

Discipleship Under the Good Shepherd

Acts 2:42-47, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 2:19-25, John 10:1-10

The reading from the 2nd chapter of Acts tells us the early Christians were devoted to four things:

1. The apostles' teachings,
2. Fellowship,
3. To the breaking of the bread, and
4. To prayer.

First, to the apostles' teaching. The early Christians desired to hear about Jesus, everything he did, and everything he said. They heard from those who had received these teachings from the eyewitnesses. These were the ones who Jesus commissioned to give to this world what it so badly needed. His gifts, especially His forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. These early Christians devoted themselves to this. A little Jesus here and little Jesus there was not good enough. They craved all of Him constantly.

Second, to fellowship. Better translation would read, "to the fellowship." They had unity with one another. They were Christ-Centered. The top Core Value of North American Lutheran Church is that we are "Christ-Centered." It is because of Jesus we have our common life together. These early Christians shared their common life in Jesus by sharing their lives. They supported one another in times of trouble and need. They walked with the grieving, they sat with those who had lost hope. They gave of their time and talents, and their resources, all gifts that God had given them. They were the Body of Christ. There were no Lone-Ranger Christians. Each person was important and vital to the ministry and the fellowship. I can hear them saying to one who was absent, "We missed you in Church, we are less without you."

Third, that unity led them to be fed and nourished by the breaking of the bread. Again, as we heard in last Sunday's gospel when Jesus was made known to them the Cleopas and his friend when He blessed, broke, and gave them the bread at supper. "In the breaking of the bread," is Luke's way of telling us these early Christians gathered frequently for Holy Communion. They devoted themselves to receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. The very gift that Jesus instituted before He went to lay down His life for the His disciples, and for you, and for the world. They devoted themselves to this gift to strengthen their lives as Jesus lived

in them and they lived in Jesus. It was if Jesus was still with them and giving Himself to them. That is what He was doing, and it was very precious to them.

And Fourth, to the prayers. They gathered and prayed together. I can imagine they spoke their prayers after hearing what Jesus had spoken to them through the Apostle's teaching. In these prayers they lifted up their thanksgivings for all that Jesus had done with one voice. They lifted up the needs of the sick, the hurt, and the grieving, as well as the needs of the fellowship, and their own needs. They did this with confidence assured of Jesus' promise to hear their prayers and to give them what they need in the proper time. They realized that prayer was important to them as breathing is to life. They knew they were not on their own.

They devoted themselves to the Apostles' Teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and to prayer.

While it appears that they were devoted to these four things, they were really devoted to Jesus. All four of these things were from Jesus and all four of these things pointed them to Jesus. They were devoted to Jesus because Jesus was first devoted to them. They knew they had Good Shepherd leading and guiding them to thirst quenching waters and nourishing green pastures of God's Word. They knew they had a Good Shepherd caring and protecting them in the dark valley where the shadow death lurks. They had a good shepherd who would not forsake them, realizing too that when they got off track, Jesus' goodness and mercy was following them, not just leisurely, but like a NASCAR racer chasing down the leader.

They knew they had a Good Shepherd who would prepare a table in the presence of their enemies in this world where the forces of the enemy seem to be winning. It did then as these early Christians devoted themselves to Jesus with these four things. And they still exist today. For God's Word will always be opposed by the World who believes it knows better.

Peter addresses this in the second lesson for today. He writes of unjust sorrow and suffering for doing good. For proclaiming the truth of God's Word and suffering for the proclamation. For speaking out for the protection of life from Womb to Tomb, for God's good and gracious desire for marriage of man and woman. Pointing out our sins and our need for Jesus' forgiveness. Proclaiming that we cannot save ourselves by our good works, and that we all need the savior who is Jesus Christ

the Good Shepherd who loved you to the end and is devoted to you by laying down His life on the cross so that He becomes to the door into the fellowship of believers. When we move away what is good and God's intention, we are not devoting ourselves to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of the bread, and to prayer.

Peter goes on to say that Jesus is our savior and example. He suffered and Died for doing good, did not return evil for abuse he suffered. ***For His suffering on the cross He bore our sins on the body of the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness. By His wounds we are healed. We're going astray like sheep*** but because of Jesus' goodness and mercy has caught up to you, ***you have return to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.***

So, these early Christians show us what life looked like under the Good Shepherd was devoted to them and how they devoted themselves to Him.

Today, as the church, may live together in this faith with Jesus our Good Shepherd as His disciples and followers.

As Disciples of Jesus, We Courage one another to:

Pray Daily: "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible to be alive without breathing." Martin Luther

Read the Bible: "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; It has hands, it lays hold of me." Martin Luther

Worship Weekly: "To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father is necessary to the Christian life as prayer." Martin Luther

Serve at Bethany and in our community and beyond: "God does not need your good work, but your neighbor does." Martin Luther

Be in relationship with others in the community of faith to encourage growth: "If he have faith, the believer cannot be restrained. He confesses, he teaches, this gospel to people at the risk of others." Martin Luther

Give of your time and resources: "I have held many things in my hands and lost them all. Whatever I have placed in God's hands I still possess." Martin Luther

For when sin, death, and the devil want to take your life from you, Jesus, your Good Shepherd says, "Over my dead body." And that is what took to save us, the Good Shepherd laying down His life for you. And since Jesus Christ is Risen, and He is risen indeed! They cannot have your life. For you belong to Jesus who is devoted to you, Your Good Shepherd.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.