

**Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I among them.” – Matthew 18:20**

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (LCMC)
Springfield, GA
Home Worship Bulletin
May 3, 2020 – the 4th Sunday of Easter**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Silence for reflection and self-examination.

Most merciful God, **we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen**

Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all our sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

GREETING

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

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

SALUTATION

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. **God of all power, you called from death our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. Send us as shepherds to rescue the lost, to heal the injured, and to feed one another with knowledge and understanding; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen**

+LITURGY OF THE WORD+

FIRST READING

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; **I shall not want.**

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: **he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

³ He restoreth my soul: **he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: **for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: **thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: **and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now, and will be forever. Amen. Alleluia! Alleluia!

SECOND READING

I Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

THE HOLY GOSPEL

John 10:1-10

The Holy Gospel according to St John. **Glory to You, O Lord.**

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to You, O Christ.**

THE SERMON

Dr. James Cavanah

It is one of my favorite verses in all of Holy scripture. It is also part of our First Reading this Fourth Sunday in Easter. Luke wrote, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Luke was writing about the devotion, and faithfulness of the first century Christians. The setting for our First Reading is just after the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had been poured upon the disciples. The early church had been filled with the promise of the Helper, the Comforter, the Spirit of Promise, the Holy Spirit. They had been changed and empowered. They were bold, confident, and determined to preach “the good news” of Jesus Christ. Every member of the church was committed to Jesus Christ, the message of the Gospel. and to each other.

The early church was, in a true sense, a Bible School for believers. Their one focus was on Jesus. Speaking of Bible School, did you hear about Donny? He came home after his very first day in Vacation Bible School. His mother asked “Donny, who is your teacher?” Donny replied, “I don’t remember her name but I think she must have been Jesus’ grandmother. Donny’s mother asked, “Why in the world do you think your teacher is Jesus’ grandmother?” Donny replied, “Well, all she talked about all day long was Jesus. We read about Jesus. We prayed to Jesus. She showed up movies about Jesus. She has to be His grandmother!” Obviously, this Bible School teacher loved Jesus and she shared of love with her students.

The question for you and me today is this: How devoted are we to the faith we profess? Luke clearly provides a snapshot of the early church – “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ...and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42, 45-47).

So, what can we learn from the words of Luke in light of the question: How devoted are we to the faith we profess?

The disciples devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. Luke wrote, They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

It’s no secret that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. Not only is Islam the fastest growing religion in the world, it is the fastest growing religion in the United States! Why? It certainly is not because Islam possess the truth. It is a false religion right out of the mind of Satan. Islam is the fastest growing religion because its followers are devoted to their faith.

One of the largest universities in the world is Al Azar at Cairo. It is a Muslim university with over twenty-one thousand students. One of the requirements for admission is that every applicant must repeat the entire Koran from memory, word for word. Now, if you didn’t already know, the

Koran is about the same length as the New Testament. How would you do if you had to recite the entire New Testament from memory? I could not.

The early church focused on Jesus and their love for Him. Here three characteristics Jesus underlined for us if we are to be His disciples. He said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples” (John 8:31); “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:25); “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

Jesus is telling us today through His Word that we must “abide in His word ... love one another ... and take up our cross and follow Him” if we are to be His disciples. The first century followers of Christ knew the importance and the reality of our Saviour’s words. Luke tells us, “And they (the followers of Jesus; those who believed in His name) devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

How devoted are we to the faith we profess? One day, someone asked Jesus what is the first and the greatest commandment. Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

How devoted are we to reading and memorization of God’s Holy Word? When Paul went to the region of Berean to preach the Gospel, the people listened but they did something else. They did something essential to pure orthodox teaching and equally guards against the spread of heresy and false teaching. Luke wrote, “Now these [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). These men and women used God’s Word to tell truth from error because they studied the Holy Scriptures – and so should we.

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of God’s Word when he wrote, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:14-17).

A few years ago a sports radio station announcer asked if anyone would be willing to give up sports for two years in exchange for two million dollars? If accepted, the challenge would include no games, no radio, no TV, no sports page, no ESPN, no discussions at the water fountain or anywhere else. All sports news would be completely avoided for 2 years. One honest sports fan called in and said, “I wouldn't give up sports for \$25 million. It's the first thing I look for in the paper, go to on the Internet, and watch on TV. Sports surround everything I do. Sports, why it's my life.”

What would we be like, what would the church be like, if this were the attitude of every Christian toward the Word of God. The Psalmist said, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). The disciples devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and so should we.

The disciples devoted themselves to God’s Word and to worship. Luke wrote, “And day by day, attending temple together” (Acts 2:46). You probably heard about the little boy who went to church with his grandparents. His grandmother sat in the choir and it really disturbed her to see husband nod off to sleep every Sunday in the middle of the sermon.

Finally, she decided on a plan. She gave her little grandson fifty cents each Sunday morning to poke his grandpa in the ribs whenever he fell asleep. This plan worked until Easter Sunday morning. The church was packed. Grandmother was sitting in the choir and she noticed grandfather had fallen asleep and was even snoring.

Little Tommy made no effort to wake his grandfather. After the service grandmother was quite upset with both her husband and her grandson. She said, "Tommy what happened? You knew I would pay you fifty cents after the service if you kept grandfather awake." Tommy said, "Yes Ma'am, but grandpa offered me a dollar if I would let him sleep."

Many of us can sympathize. Perhaps too many of us. Sometimes worship is not always exciting but it should be when our hearts and minds are prepared to enter into the presence of the Living God. When Jesus spoke to "the woman at the well" He said, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23).

