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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 29, 2016
2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 12:1-4; Mark 4:26-29

Hymns: 2; 4087; 412; 52

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 2:42-47

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: What Makes the Church Grow

We live in the age of mega churches. There is so much evident success in the approach that is taken by some churches. They really seem to attract people. They may make other Christians wonder what they are doing wrong, or what they could do or should do to

make their church grow like those. Should we look to them as a pattern for us?

While there may be things that we could be doing better, and maybe a thing or two that we may even learn from some of the other churches in a community, the Spirit of our God does not hold these out for a pattern or as an example for us. The Spirit holds out for us some of the churches of the early New Testament era, beginning with the congregation in Jerusalem where they had a real challenging environment in which to work. And what is the conclusion of our text? **“The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved”** (v.47). The Lord added to the Church, not the apostles. The Lord built that Mega Church that was not limited to Jerusalem or to the first century, but is still growing in our day and among us also, the invisible, universal Christian Church. So we see Jerusalem congregation --

THEME: Evidence of the Spirit’s Presence and Power in the Church.

The first important sign of the Spirit’s presence and power is found in the --

I. Faithful Devotion among Believers.

We read in the first verse of our text:

Acts 2:47 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

What is evident among those early believers is their devotion to the Lord and their dedication to the Word. They wanted to hear the Word. They had an earnest desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn’t about being entertained; it **was** about learning of God’s grace and the truth of their salvation. In this verse we hear the word “doctrine.” I think in our day and age that word is a turn off for a lot of people. These early Christians simply wanted to learn more of what the apostles had to teach them, that’s *doctrine*. The Apostles taught them about Jesus and how Jesus was the Christ foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. They taught them about Jesus and how Jesus was the sacrifice for the sins of the world. They taught them about Jesus

and how Jesus is the resurrection and the life. They taught them about Jesus, for all the Scriptures are focused on Jesus and the salvation that we have in His name. These early Christians didn't think that they had learned enough to get to heaven so the rest was unnecessary. They wanted to learn more and so they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine. They heard the Word, they learned the Word, and they remained true to God's Word.

More than that, they wanted to partake of the means of grace with their fellow believers. The "**breaking of bread**" in this verse is not a simple reference to shared meals. While they had meals together around the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the sacrament was the highlight of the meal, this breaking of the bread as Jesus had instructed them. It was not enough for them to receive this grace once in a while. They desired the fortification of faith that comes with the reception of Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Sacrament.

They also came together to join with their fellow believers in prayer and praise of their Savior God. This filled their hearts with joy, and brought fulfillment to daily life.

All this was evidence of the Spirit's power and presence within the early Church. It is the Spirit that works this desire in the hearts of believers. As we come together around the Word the desire for that saving knowledge that persevering faith grows within the heart of the believers. Though there may be only a few of us here this morning to hear the Word, this is our joy also, and this is the blessing we still receive as we gather around the means of grace in Word and sacrament as we pray together and praise the glorious name of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is a glorious blessing for us to be here! Don't forget that! **It is a blessing to be here** gathered around the Word. By all means, don't neglect or despise this special blessing, for here the Spirit comes to us with power and instills in our hearts His presence.

We see also how through the Spirit's power --

II. The Apostolic Word Was Confirmed.

Another blessing these early Christians enjoyed is found in the signs and wonders they witnessed. We read of this in our text.

Acts 2:43 “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

Again we need to understand exactly what is meant by one of the expressions in our text. Fear is not something that we normally regard as a blessing. However, this fear isn't being afraid or terrified as we normally think of fear. This is the fear of reverent awe. It is the kind of fear that one might experience if one were granted the privilege of being invited to the White House to meet the President of the United States; except when one truly comes to know the greatness of our God the reverent awe is so much greater than one would ever have for any man, no matter how powerful a position they possessed on earth.

The early Christians came to a greater comprehension of just how wondrous God is by the wonders the Apostles performed in Jesus' name. The signs they witnessed led them to say more than “whoa,” or “WOW!” These signs led them to comprehend the reality of the power of God in the Christian's life. It made God so much more real for them, so they knew the power of Jesus' promise to be with them even to the end of the age.

