

**Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 12, 2013**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Acts 2:42-47**

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43) Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Why did you become a member of Good Shepherd (or your own congregation)? I'm sure each of you might answer that question in a slightly different way. People join churches for lots of reasons. Some are looking for a place where their children can learn some moral values and receive some religious instruction. Others are looking for a group of friends. Still others are looking for help with the problems and difficulties of life. All of these are fine reasons to seek out a church and to become members of a church. But the longer you are a member of a church that is committed to teaching the truths of God's word as is done here at Good Shepherd the more you will realize that this is a congregation which is more than a social club. This is a group of people who confess that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. We are a group of people united in faith by the word of God whose desire is to use the Gospel to win souls for Christ and to strengthen believers for Christian service.

It is no accident that Christians join together in such a fashion. It's a part of God's plan for the members of his family which is accomplished through the working of the Holy Spirit.

In Martin Luther's explanation to the third article we confess:

**I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.**

Our text for today is a classic example of the Holy Spirit's work of calling, gathering and empowering the Christian Church. This text speaks of the results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On Pentecost Jesus fulfilled promise to send the Holy Spirit to equip the disciples to go forth as witnesses of him and his resurrection to bring souls from throughout all creation into the family of God. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples as what seemed to be tongues of fire rested upon their heads. People from all over the world heard the disciples speaking of Jesus and his resurrection in their native languages. The Holy Spirit worked through the Word. Thousands of people believed and were baptized – the New Testament Christian church was born.

The words of our text describe the Spirit fostered attitudes and actions of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem. It is my hope that everyone who is a member of a Christian congregation would have the desire to follow in the steps of these early Christians. Since such attitudes and actions are expressions of faith it is appropriate that we pray:

**Lord, help us to be like the first Christians.**

- 1. May we be devoted to the Word**
- 2. May we gladly express our faith as we worship and work together**

Devotion to the Word and Sacrament was a way of life for the first Christians in Jerusalem. **Our text says that they were devoted to the apostles teaching.** The apostles taught that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a Savior. They taught that he suffered and died to pay for the sins of all and that he rose from the dead as evidence that sin, death and the devil had been defeated. They taught a baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together with all that Jesus had taught them including his command to celebrate the Lord's Supper often in remembrance of him. They taught that Jesus' disciples would be known by the love that they showed for one another. They taught that Jesus would return to judge all people. They taught that on that day the dead would rise from their graves. The Lord Jesus would separate the believers and the unbelievers. The believers will be invited to spend eternity with him while the unbelievers will be sent to eternal condemnation.

The Holy Spirit used such preaching to strengthen the faith of those early Christians. This faith expressed itself in their continued devotion to the Word. And the result was that their devotion and love for the Word showed itself as they met together **every day** in the temple courts. They enjoyed regular contact with their brothers and sisters in the faith. They enjoyed the privilege of encouraging each other with the Word and being encouraged with the Word and Sacrament.

These early Christians found a way to make use of the Word on a daily basis. When we pray, "Lord help us to be more like the early Christians," we are asking that he would bless our use of the Word and Sacrament and that he would move us to be devoted to the Word. What opportunities do we have to show our devotion to the Word?

- ♣ We can make use of the Word each day in our homes.
  - There are a variety of easy to understand translations.
  - There are audio versions on CD's and video versions on DVD's
  - There are Bible apps for your smart phone or I-touch or I-Pad.
  - There Bibles for your computer and you can even access the Bible on-line.
- ♣ You can make use of devotional materials which are readily available.
  - Read the devotional booklet Meditations.
  - There are many other fine devotional books available from our Synod's book store.
  - You can access daily devotions on our web page.
- ♣ Use the Bible Studies in the Forward in Christ magazine which is mailed to each of the members of our congregation or can be accessed from our web page.
- ♣ Set up your own personal Bible reading program or use one prepared by someone else: The Bible in a Year or The Bible in three years etc.
- ♣ Prepare for weekly worship by reading the Scripture lessons in advance. A listing of suggested Scripture lessons is available in the front of the hymnal and is regularly included in our service folder.
- ♣ Use a Bible study book like the *Peoples Bible*.
- ♣ Review your Catechism.

- ♣ And let's not forget the regularly scheduled worship services, Bible studies and other Christian education opportunities which are available to us here at Good Shepherd.

We certainly have a wide variety of opportunities to use the Word daily. But how will we find the time? If you are already in the habit of using the Word at home continue to set aside that time and look for ways to add to it.

If you are not already in the habit of using the Word on a regular basis start out slowly and work up to a more vigorous schedule as you grow in your faith. Think of it in the same way that you might think of adding an exercise program to your routine. Several years ago my doctor had been encouraging me to add some exercise to my weekly routine. I resisted – I used the same excuses many people use for not spending time in the word. I was too busy. It was too difficult. Finally my wife asked if I would walk with her for five minutes every other day. Well after the first 5 minutes she said let's do five more. Slowly but surely we worked our way up to 30 minutes at a time. It became easier as we went along especially when we noticed some benefits. We continued that routine for quite some time.

Apply those same principals to your use of the Word –

- ♣ Do it with someone else. That way you can encourage each other.
- ♣ Begin slowly even a few verses a day from the Psalms or the Gospels or one of the Epistles then steadily increase.

The early Christians devotion to the Word also included a regular participation in the Lord's Supper. Make it your goal to receive the Lord's Supper each time it is offered. If for some reason you are unable to commune on a regular basis – be sure to make arrangements to receive the Lord's Supper privately.

As a result of regular use of the Means of Grace the early Christians were enabled to show their devotion to the Word with actions which were consistent with God's will.

**They expressed their faith as they worshiped and worked together.**

**44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.**

They regarded each other as family. Gladly and sincerely – not with a sense of obligation – they were willing to express their love for the Lord as they shared with each other. They took care of each other by sharing their possessions and goods. This was their way of showing that they loved each other as they loved themselves. Not only did they gather together on a daily basis in the temple courts but they opened their homes to each other so they could enjoy the blessings the Lord had provided to them with the members of their Christian family. They praised God with their lives. Whether they ate or drank or whatever they did it was done to the glory of God. And the result was that they enjoyed favor with all people because they were displaying fruits of the Spirit in their lives. (Galatians 5:22-23) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

As they used and shared God's Word with each other and with those whom they came into contact with the Lord blessed their efforts by adding more and more souls to his church as our text tells us: **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

How can we follow their example? We can gladly worship and work together. In addition to the weekly worship services and Bible study opportunities in our congregation, we can be a part of fellowship activities: participating in them and making them possible. We can work together on a wide variety of projects and ministries in our congregation: using our talents to help maintain the congregation's property and grounds, to assist with the activities related to our worship services, serving as greeters, ushers etc. We can volunteer to serve as workers in the Sunday School or VBS. We can be willing to serve as officers and elders or committee members. We can pray for each other and with each other. We can look for opportunities and ways to help each other and to reach out with the Gospel. We can use our financial resources to support the Lord's work in our congregation. Perhaps you can think of ways or activities that I haven't mentioned.

From the verses of our sermon text today we can see that there's a lot involved with being an active member of a Christian congregation: gathering together, working together, sharing concern for each other, praising the Lord, sharing his wonderful acts with others. Where does the motivation and the power come from? It comes from the Gospel in Word and Sacrament – The Means of Grace. This is the tool that the Holy Spirit uses to empower and gather his church on earth and to keep it faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**May you daily pray, Lord help us all to be like the early Christians. And may the Lord answer your prayer by enabling you to be more devoted to the Lord and by gladly expressing your faith as you worship and work together with your fellow members in your congregation.**

**Amen.**