

## Real World? Real Savior!

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. of Easter – 04/26/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Acts 2:42-47 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 42 (literal translation from the Greek) **“And they (i.e. the 3,000 newly converted and baptized Christians on Pentecost) attached to and persisted in the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship; to the breaking of bread and to The Prayers.”**

### Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ Our text here today, in the book of Acts, paints a beautiful scene for us of what it was like for the very first “Christians” in the early Church. In fact it almost has a “Once upon a time” kind of feel to it, doesn’t it?

→ Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying St. Luke is idealizing things or that he doesn’t have his facts straight. I’m simply saying that the scene he describes is like nothing I have ever experienced in my lifetime in the Church. And if you, like me, have never experienced such a beautiful scene either, we can certainly be tempted then, to wonder how much help these words from Luke can be for us today.

✘ We must be careful to understand that these words are describing these conditions in the early church, but are not necessarily prescribing the way that the Church must look in every age moving forward. In other words, Luke lets us peer through a small window into what life looked like in the early church.

→ But what we get to see through that window is by no means a full-length feature film. Yet it is also much more than just a snapshot. The church that our text describes is bustling with activity. It has a vibrant life of worship; an avalanche of generosity toward the needy; and a beautiful camaraderie that no snapshot could capture. To me, it’s like the flurry of activity you see when an ants’ nest has been stirred up. Every single member of the body seems to be busy with something; seems to know well his/her important part within the Church.

✘ Perhaps to us, the problem with this beautiful scene is that it appears to be absent of any problems. And so it seems like it is unrealistic; not possible in the “real world.” You have to look really hard and read between the lines to find anything less than ideal.

→ But you see, not everyone in Jerusalem had yet come to faith in Christ. We know this how? Because verse 43 speaks of “every soul” in the city being “awed” by the “wonders and signs...being done through the apostles” at the same time that verse 47 says that “the Lord [was adding] to [the church’s] number day by day those who were being saved.”

→ So yes, some people were in need (v. 45), but those needs seemed to be met as soon as they came to light. So, if there is any problem with this beautiful scene, it is that it seems too beautiful. And so, we have a hard time relating to that. And we might be tempted to read this text and say, “That doesn’t speak to us, because we, after all, live in what we have skeptically come to refer to as “the real world.”

✘ It is true, we may live in the “real world,” but for this “real world,” God in His grace has provided for us, “a real Savior”; the One of whom we shout out in praise, “Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*”

### I. Living in the “Real World”

- ⊗ But, you don't need me to tell you that the Church today is living in the "real world"; a world where sin seems out of control; where it's often hard to distinguish Christ's people and His Church from the world that it's supposed to be witnessing to.
  - ➔ I mean, let's be honest, today's Church faces a growing opposition from the world around it. And this reality is nothing new for many Christians around the world who are actually threatened with death and extreme persecution because of their faith. It's only in the last 70 years or so that the Church here in North America has been seeing that kind of opposition grow dramatically.
- ⊗ On top of that we hear, far more often than we would like, of scandals within the Christian Church – embezzlements, sexual misconduct, misappropriated funds; all things that give the church a real black eye, so that the world is now telling the Church to clean up its own act before it ever dares to preach to anyone else.
  - ➔ And individually, we Christians all have our own battles against sin – not necessarily big, public scandals, but private problems that only we and maybe a close friend or two might know about. But they are still "real" battles that leave us bruised and wounded; sometimes even reeling in doubt and despair.
  - ➔ On top of that we are often nursing wounds that we've received from others' sins against us, so that now we struggle to forgive as we have been forgiven by Christ. Add these all together, and it seems like our world today bears no resemblance to the world that Luke describes in this text today.
- ⊗ But remember: as beautiful as it is, the scene Luke describes to us is just a small window into the early Church. It teaches us some wonderful things, but Luke is not suggesting that the early church was all candy and roses and fairy dust.
- ⊗ No, they faced real problems too. Just keep reading in chapter four. Real hostility arises there against the church when Peter and John are arrested for nothing more than just proclaiming the Gospel.
  - ➔ In chapter five, the church faces scandal. Ananias and Sapphira apparently wanted to see their names on a big wall plaque, telling everyone else what generous people they were. So, they pretended to make a big donation to the poor. But it was all for show. And to pull it off, they lied – to the church; to the apostles; but ultimately to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).
  - ➔ Moving then to chapter six, we hear the Greek-speaking widows complaining that they were being discriminated against in an "us versus them" controversy; the typical "everyone is picking on me" kind of drama.
- ⊗ And we could go on and on, but you get the point. So, whatever else Luke is teaching us, it is not that the early church faced no real problems. No, the world of those early Christians was every bit as "real" as ours is today.

