

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

*<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

*<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup> 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, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:37-47)*

### **Devote Yourselves to the Fellowship**

What do you spend the most time on every week? Sports? Work? Family? Sleeping? Would you agree or disagree: how you choose to spend your time tells what really matters to you? Now, obviously, there're certain things we can't control. We all need a certain number of hours of sleep. We adults have to work. The house requires maintenance. You have run to the grocery store and so on. But you still get to choose how dedicated you are even to those necessary things. You can spend the minimum or the maximum amount of time at work, or something in between. You can give your family the least amount of time that will keep your spouse off your back or you can lay aside things you'd like to be doing and dedicate your time to them. So how much time does your church get? Is this fellowship of believers truly important to you? I certainly hope so. This is the place where we come to hear the word of God. These are the people who have confessed their unity of faith with us and taken their stand next to us to testify to Christ in a dying world. And these are the hands that God has brought together in this place and time to do that work. **Devote yourselves to the fellowship.**

#### **I.**

How do we do that? Well, the word of God we have before this morning gives us an example and from that example, we can see God's plan. **Devote yourselves to the fellowship. Strengthen that fellowship through the gospel.** That's what we see in Acts chapter two this morning. These events took place on the day of Pentecost. That day began with a miracle. There was a sound of a rushing wind and then tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the apostles. A huge crowd came together and God gave his apostles the gift of speaking in languages they had never learned. Peter stood up and preached a mighty sermon. And then came the words of our text.

Luke tells us, **"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"** Peter had just told them that Jesus was the promised Savior, the Messiah that they had been waiting for since the time of Abraham. But they had killed him. That message of the law crushed them. Why? Because it's God's law. We Lutherans rightly emphasize the fact that God works through the gospel. But the Holy Spirit does work through the law, too. Not to give us faith. Not even to make us better Christians. The law cuts us to the heart. The Greek word Peter used literally means that it stabs us. It doesn't do that because God enjoys our pain. It does that because God wants us to know that we need a Savior so that when we see Jesus, we cling to him and his forgiveness and have eternal life.

So when God stabbed the hearts of these people and they asked, **"What shall we do?"** Peter said: **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."** We repent, which means nothing more than recognizing that our sin is real, that it's ours, that it deserves death and hell. And then it means trusting in Jesus to take it away. How do we get that trust, that faith? The Holy Spirit works through the gospel. God announces that Christ died for us, that he has forgiven our sins and placed

our death and hell on him. God promises us life in heaven and his love for as long as we live here. God gives us that good news also in baptism where he combines the word of the gospel with the water and he washes all our sin away forever. God gives that good news through communion. God combines the word of the promise with the bread and the wine. He makes Jesus' body and blood present and they take our sins away. God gives us that good news every time our pastor or another Christian tells us that the sins that torment us are forgiven and we belong to God.

Every time he does that, God gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes our faith stronger every time we hear the gospel, every time we come to communion, every time we meditate on what Christ has done for us. The Holy Spirit is constantly building our faith because we live in a world that never stops tearing it down. That faith changes us. God made us new, when he made us believers. Day by day, he renews our joy in the gospel and our desire to live for him. He gives us the strength we need to live the life he calls us to live.

A huge part of that change is the fellowship. God did not design us to live our faith on our own. Just as he built us into physical families so that we can help and support and care for one another, God also builds us into spiritual families. God designed our faith to live in a congregation, in a fellowship. The Greek word translated as fellowship really means a sharing. In the church, we share our faith with each other. We band together to face the power of the devil and we share our lives with each other. So God calls us to devote ourselves to this fellowship he has given us. That devotion does require effort. Our Christian life comes from God. He gives us the desire to live for him. He gives us the strength. But you do have a part: God calls you to dedicate yourself to living for him. God calls you to come and hear the gospel so you grow in faith. Laziness is a sin. Failure to work at your Christian life is unfaithfulness.

But growing in our devotion to each other does not come from activities. Easter breakfasts and bowling leagues and whatever else you might come up with express our fellowship. But they are not the source nor are they the way it grows. Now you might object to that. You might point out that the only way we can get close to people is by spending time with them. That's true. But friendship and fellowship are not the same thing. Many times, friendship grows as our fellowship deepens. Many times, knowing each other enables us to better show love to each other because we understand better what each other's needs are. But those things are the blessings of our fellowship, not the cause of it.

