

An Acts 2 Church (2)

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Date: 06 June 2021

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[0:00] Let me see if it goes. So my question for you as we start is, are we in Acts, Acts, A-C-T-S, are we in Acts chapter 2 church, parish, or not?

It's a big question to answer. Let's kind of move away into that water and see where it takes us. You know that in one month, our new rector and his family will be here.

That's very exciting. So what that says to us as a parish is, let's get ready. Let's take stock of who we are. Let's see where God is leading us as a parish so that we can make a difference in Syracuse and in the world.

We're doing a series this month on the parish, Acts chapter 2 parish. How are we doing that and how are we doing?

And so we're going to look at the epistle that was read today, chapter 2 of the book of Acts, verses 38 through 42. If you've got a pew Bible, check that out.

[1:18] What was that page number, Brian? Do you remember? 1082. So if you've got a pew Bible, turn to page 1082. If you've got a device.

You know, we went to a church and I brought my Bible. It was a non-denominational church. And the pastor got ready to preach and he said, now open your devices to Mark 14.

And he said, except for you, open your Bible to Tom 10. We were a little older than most of the people there. So whatever you have, we're going to be studying that section today.

All right. Verse 37 through 39 is what we're going to look at first. But before that, we need the backstory. What happened that caused verse 37 to take place?

You'll remember that two weeks ago in our church calendar, we celebrated Pentecost Sunday, where we remember that the Holy Spirit with tongues as a fire lighted on each member of those 120 people in the upper room and they were thrust out into the city to preach the gospel.

[2:32] They preached in all tongues. They were so effective in the Holy Spirit that people heard the story. And then Peter was the preacher for all these people.

And he laid out how the Jewish people at that time had let God down by killing his son. Well, he did such a good job of it.

We get to verse 37. It says, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

Have you ever been horrified at something you did or didn't do? The first time I became really aware of poor action on my part, I had a girlfriend when I was much younger, before Mary Ellen, and I dumped her.

Now, the problem wasn't so much that I dumped her. I really did need to dump her. She needed to be free of me. But the thing was how I dumped her. It was absolutely heartless.

[3:49] Several years later, when I began to take stock of who I was, I was simply cut to the heart at how I had treated this person. That's a little bit about how those people felt when Peter had preached the gospel to them.

They were horrified at how they realized for the first time that they had not been trifling with some carpenter up in the hill country of Nazareth.

They had been trifling with God Almighty. That'll get you. And it got them. You know, we all live with a little bit of rebellion and a little bit of anger.

It's in only 100% of all people. It's what we do with the rebellion and anger that makes a difference. But as subtle as that rebellion may be, as eager, not eager, as easy as that anger may be, we have to realize that when that happens to us, we're not trifling with the person beside us or with the institution.

We're trifling with God. We're putting our whole soul and body at risk. As Brian read in the Old Testament lesson in Genesis, you see, we're Eve and we're Adam.

[5:26] It keeps happening. And so we are cut to the heart. And we say, as they said that day, what shall we do?

How do we make it right with God? And so verse 38, Peter just lays it out. I think if he had been a worker in today's world, he would not be a fisherman.

He would be an engineer. He lays it out as an engineer. He says, repent, 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.

Now, we think that's easy, right? It was not easy for the people in that day and age. They were Jews.

And they knew that the only people that got baptized in their community were Gentiles coming into Judaism. This was almost like an insult to them that they would need to be baptized.

[6:32] It was a little bit like coming out, except there was no glory to it. You know, in today's world, if you quote, come out, everyone says, well, what a wonderful thing.

You're so courageous, blah, blah, blah. Well, that's not what happened when they came out from that Jewish faith back then. There was no glory.

There was going to be persecution. Repent. Repent. There we are with that word again.

We hear that just about every Sunday in church. It's probably pretty important. So, all right, so we're going to repent, but what do we do with that repentance?

For those people, it was pretty simple. They needed to turn from persecuting these early believers in Christ. They needed to turn from that.

[7:33] To repent means to turn around. To turn from dark to light. They needed to repent and then be baptized. Now, in their world, it would be being baptized in a dissident's name.

Jesus was a dissident. That's pretty heavy. But they agreed. They agreed to do it.

So, on the other hand, what did they receive for what they gave up? The gift of the Holy Spirit.