## II. A "Real Savior"

- ⊗ But for God's people, then and now, who find themselves in the "real world", with real problems and real challenges, we see that this text today proclaims the life that comes only from the very real and now risen Savior. Yes, Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ⊗ And that, you see, is why Luke's description of life in the early church is so beautiful, not because those Christians faced no real problems, but because they were learning to face those real problems with a very real and living Savior!

- And because He lives, they now know, as Jesus says in John 14:19, that “because I live, you also will live!” He is, as Psalm 23 promises, our Good Shepherd leading His flock to life. In Psalm 23:6 David rejoices in the fact that “I shall dwell in the house of Yahweh forever.”
- ✘ At the same time, other parts of Holy Scripture make it clear that eternal life is not something that begins for us believers only when we die in faith. No, eternal life has already begun from the moment God joined us in faith together with Christ, our Good Shepherd. In John 5:24, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life (present tense). He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”
- And again, as Psalm 23:4 & 6 comfort us, our Good Shepherd is leading His flock through this “valley of the shadow of death” to where we will “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” No doubt, we all look forward to that glorious day, don’t we? But my friends, that life is already now being manifested in His church. It is ours today because, Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ✘ That’s what makes this text so exciting. It’s not that the early church had no “real” problems. It’s just that they knew they had a “real” Savior to address and take care of them in the midst of all their problems. And that glorious truth could not help but show itself in the way that they lived out their faith every day.
- So Luke simply describes for us how that life was expressed in their devotion to the Lord’s Word and Sacrament. The Greek word in verse 42 that is translated in most Bibles as “devoted” is προσκατερέω (proskarteréo), which carries the basic meaning of “persisting in, or diligently attaching oneself to something or someone.” Verse 42 says that this then was the attitude that the early Christians had toward “the apostles’ teaching”; toward “the fellowship” – that is the bond they all had with Jesus and with each other in Jesus’ gift of salvation. And that intense dedication and bond showed itself in their attitude toward and their extreme appreciation of Christ’s gift in “the breaking of bread” (i.e. Holy Communion) and “the prayers”, which was their way of referring to the established liturgy and order of worship that was already developing at that time.
- And look, this was no dinky, little church. Luke is talking about the 3,000 or so whose souls had come to faith in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost.
- ✘ They held fast “to the apostles’ teaching” because that’s where they heard their Good Shepherd’s voice.
- They were dedicated intensely to “the fellowship”, that is the bond they had with those who confessed the same truths and the same faith in Jesus because it was in and through that family of faith that they shared Christ and all His Gospel gifts.
- They were equally devoted to “the breaking of bread” so that they were regularly celebrating and receiving Christ’s forgiveness, strength and peace in the Lord’s Supper.
- And they persisted in their mutual bond and dedication to what Luke calls “the prayers” which describes the early Church’s vibrant and faithful life of worship!
- ✘ And because they were so strongly connected to their Good Shepherd’s voice, that Word took root within them and made them agents through whom the Risen Savior extended His care to others. Notice in verse 45 how “they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” This was not forced upon anyone. It was simply the natural; the spontaneous care and concern they had for one another as part of the gathered family of Christ.

- ⊗ Yes, the church today has problems. And that means there is no better time to publicly display the life and the love of Christ than this time right now! The same God of love; the same risen Savior; the same Holy Spirit, is still at work in the church right now today!
  - The Church of Jesus continues to be fed and strengthened by our Lord's Word and Sacrament. We still gather every week around our Savior's voice; devoted to the apostolic teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers here in His Divine Service.
- ⊗ And strengthened by these gifts of grace, we, the Church of Jesus continue to serve as the agent through whom the Good Shepherd extends His care to others in their various needs today. We say it every Sunday in our Mission Statement: *Sharing God's Word! Serving All!*
  - The first of those needs in our "real world" is the pure and faithful proclamation of the Gospel. Everyone still needs to hear that Jesus has died for his/her salvation; including every one of us already in His Church!
  - But there are lots of other activities and ways that we can bear witness to, and supplement that Gospel: food pantries, grief counseling, care for the sick and dying, rides to and from appointments, phone calls and prayers with those around us – these and countless other expressions of care are a natural outgrowth of the church's life, and they all happen because our real and living Savior lives in and through His Church.

## **Conclusion**

- ⊗ So, whether we are thinking about the Church of Christ at the time of our text or now today, we know that the Church, in this very "real world" always has a very "real Savior." And this text is a very real part of our history as it demonstrates the very real life that our very real Savior has won and now gives to us, His beloved and forgiven flock.
  - So rejoice, my fellow believers, because Your Savior's promise will never change, because it depends not upon you or me or this world in which we live, but only and always upon Jesus alone. And that promise is this: that "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Yahweh forever!" (Ps. 23:6)
  - Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*