

## Scripture Reading:

Acts 2: [We begin in verse 36 with the conclusion of Peter's great sermon] 36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." 40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

# 'I Believe a Holy Catholic Church'

Well, I got myself in big trouble the last time I asked if anyone remembered what Sunday in ordinary time in the Church calendar we had reached... Because I had the wrong number in mind

- But as we approach the season of Advent, it is good to remember where we are at and why we have ordinary or normal time in the Church calendar... Any takers?
- The season of Advent can be seen as both the end and beginning of the Church calendar.

-- Coming to the end of the year should remind us that we look for the end of history in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of our Lord Jesus when He comes as the judge of all the earth.

-- Preparing to begin a new year, we look back to the first Advent of our Lord when He came as the baby in a manger to save His people from their sins, bringing in the New Creation.

For the first half of the Church year we review, EACH and every year, the life and ministry of our Lord:

- His birth, His manifestation, His earthly life, His teachings, His suffering, death & burial, His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand from where He rules today
- Then we have what is called normal time or ordinary time: And not because we ran out of things to review in life of Jesus:

As John tells us near the end of his Gospel, if all the events in the life of Jesus were recorded 'the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.'

- Ordinary time is to remind us that Jesus said we are to hear and DO those things He taught...

Or, as we have quoted from John 14:15 this year in our order of worship where Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

- We do this year after year to remind us that Jesus and His work are central to our lives and that we are to live accordingly!

We see an important example of ‘hearing and doing’ here at the end of Acts chapter two. We will take the final two Sundays of ordinary time this year to review some important lessons about the Church and our community within the Church. Luke has shown us how Jesus ascended to the Father’s right hand and sent us the Promised Comforter. Peter has preached the first great sermon of the Book of Acts and three thousand souls have been saved.

- Having saved His people from their sins, Jesus has now established His Church!

We see here the important order that is reflected in the Apostles Creed where we confess:

- I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of the Saints

The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son and He will do so through the Church, the New Jerusalem. This week we consider “One Holy Catholic Church” and next week “the communion of Saints.”

- Both are clearly taught here at the end of Acts Chapter two! *[review catholic as universal]*

First and foremost we must see that the Church is made up of those who have been called by the Father, saved by the blood of the Son and regenerated by the power of the Spirit.

- Our salvation is dependent upon the Triune God from first to last and we dare not trust in anything else!

Now with that being said, we must also see that the Church that we confess is much more than a bunch of individuals running around with a personal relationship with Jesus and ‘get out of hell free’ cards.

When we consider the doctrine of the Church, we again come to that road that has steep cliffs on either side:

In much of modern Evangelical Christendom, we have stressed the importance of those who are truly saved, those who we would say are in the invisible true Church, BUT so much so that in many ways the Church has truly become invisible!

In the more traditional Catholic, Orthodox, and even some reformed churches we have seen a focus on the purity of the visible church, demanding adherence to every jot and tittle of their doctrine: Demanding that even the Bible must be seen through their lens

- In the end they argue that ONLY their church offers real salvation which has brought us the seemingly hopeless divisions in the Body of Christ that we have today.

I fear there are many in both camps that will hear those dreaded words from Jesus on judgment day: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

- I want to focus this morning on Church unity, which is quite obvious here at the beginning of Church history!

*Much of what I will share is a weak summary of the material that Pastors Wilson & Lusk provided in their lectures on Reformed Catholicity some years ago.*

First we must avoid some of the nostalgic desire today to get back to the First Century Church:

- As Pastor Wilkins rightly points out, we should be careful what we ask for...
- As we go on in the Book and Acts and certainly by the time that Paul is writing His epistles, we can see that they were not without many problems as well!

We can plead for the unity that we see here in our text or how they solved problems at the Jerusalem council:

- But we must remember they soon had the Church of Corinth to discipline and the bitter parting of Paul and Barnabas.

A second mistake is the more modern thought that we should just drop the whole idea of having a formal church all together. This attitude can certainly be found in many seeker friendly circles where mega churches do all they can to not look or act like a traditional church. And also found in some home-churches that want no real authority structure at all

- Thus it should not surprise us that in many quarters we have lost all the traditional signs of the one true Holy Catholic Church: Word – Sacrament – Discipline

Hopefully we have rightly avoided these errors here at Church of the King and Lord willing we will continue to do in the future.

- We must continue to strive to understand and practice as a Church gathered what is taught here in Acts with:

- Teaching of right doctrine;
- Rich fellowship;
- Proper use of the sacraments; and
- Much prayer

However, we also understand that independent and isolated individual churches can be as damaging as the American rugged individualism that we regularly denounce.

- So we have joined ourselves together with a small group of like minded churches in the CREC, so we have a small step in the right direction and some additional accountability

To look toward any further type of Church unity gets real messy... How can we bring ourselves to unite with those who are in error, even with minor issues no less the great doctrines of the faith, IF we are going to be faithful to the Apostle's doctrine as we should?

- Well for starters, we need to get serious about this because it is commanded!

