

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA October 18, 2015

Acts 2:42-47

## **Building Up the Family of Believers: In our Church!**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

**Acts 2:42-47**

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

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. 1984 (Ac 2:42-47). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

As you hear about the early Christian church, do you ever find yourself wishing you could've been a part of what they had there in those early days? Just look again at the description: Devotion, awe, miracles; a togetherness and community; giving and sharing; joy and gladness; growth and positivity. It must've been awesome to be part of what they had! It's no wonder as we look at what they called each other brothers and sisters. In every way, they were a "Family of Believers."

Is it like that today in the church? Do we have that kind of joy; do we share that fervor and devotion; do we feel that togetherness? Do you feel such a connection to ALL the people who sit around you that you would naturally call them

brothers and sisters? Would say that you belong to a family of believers?

One of the common musings that I hear from those who are struggling with church, or those who have decided to leave church, is a common frustration. They don't feel connected; they can't find people who are like them.

And to be honest, that answer always frustrates me a bit. It frustrates me partly because I look at that person and then I think about all the people in church who are just like them. And I wonder, "How can you not find them?"

But then I often get my answer as I talk to active members. Far and away the most common phrase I hear as I talk to members about other members is this: "I'm not sure who that is."

It was to address that disconnect head-on that we adopted this new Vision Statement focused on Building Up the Family of Believers. But step one to improving something is to understand the source of the problem.

Certainly, we can come up with all kinds of reasons why we may not feel like the closely connected Family of Believers that we heard about in Acts. We can throw out stock excuses like, "We're too big," or "We're too different." We can blame others by saying, "They're too cliquish," or "They're too distant." We can excuse ourselves by saying, "I have too little time," or "too much other stuff to do," or "too many relationships already."

But perhaps the real reason that we don't always experience Acts 2 is that we simply don't treasure the "Family of Believers" like they did. And there can be a number of reasons why that is the case.

A couple of years ago, many of the college basketball teams sponsored by Adidas would take the floor in shirts that said, "We All We Got." It's poor English, but the early Christians really could have donned those shirts. Living as a Christian in those days often meant leaving relationships, even family, and so these fellow Christians were often all they had. It's no wonder they became family.

For most of you, this isn't "all you've got." You have family in the area. You have friends outside these walls. You have activities and interests that have nothing to do with the church. And there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, there can be a ton of good in that. But it also can make it easier to not put in the time or energy needed to build new relationships here at church. It can make it easier to give up on a relationship here at church when the first offense causes a bit of hurt or friction. It can make it easier to come to church to get what you need and then get back out to your life. But the reality is that we aren't likely to treasure the family of believers when we're not fully committed to it.

Perhaps you are saying, "But, Pastor, this is all I've got. I have my group that I view as brothers or sisters. I have my activities that I'm involved in. I have it just the way I want, but I don't want it to change, I don't want it get bigger, I don't want to upset what I have by letting others in." However, we won't truly treasure the whole family of believers when we place limits on who is family.

Or maybe you are saying, "I've seen the problems that plague so many families today, and I know I'm going to find those same problems in a church family. In fact I've experienced some of them already, so I'm going to keep my distance, I'm going to have my guard up, I'm going to shield myself from hurt. The less people I know, the less people who can hurt me, the less people who can disappoint me." Once again, though, we can't treasure the family of believers if we expect perfection and forget about forgiveness.

We can come up with so many reasons to not treasure the Family of Believers, but perhaps our time is better spent on why it can be treasured. The NT Christians didn't treasure this family because it was some perfect oasis where division and sin didn't exist. They felt Satan's work as he tried to tear them apart, and we know from the New Testament letters that he occasionally succeeded. Instead, they treasured

the family of believers because of what it took to make them part of that family.

It has been for only a short time in the history of the world that the Family of Believers enjoyed perfection. Satan came, and with sin, he tore apart the Family of Believers, separating God from his children, creating a divide between Adam and Eve, stirring hatred between their first two sons, Cain and Abel. Sin turned the first family of believers into a dysfunctional mess.

Yet, look at what God planned because he treasured that family of believers. Look at what God did to restore the family. God the Father was willing to give up his Son to redeem his children and bring them back into the Family. Jesus was willing to give his life that we might have fellowship with the Father, that we might have fellowship with the Son, that we might be brothers and sisters in the Family of Believers.

And that allowed the joy, the caring, the community to remain among these Christians because they remembered what was done by their Savior Jesus to cover over the sins and shortcomings and bring them together. It allowed them to live in forgiveness, to experience joy, to be awed by what they saw daily.

At the start of our sermon, we wondered what it would be like to be part of the Family of Believers that we hear about in Acts. Guess what? You and I have exactly what those Christians in Acts had. We are part of a Family of Believers that Jesus was willing to die to make us part of. We are part of a Family of Believers whose sins and shortcomings have been forgiven. We are part of a Family of Believers that can experience the joy and community and blessings that they experienced. That Family of Believers is ours to treasure. But it is also ours to build up.

As a church, our leaders have been challenged to do just that, to focus on objectives that Build Up the Family of Believers.

But building up the Family of Believers in our Church really begins with you. So today, I'm

bringing that challenge to you. Make objectives or goals for yourself as a member of the family of Believers. I'm even going to give you two. Each Sunday, look around and find someone that you don't know by name. Before you go and find the people that you know, chase down that person that you don't know and introduce yourself. Beginning with the connection that you have in Christ - and what a place that is to start - you will find other connections. You might find that the person who sits across the sanctuary works with your aunt. You might find that the couple in front of you went to your school. Be sure that every person who steps foot here knows that they are a treasured member of the family of believers.

Second, look around each Sunday and think of someone that you don't see. Don't assume they are going to 2nd service, don't conclude that they must be out of town, don't ask the pastor if he's seen them. Give them a call on Sunday afternoon and tell them that they were missed by their family.

As we close, I'd ask you to begin that practice of looking around right now, from the person sitting next to you to that person all the way on the other side of the church. Look at those people and take note of them. Treasure each one of them, because these are the brothers and sisters that Jesus died to give to you. These are brother and sisters for you to build up.