Just as those 120 believers had received the Holy Spirit, so they were being gifted to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.

So, Peter goes on in verse 39. He says, For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

[8:38] Promise for your children? What do you mean by that? Several things. For us, we wonder, is that the introduction of infant baptism? You know, in the Jewish faith, one, a male was circumcised at eight days old based on the faith of his family and being introduced as a member of the community.

That's sort of like what's happened in infant baptism, isn't it? It's a promise for you and for your children. No child should be baptized unless there's deep faith on the part of the parents.

With the promise, they're going to raise the child so that at the proper time, this child may proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in a public way. Well, that's what they were getting themselves into.

And it says, a promise for you and for your children, which meant this was not going to be a one-generation religion. This was going on for a while.

In fact, we're part of it today, aren't we? We are those children. It's been promised to you and to your children and we're thankful that we are called.

[9:55] And then the other thing he says, and for those who are far off, do you know what that meant? Gentiles. This promise is for Gentiles as well as Jews.

You know, in those days, the Jewish faith had two classes of people. Jews, everybody else. Everybody else were called Gentiles.

Peter is saying the promise is for the Gentiles as well. Well, a major seed change took place that day. This was not going to be a minor Jewish cult.

This was going to be a movement that would move all the way around the world to Syracuse. By golly, and I'm not talking about Syracuse in Italy or Sicily.

The promise extends to all of us. Wonderful. Okay, so what happened?

[10:57] All right, we move to the second section in case you're keeping track. Verse 40, And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

Crooked generation? Were they living in a corrupt or crooked generation? Well, I'm not talking about present-day Judaism, of course, but I'm talking about Bible Judaism. It was corrupt. Remember the Pharisees and the Sadducees, leaders in the Jewish community hated each other, vying for power, and the scribes or the attorneys were in there working hard not to further the gospel of Christ.

or God or anything else except themselves. It was a corrupt generation. It was a dysfunctional religion at that point.

A dysfunctional religious family. And so Peter calls them out of it. A lot of us had to deal with that like in the last few years.

[12:08] We had to come out of a corrupt mainline denomination. And represented here are people who have come out of corrupt denominations.

communities. It hurts to come out of what's been our home for so many years. It was hard for me. Many of my friends thought he's gone wacky. He's gone to be some Nigerian. Because I went into the church of Nigeria. it was not easy to quote come out of a corrupt denomination.

Many of us have had to go through that. And it's like what they went through back then. Today I it's hard for me to say it but it's true there are many dead parishes in the nation today.

We live in a kind of a dead generation of Christian churches. Some of these are so dysfunctional that if it were proven that God is dead those parishes would go merrily along.

[13:27] Because really not about God it's about friends. That doesn't work. It's a difficult thing. It's called superficial religion.

And we're called to leave it. We're called to strike out into the frontier of Christ living. And so it says verse 41 so those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

Now I'm not a mathematician but that's a lot of people to be baptized. Now if the 12 apostles were the only ones who could do the baptisms they would have had to each baptize 250 people that day. That's kind of a lot of people to baptize. I used to have one of my charges was the false church Anglican down in Virginia in false church Virginia and it was a fairly large church.

The first time I went to do confirmation there. I went for a potluck Saturday night to get to know the confirmands and there were like 80 confirmands.

[14:47] I didn't know that was going to happen. I'm thinking typical five to eight people. 80 confirmands and their parents and friends. And my mind thought how do I confirm 80 people and not make it last all day long?

And I asked a friend, another bishop, how do you do these large groups? He said, well, I just go along the line just hitting them one by one by one. And I thought, that can't be right.

That's just not right. So it took a little longer to confirm 80 people, try to give each person dignity, assure them of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but it got done.

And I did notice people had lunch bags, they were eating their lunch. It did take a while. So the next year when I went back, guess how many people got confirmed?

80. They do about 80 every year. I don't know how they do that. A lot of people live in Fairfax, Virginia. But the deal is they had to baptize a lot of people.

[16:00] Now suppose those 12 said, well, we don't have ordained people yet, so all 120 of us in the original cadre, we can baptize them. Now if you do the math for that, each one of the 120, if they were up to it, had to baptize 25 people.

Now that's more manageable. But I'm telling you, you've got a lot of folks being baptized. Okay, so here's what church leaders have to decide.

okay, we got them baptized, Lord. Now, what do we do with them? Do we say, have a nice day?