Turn with me if you have your Bibles to Ephesians chapter four, or make a note of Ephesians as your homework this week... We clearly see in the first three chapters of Ephesians the picture of salvation I have outlined:

Paul presents the Saints as called by the Father, saved by the Son and regenerated & empowered by the Spirit, as Paul powerfully prays at the end of chapter three:

Ephesians 3:14 "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**That is a powerful prayer that should often be on our lips, but it must be followed by the obedience that Paul then calls the Saints to: What we must see here in Ephesians, as we do in our text this morning, is that the first focus is on the Church and her corporate practices.**

**Then Luke and Paul give us insights into the communion of the Saints with specific examples & commands for fellowship, charity, & hospitality: Commands for husbands, wives, children and those in the work place.**

- **The bottom-line is that we must properly understand the Church corporately if we are to function properly as its members.**
- **This is an especially difficult challenge for those of us who are reformed post-millennialists!**
- **We have been so busy separating ourselves from the errors of others that we can no longer imagine having One Holy Catholic Church, the very thing we confess to believe each and every week.**

**We pride ourselves in seeing the proper Biblical picture of Christ's Kingdom filling all the earth, with all of the nations being discipled and bowing the knee to Jesus... We are ready to reform people, families, schools, and businesses: Governments big & small...**

- **But there is little or no talk about the church**

**BOTH Luke and Paul insist that we must have the doctrine and practice of the Church, the One Holy Catholic Church right before moving on to the other areas.**

- **This is a focus we desperately need to reclaim today!**

**Pastor Wilson has pointed out that Paul here presents a unity that is given and a unity that is not yet... I would argue that we will see much the same as Luke lays out the early history of the Church in Acts.**

- **Paul follows his great prayer and begins chapter four with a plea for unity:**

**Ephesians 4:1 "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**

- **We should notice two things here that are parallel to what we have before us in Acts 2:**

**1) Paul tells them to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called"... Those bookends we studied last week where we see "as many as the Lord our God will call" in verse 39 and "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" in verse 47**

- **We have been called as the people of God and should walk worthy of that calling, which we will see in more detail next week.**

**2) Paul calls on them to keep the 'unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'... And Paul leaves no doubt as to what this unity involves:**

**"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."**

- **As we confess in the Apostle's Creed we believe in the one Holy Catholic Church**

**We may meet in many different places and call ourselves by many different names and even stress that we believe various different things, BUT there is only one true Church and that is the Church the Spirit has come to build, to comfort and to grow!**

**One Lord, one faith, one baptism:** This is what Pastor Wilson refers to as the unity that was given:

- This is the unity that we are to keep, and to not do so is sin

Paul goes on to say that the work of the Son and Spirit have brought us the grace we need, in language that should remind us of what we have been studying here in Acts:

7 “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”

- The Son has ascended and sent the Spirit who now carries out the work of Glorifying the Son...

11 “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

- PLEASE notice that these are given for the Body of Christ and NOT our own personal peace and affluence!

12 “[given] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

- Paul is addressing the Gentiles at Ephesus and goes on in this chapter to admonish them to turn from old ways and be the Church.
- Peter has called thousands of faithful Jews out of the old creation into the new creation, the Church of the Lord Jesus
- Luke tells us that they immediately focus on four things that are still vitally important today:

### 1) The Apostle’s doctrine

Truth is never to be sacrificed at the altar of unity, but our desire must always be for our learning to help us preserve the unity that has been given and work toward the unity that is to come when we are all built up in Christ to be the “perfect man.”

### 2) The Fellowship of the Saints

We are not lone-wolf Saints, but must desire, seek and enjoy the corporate fellowship we have with other believers in Jesus

Our worship does not consist of performers or leaders up here and watchers or followers out there...

- We are the gathered Saints called to worship and participate!

### 3) The breaking of bread

Just as we saw the call for us and our children to receive in baptism the sign and seal of the gracious covenant of salvation wrought by God... So we are now to partake of the sacrament of the Supper, remembering and celebrating His propitious death until He comes.

4) And in prayers.

Just as Paul prays for the Saints, so we lift up our corporate prayers of confession and petitions each week as the Body of Christ, the Church. We must come honestly as we confess, also realizing that we are to confess the sins of the world because Jesus has made us all priests. We must come with our petitions believing they are acceptable and heard because of the work of Jesus and their deliverance to the very throne of God by the Spirit!

➤ Lord willing, we will continue to be faithful in all these areas here at Church of the King!

BUT how are we to solve the problem of unifying the Body of Jesus when it is so badly divided today? Let me suggest two simple things:

First and foremost we must BELIVE that one day we will see the unity of the faith, a mature Church whose stature is the fullness of Christ

And secondly as we consider how we approach other churches and brothers and sisters, let us always practice what Paul calls the Saints to at the end of Ephesians 4:

29 "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

And finally let us learn to be patient with our brothers & sisters when we find ourselves expecting them to understand something in five minutes when it took many years for the Lord to teach us the same thing ☺

32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

**Communion Meditation:**

**John 17:**

"20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."