

TEXT: Acts 2:37-47

THEME: SEEK TIME WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. Strengthen Fellowship through the Gospel
2. Show Fellowship with Love for Each Other

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² 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.

Dear Fellow-Recipients of God's Love Who Seek to Show God's Love to Others:

This is the second Sunday of End Time, when usually we hear about the Last Judgment. On this Sunday we are reminded of the constant and urgent need for true repentance. We are given a picture of this in the first part of our text when the Jews in Jerusalem responded as we all should to the Lord's calls to repentance—with immediate action and real change, worked by the Holy Spirit. The second part of our text gives us an excellent example of living in the end time, which we are doing right now. Those believers saw the urgency of gathering together around Word and sacrament. By their love and generosity, they showed themselves to be the faithful believers Jesus invites to eternal life. As we continue our four-week theme, *Love Takes Time*, we want to focus on that second part of our text and encourage one another to SEEK TIME WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST, the Church, and especially our local congregation, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.

We can illustrate the importance of seeking time with the body of Christ with an example from nature. The huge redwood trees in California are amazing. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high (that's the length of a football field) and more than 2,500 years old. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. But that is not the case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other; interlocked. So, when the storms come and the winds blow, the redwoods still stand. With an interlocking root system they support and sustain each other. They need one another to survive. So do we!

Therefore, God has given us his Church which is the body of Christ on earth. When one is baptized into Christ, one is baptized into the body of Christ. Through Christ we are bound together in a community of faith. Belonging to Christ, we belong to each other. Fellowship with Christ means fellowship with each other. Through Christ, God has made us a family, a community of faith. This is our God-given support system and it is intended to meet some crucial needs in our lives.

Our text reveals to us the proper focus of a community of believers, for a congregation like Trinity. This is important for us because we can sometimes lose our focus. We can go off on all kinds of tangents as we try, with good intentions, to meet and fulfill all the felt and perceived needs of every member, forgetting that all those needs are only truly met and fulfilled in the one thing needful—Jesus Christ, our Savior, and his gospel. The first Christian church got this exactly right. We read that **“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”** The teaching to which they devoted themselves was the message about Jesus proclaimed by his apostles. Jesus, the divine Son of God and our Savior, was crucified and buried, but he rose from the dead. The apostles' teaching included the words, actions, and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The breaking of bread is a reference to the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion that they observed regularly. Teaching, fellowship, praying, and Holy Communion were the focal points of the first Christian community or church. We STRENGTHEN FELLOWSHIP THROUGH THE GOSPEL and we get the gospel in all its forms right here at church.

Our church is essential to our spiritual well-being. In the New Testament there are no “Lone Ranger” Christians. We need each other and God expects us to be there for each other. God has ordained that we play a vital role in each other's faith. For that reason, we are commanded in Hebrews 10:25, not to **“...give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** God has a purpose for putting us together.

Luke informs us that **“All the believers were one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32)**. They were united in their faith in Christ. They made every effort to think and act like Christ. God used this church in Jerusalem to do some powerful things in the lives of countless believers, living in a pagan, godless world. God's plan hasn't changed. He still desires to use his Church to do some powerful things in our lives. A local congregation, like Trinity, is absolutely crucial to our spiritual well-being. Through it, God desires that we find strength for the journey, a never-ending source of guidance, and opportunities for us to minister to and serve one another. When we use God's gospel to do this, the faith and fellowship of all of us are strengthened. But if we lose our focus, if we allow ourselves to get side-tracked and all enamored and excited about the teachings of man, well, then we might see a little improvement in the lives of people for a little while on this earth, but we will have done nothing for and maybe even harmed the spiritual and eternal well-being of others and ourselves. We need to stay focused on Jesus and his gospel.

As we face the inevitable tragedies, trials, and troubles of life on this sin-marred planet, God intends that we be empowered, encouraged, strengthened, and supported through the church at large, like our Wisconsin Synod, and especially through our local congregation,

Trinity. As we face the storms and temptations of life we should receive strength from each other. This is God's plan. In this way, we **SHOW FELLOWSHIP WITH LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.**

In the course of this life, King David knew his share of difficult, painful times that tested his faith and sometimes caused it to waver. In Psalm 61:2 he cried out to God for help, saying, **"...I call to you,...as my heart grows faint."** Overwhelmed by the trials, heartaches, burdens of life, many of which he brought onto himself, David called out to God for help and strength. Then in verse five he rejoiced because God had answered his prayer. **"...O God, you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name."** God had strengthened his faith and empowered him but it was through fellow believers. God also works in our lives through other believers.

During the times when we are overwhelmed by the burdens, heartaches, and trails of life, we, too, need to be encouraged and strengthened by fellow believers. When we wonder if God really does love us and care for us we need God's people around us. God, in his wisdom, has chosen to come to us through his people. Through other Christians we can sense and know God's care and love. When we are cared for and loved by other believers, especially during painful times, we gain a new sense of God's love at work through them for us. That is why we cannot afford to stand alone; to go it on our own. We need each other; we need the church; we need our local congregation, Trinity.

I'm reminded of our first winter in Muskegon, MI, after returning to the United States from Brazil. That winter we received 140 inches of heavy, wet, lake-effect snow. Along the north side of the parsonage was a row of majestic, mature spruce trees. Often the branches were bowed down with the heavy snow—bowed down so low that branches from one tree were often leaning against the branches or trunk of another tree. Because of that support, the branches didn't break. Where trees stood alone on the property, however, the effect of the heavy snow was different. As the snow became heavier and heavier, the branches snapped. They lay on the ground, dark and alone in the cold snow.

When the storms of life hit, we need to be standing close to other Christians. We need each other; we can't stand alone. The closer we stand in our church, the more involved we are with our church, the more we will be able to hold up during the storms of life. Throughout our lives and especially during the tough times, God desires to empower and strengthen us through our church. He expects us to devote our time to supporting each other during the storms of life. That is why we need to spend time being an active member of our church. We need others and they need us.

Remember, the early believers **"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."** Let us do likewise and **SEEK TIME WITH THE BODY OF CHRIST, the church.** Amen.