We were not created to please ourselves; we are created to please God. Nowhere is this more vividly expressed than in our corporate worship. St. Augustine wrote, "God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him."

For too many, "worship" is spelled T-I-M-E. In our busy, hurry up, and overly committed world you and I are challenged with more things to do than we will ever get done. But it is only in worship that God's presence is felt as we are reminded that our sins are forgiven, our hurts are healed, that we are loved, accepted, and our hope is restored. Worship is where we meet with God and each other as the body of Christ. This is why corporate worship is so deeply important and so deeply missed as we continue to "shelter in place".

What would we be like if worship was our primary desire in life? What is all of your life and my life revolved around our worship of God? The disciples devoted themselves to worship. Luke wrote, "And day by day, attending temple together" (Acts 2:46) and so should we.

The disciples devoted themselves to fellowship. Luke wrote, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread..." (Acts 2:42).

I remember a *Peanuts* comic from several years ago. In the comic, Lucy is saying, "It's my life. I'm my own person! It's my life, and I'm the one who has to live it!" That sounds like Lucy, does it not? Then, in the final frame of the cartoon Lucy adds these words, "With a little help."

We all need that little help! We all need a little help from our friends and that is what fellowship in the church is all about. John Donne wrote, "No man is an island unto himself" – we are all part of the continent. In other words, especially as Christians, we are united, connected, and part of each other in the body of Christ.

The early Christians not only worshiped and studied the Holy Scriptures. They enjoyed great fellowship. They broke bread together. They talked together. They laughed together. They sang together. They cried together and mourned as one. Yet, also hoped together as one body in Christ.

The great theologian of early church, Tertullian said "See how these Christians love one another." An anonymous author penned these words, "Christian fellowship is one of the greatest gifts that we have. Even if I were not a Christian, I would want my children to be in Sunday School. I would want my teenager to be in a church youth group. I would want my aging parents to be in a seniors' group at the church. I would want those I love to have the benefit of being among Christian people who would love them and care for them."

What would we be like if our lives revolved around our fellowship with God and one another? The early church devoted themselves to fellowship – and so should we.

Finally, the disciples devoted themselves to prayer. Luke wrote, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... [verse 47b] ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42, 47b)

Notice that Luke wrote they devoted themselves to "the prayers" – that is, they devoted themselves to the prayers of the church, the prayers of the people, prayers for each other and prayers for the world.

This why our corporate prayers in worship are so vitally important to God, to us, and to all for whom we pray. God works through the prayers of His people. Martin Luther said, “I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.” This is the both the power and the reality of prayer!

There is an old saying that goes like this, “In Acts 2, the disciples prayed for ten days, Peter preached for ten minutes and three thousand were saved. Today, the church prays for ten minutes and the pastor preaches for ten days.” (Note: If ya’ll prayed more, perhaps I would preach less!?)

What would we be like, what would Holy Trinity be like, what would our community and our world be like if prayed like the early church? The disciples devoted themselves to prayer.

Our First Reading on this Fourth Sunday of Easter is a powerful challenge for you and me. Like the early church, are living with uncertainty and fear. We are “sheltered in place”. In a sense we are like those early disciples “sheltered in the upper room” in Jerusalem awaiting the promise of Holy Spirit.

Now, is the time to pray and to study God’s Word and to look forward to that time when we can once again join together in worship, prayer, the study of God’s Word, and fellowship as we assemble in God’s presence. Until that day, let us pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we remain devoted to the faith we profess!

Thanks be to God!

APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth,

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit,

And born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen!

THE PRAYERS

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, You raised Jesus Christ from the dead and proclaimed Him Saviour, Lord, and King forever more! Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus Christ, empower us to know Him who gave Himself for us and grant to us the boldness to make Him known to others. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Holy Spirit, bless the Church. Fill us with Your presence and wisdom; give us a love for the church, the Gospel, and the world. Conform us to the image of Christ. May all our thoughts, words, and deeds reflect the hope and power of our new life in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, we pray for Your Holy Catholic (Universal) Church. We pray especially for the LCMC, for our sister churches, pastors and congregations. We pray for our partners in the work of the Gospel: World Mission Prayer League, Mission on the Move, Treutlen House, Family Promise, Habitat for Humanity, God's Mission House, Tartu Theological Academy, St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, and all who faithfully serve You in proclamation of Your One True Gospel. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, we pray for our nation and all of our elected and appointed officials and who serve in our courts. We pray for our nation's military and especially all who are deployed. Holy Father watch over and protect all of our First Responders, and all our medical workers as they labour against the Covid-19 virus and all other disease and sickness. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are out of work and have families to support according to Your riches in glory. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be with all our students and teachers and those who work in our educational institutions. Give to them diligence, wisdom, understanding, and motivation to complete their studies. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray for so many in need: for our members Carol, Elizabeth & Fulton, Loretta, Mary Will, Charles, Margaret, Brenda & Carl, Patricia, Doris, Harper, Preston, Angie, Debbie, and Dawn; for our extended family and friends Becky, Darwin, Pr. Robert, Merry, Elizabeth, Bobby, Raymond, Steve, Christopher, Tracy, Alice, Shirley, Jim, Monteen, Charlene; and Fran for our homebound Betty Jo, Linda, Eva Belle; and for those serving in the military, Dustin and Marcus. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, hear our prayers and receive them for the sake of the crucified and risen one, your Son our Lord, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

GREETING OF PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face shine on us and be gracious to us. The Lord look upon us with favor + and give us peace. **Amen.**

DISMISSAL

Let us go in peace to serve the Risen Lord. Hallelujah!