

Acts 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

John 10:1-10

¹⁰'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Our first lesson this morning is from the Book of Acts. It describes life right after Pentecost, when the Church was born. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to

all, as any had need..." They had "glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."

The Christian Church had been born and it was alive and well. It still is. You are a part of it. The same Church that was described two thousand years ago still operates on exactly the same principles and is empowered by the same inspiration. Worship, teaching, fellowship, prayers, and sharing are all part of what we do as the Body of Christ.

I love our worship services here. The talented musicians, the love people have for each other and for the church.

Here at Peace, I celebrate our teaching all the time. Our dedicated Sunday School teachers, the women's Bible studies, the evening weekday Bible studies, annual Bible School, weekly confirmation classes with adult guides and mentors. This afternoon we will begin a four week class preparing for first communion. Next week we will begin a five week Inquirers' Class to discuss the basic issues of our faith. (Sunday afternoons from 3:00 to 5:00.) Just like the second chapter of Acts.

Fellowship – I can smell the coffee right now. I just got an e-mail about one of the dinner groups, I saw two children holding hands on the labyrinth. If some of your best friends aren't around you right now, it's because you haven't introduced yourself yet.

Prayers we do a lot of. We pray as a body and we encourage ourselves to pray individually as a way of staying a body. We pray for each other and this world that God has told us to take care of.

The earliest Church shared all they had. That is being part of the Body of Christ. We have a mission to show God's love to the world and we have the love and trust to accomplish that mission together.

Some of the organizational principles have changed in the last two thousand years. One of those changed principles is the appearance of denominations that did not exist at the time of St. Peter. We belong to a denomination called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

and in that fellowship we can do far more than any individual congregation could hope to accomplish. Our synod (or geographic district) is called the Southwestern Texas Synod with its office in Seguin. We are 67,902 members in 173 congregations. Through our synod you are taking part in Social Services, adoption agencies, Hispanic ministry, education, youth development, and seminary support. That's just our Synod. Churchwide we have sixty-five synods and we are almost five million members. Churchwide, you have eight seminaries and twenty-six colleges, foreign missionaries, inner-city missions, hunger programs, and disaster relief. You staff girls' schools in India and hospitals in Palestine. You run rehabilitation centers in Russia and farming programs in Papua New Guinea. We are able to participate in all of these things because of dedicated leaders over the generations who have served God with their organizational skills and because of the dedication of people we will never meet who live today, all around the world – participating in the mission of God.

And because of us. Peace Lutheran Church sits right here on Ranch Road 620 in north Austin and, every week, just like they did immediately after Pentecost, we worship God, and we have fellowship, and we pray for our ministries, and we share what we have. We give an offering of our money every week as a part of our worship of God; that's how we participate in God's work. That money is used to maintain our property, buy education materials, pay salaries, buy worship resources, and all of the other things that fill a seven page budget that St. Peter, standing back there in Acts 2, would have found incomprehensible. And we also take ten percent of that offering and send it to our Synod Office in Seguin. And they take about half of that and send it to the Churchwide office in Chicago. And that's how we live with our fellow Christians who do so many things around the world.

I ask some members of our Board of Stewardship to show a brief presentation on how we participate in the world-wide ministry of the ELCA.

Video presentation about the ELCA.

This morning, at the conclusion of our worship service, let's do one more worshipful thing. After our final hymn, "Praise the Lord, Rise Up Rejoicing", when Michelle tells us to "Go in Peace. Proclaim the resurrection. Alleluia, alleluia." Let's respond, "Thanks be to God! Alleluia, alleluia." And then proclaim the resurrection by walking to our Lord's altar and placing in your Faith Commitment card for the coming year in this container that has been prepared for that purpose. This card is a statement of how much money you plan to give in the coming year. It's part of our life together: with each other, with our fellow Christians around the world, and with our fellow Christians all the way back to that group we read about who held all things in common in Acts 2.

Jesus' final words in this morning's gospel lesson are a promise that his sheep will "have life and have it abundantly."

The life we read about in the first days after Pentecost was not easy to live, but it made a difference. That is Jesus' promise. An abundant life. Those Christians had been called by God. They dedicated their lives to responding to that call.

I have been told (but not believed) that this "abundant life" is pretty easily recognized. A person has this life and is blessed by God, with wealth and financial security, a nice car, a good place to live, a long life and good health. There seems to be a sort of Christianity sweepstakes and you can tell who has won by who has the prizes.

That is **not** what Jesus had in mind when he spoke of the abundant life that he offers.

A Christian, confidently following the call of Christ, lives an abundant life. A Christian life is lived abundantly making a difference, not being abundantly easy to live.

Make a difference by showing God's love in your life. If it is not for us to sell all we have and live together like they did in Acts 2, it is ours to be generous. To give what we have to bring God's love to people who don't know God's love. To be kind and patient. To work for solutions. Doing your chosen work, loving your family, your neighbors. Don't just live in your community -

raise the standards. Make things better. Learn more. Let the people around you know God better.

God's love is the most abundant of all things. We can make it even more abundant by adding our lives to it. And we will have the joy and excitement of God's grace and forgiveness...and being made alive.