our love for others. These are the exact opposite of the first and second great commandments to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. God does not need our money, but we need to give our money to a cause greater than ourselves. It's healthy. The role of the Church is to be the hands and feet of Christ; nurturing the congregation to grow in their faith, to reach out to offer Christ to those in the community who need to know how good it is to be loved by God; and to be a living witness of the values Christ has taught us are important. The way we spend our money bears witness to the importance of what we believe in our lives and supports the ministries we believe are important.

My sisters and brothers we have taken oaths and made promises about things we believe are important. However, they are just empty words if we do not follow through and keep those promises. Where do you feel God's call on your life in light of these promises? (pause) How will you respond to the Holy Spirit?

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.