Jesus promised that these signs would accompany the Apostles while they undertook the mission He had given them. Jesus promised these signs to confirm that the Apostles were teaching the truth of God concerning Christ and salvation that is found in His name. The Word of God was made more sure.

Peter wrote of this in his 2nd general epistle written to early Christians of the Asia Minor. We read in --

2 Peter 1:16, 19-21 “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ... 19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

What we believe isn't stuff somebody made up. The teachings of the Apostles are not myths or fables or fabrications intended to deceive. That is true of the religions of this world. Many false religions can be traced right back to the original deceiver. The Word of God was "**made more sure**" by the signs and wonders the Apostles performed. We have God's Word as it was given to us through the apostles and prophets in the inspired Scriptures.

These signs and wonders performed in the early days of the New Testament Church are as great a blessing for us today as they were for those who witnessed them with their own eyes. With the Word confirmed, as we open the Scriptures, as we are led by the Spirit to comprehend the wonder of God's love and forgiving grace in Christ Jesus, we too should be filled with that same holy awe at the greatness of our God. He who can do all things used His power and wisdom and might and dominion to deliver us from sin and death! And He still cares for you!

His Word is sure. All that we read in the Bible, ALL of it is true and reliable, and leads us in the paths of righteousness. To know this is evidence of the Spirit's blessing and presence in our congregation, and Church today.

Knowing this powerful presence changes our lives. Our text speaks to us of --

III. The Growth of Christian Love.

Acts 2:44-47 "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people."

What this describes is radically different from what one sees in the world. The world may make claims of being altruistic and charitable, but the difference is in the heart, for that is where Christian love begins, and that is where worldly charity falls apart.

When people of this world talk about altruistic giving they very quickly get to the idea of “Paying it forward,” so that someday someone will lend me a hand when I’m in need. Or they may even say, “I do kind things for others because it makes me feel good about myself.” It is still about **self**. So much for pure love.

Our text talks about people who believed in Jesus, people who know the greatness of His love and the kindness He has shown them, and the life He has given them. So they became a Christian family who cared for one another, and the fellowship and the salvation they possessed in Christ was far more precious than material stuff. So when a Christian brother or sister was in need it was no big sacrifice to part with some material possessions to give to those in need. That is the Spirit’s doing. That can only happen with His presence and power in one’s heart.

That remains true for us today. The enticement of the material wealth of this world can become all consuming. It appeals to the Christian also because not only do we need at least some of these things, we are also misled by the world to believe that life is made up of the things that we possess. The world would have us believe that success and security and fulfillment are all properly measured by material possessions. These early Christians were brought by the Spirit to recognize that the true blessing of earthly possessions is to have to give to those who have need (**Ephesians 4:28**).

Then Christian fellowship extended from worship to everyday fellowship. They visited one another, they got together to share what they had, both in spiritual and material blessings. They ate their food, whatever it was, in simplicity of heart. They were not presumptuous or proud, but humble and genuine in their love for one another.

That is such a blessing of the Spirit within a fellowship, and it is one that we enjoy in our own congregation. We really enjoy seeing one another. It makes the day richer and more joyous when we gather around the Word. That is true for each and every member of the congregation. When I see you here it brings joy to my heart. And the same is true for us all isn’t it? I see it. Yes, can be seen, and it is seen even by people of the world, even by those outside the church. They see the love, the true and genuine love, and the

simplicity of heart we enjoy where there is no guile. The world may mock, but they are also impressed, for it is not something that comes from within human character, but from the power of the Spirit working in our hearts with the gospel of Christ, His love and His devotion to our salvation.

Conclusion: That what makes a Mega Church.

It isn't a grand building. It isn't outward numbers. It isn't numbers of programs. It is the powerful working of the Holy Spirit working in and among us. The result is that Jesus is glorified among us for the salvation of souls. Again, this is true not because we are so exemplary, or better than the world around us but because the Spirit has brought us the gospel and implanted its grace and power in our hearts and lives, and by that gospel He has done what He has pleased! **“And the Lord *continues to add to the church daily those who were being saved.*”** Acts 2:47.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)