The fellowship comes from being united to Christ. That unites us to each other. As we grow in faith, we dedicate ourselves more to Christ and to each other. So we strengthen our fellowship through the gospel. For that reason, married couples should come to church and Bible class together. There are different kinds of love in a marriage. There's friendship. There's the romantic love. There's the love that comes from shared experiences, like raising kids together. But if you're both Christians, there is also the fellowship of being believers together. Studying the word together, talking about what you hear in church on the way home deepens that fellowship even in your marriage. And it leads to ever greater commitment on a spiritual level. That's not just true with marriages. It's true for all of us. God works when we hear the good news about Jesus. He reaches into our hearts and he changes us. When he strengthens our fellowship, in our family and in our congregation, he gives us extraordinary blessings that touch every day of our lives.

## II.

Devotion – love – takes time. God has given each of us a certain number of hours and days, months and years of life here. God calls us to set aside a generous portion of our time for the fellowship. When we give a part of our lives like that, we're really sharing ourselves with each other. **Devote yourselves to the fellowship. Show that devotion in love for each other.**

Luke shows us what that looked like in that congregation in Jerusalem. He says, **“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”** Every day they met together – not just on Sundays! When people were in need, others didn't just give them their leftovers. They sold their property to support one another. They ate together in each other's homes and they praised God in church and at home. What a picture of Christian love!

How much of that picture do we have to follow to be devoted to one another? God never tells us to set up a commune and in fact, that's not what happened here. God does tell us to help those who are in need. But

he doesn't spell out what we have to do in order to do that. God does tell us to regularly gather to hear the word and to love one another, but he doesn't make "every day" a rule anywhere in Scripture. So the point is less the specific actions of the Jerusalem congregation and more the love. They sacrificed time and possessions to help each other. They rejoiced together and their commitment to one another was so great that people came every day to learn more. God used their love for one another to make people ask what was different about them. Then he answered with the good news of their Savior and gave those inquirers faith.

The heart of this picture is love, lived not just when it's convenient, but especially when it's not convenient. Real love gives and sacrifices. Most of the time, real love costs me something. But I give it because God has given me Christ. I give it because I know that God will always more than repay me. I trust that promise even when it doesn't seem like that's true here.

Luke says, "**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**" Are we devoted to the fellowship here? Do we give it time? Do we make this congregation – the people who gather here – important in our lives? What do you think, not about other people, but about yourself? Do you limit your time to Sunday services and no more? If so, is that being dedicated to the fellowship? Hearing the word is important. It's the only way we'll grow in our fellowship. But do we take the next step and commit our time to the people of God here? Do we join in the work? Do we express our dedication by trying to get to know each other better so that we know what needs there are and how best to love one another? Or is it just too hard? If so, why? Is it because you only see these people on Sunday and you have a whole different circle of friends and co-workers and neighbors and you only have so much time to dedicate to relationships with people? Is it because you're overscheduled and you just don't have any more time to give?

Do you think God accepts those excuses? Are we ungrateful for the gift God has given us here? I'm here almost every day and I have to admit that I'm not always dedicated to the fellowship. I do sin against that gift of God. Do you? Does your sinful nature groan at the idea of coming here for a meeting at night or spending your Sunday afternoon at a church function? Does the idea of cleaning the school completely turn you off? Do you want to breeze in and breeze out without making contact with anyone? Are these people at the very bottom of your list of relationships? Our sinful hearts will always have something better to do than to devote ourselves to hearing the word or to working together with the people of God here. Our sinful hearts will never treasure the fellowship God has given us here. That sin deserves his punishment in hell forever.

But thanks be to God that there's more to us than just the sin in our hearts. God has given us faith in Christ. Christ died for our sin, even for our failure to devote ourselves to the fellowship or to the word. Christ died because we're lazy and uninterested in anyone other than ourselves by nature. Christ died and his blood washed all that sin away. Christ rose and God has forgiven us for our failures as members of his fellowship. Every time we hear that Jesus has taken all that sin away, God strengthens that faith. Built into that faith is a hunger for fellowship. It's really there, even if you've buried so deep that you don't feel it. Recognize that hunger as a good thing! It's a gift of God! Feed it with the word and be devoted to the fellowship here.

My friends, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are one here, even when we don't feel it. We are going to spend eternity together. Commit yourself, day by day, to living and loving as Christ did. How you spend your time shows what matters to you. Make this fellowship matter. Hear the word and grow in faith. Then commit time to God's people here. Amen.