They had to group them, organize them. Those that were there for the holy day and were going back to wherever, they had to get them prepared to start churches.

Those who were staying in Jerusalem, they had to get them organized. It was the birth of the parish church. And we live with that today.

[17:10] Verse 42, and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. That's a parish. That's what we're called to be.

The apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. That's what's supposed to happen on Sunday morning. That's what we're called to. Now, with these folks, as they started and got grouped up, they didn't have a New Testament, did they?

A written document called the New Testament. They had what we call the Old Testament, which was their Bible, and they had these twelve apostles hanging around. And so the apostles teaching consisted of apostles preaching on what Jesus had told them.

Preaching on the fact that Jesus is still alive. He may have been crucified, but he's alive and well. So they had to listen very carefully to what their life was called to be as Christians.

The apostles teaching. Are we doing that today? Yeah. In our style of worship, the whole worship is scripture arranged for devotional purposes.

[18:26] verses. We read more scripture than you can possibly take in. Do you get situations where sometime in the middle of the scripture you realize you've just been cleaning the house in your mind?

Or I gotta wash the car this week? Our minds sometimes drift off, but the fact is we're called to be a church living on the teaching of the apostles.

We do have a written testament today, a new testament. We do respect it. So that's number one, yes, today's test, yes, we live with the apostolic teaching and doctrine and in behavior.

Second, it said, and the fellowship. Now back then, they needed each other because they were living as Christians in an illegal society.

they were the illegals. And so, well, good morning. There's number one with a beautiful yellow bow tie.

[19:33] I think there are more coming. Okay. The fellowship. It was, you know, you remember the three musketeers? What was their theme? One for all and all for one.

That's what they were called to do. Good morning. Welcome. Yeah. Okay. Okay. So they'll be coming in for a while.

Let's continue on. All right. They didn't have buildings like this. They met in people's homes. They had to care for one another.

The fellowship. All right. For today, our fellowship could be as superficial as a cup of coffee after church.

A lot of denominations, what do they call their parish hall? The fellowship hall. And you drink a cup of coffee. And that's about it. Somebody says, how are you doing?

[20:34] Doesn't matter how you're doing. You say, I'm doing fine. I've got cancer, but I'm doing fine. Well, for us, fellowship is a Greek word called koinonia.

That is deep caring for one another. That's what fellowship is. It's a deep caring. When one hurts, everybody hurts.

When one is full of joy, we're all filled with joy. We're still one for all and all for one. So we've got two so far.

We've got the teaching of the apostles. And we've got the fellowship. So the third one is the breaking of the bread.

Hey, we do that. Back then, they did that. The earliest records we have of these early Christian communities have to do with Holy Communion.

[21:38] Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. And they did it faithfully. Now, we had a little hiccup during the Protestant Reformation, where a lot of folks said, we're not doing that anymore because people see it like it's magic or something.

We're going to just concentrate on the Bible. Well, okay, I see a great movement back to Holy Communion on a regular basis, following what the Lord told us to do.

Take this in remembrance of me. we're trying to do that at the Holy Trinity, to break the bread seriously. So when we receive communion, it's the closest we get to Jesus.

I don't care about all the different views, what happens doctrinally. It's the closest we get to Jesus. When you receive that bread, see this as a union with God.

Communion. Okay, and then lastly, I'm beating this with a stick till it's dead, I'm sorry. We get to the last one, and that is the prayers. Back in those days, they needed to pray for each other because once they became believers in Jesus, they were very likely going to lose their job, lose their families, be cast out of the society.

[22:57] Some years ago, about 30 years ago, Mary Ellen and I were living in Turkey, and I was ministering to NATO troops. One day, I was sitting in my office, and a nice young woman, Turkish woman, came in, and as the conversation continued, I realized she had become a believer in Jesus.

She was wanting to be baptized, and I said to her gently, now, if you're baptized, how will that affect your family? She said, I know, I already know they're going to throw me out, they're going to disown me, but I love Jesus.

And so, I got our sergeant to come in to the little blessed sacrament room, and we had a baptism. I thought, what have I done to this lady? Well, the Lord knew what he was doing.

She became a leader in the Christian church, the underground church in Turkey. what a wonderful gift that was. But she had to take the risk, didn't she?

We're called to take the risk in prayer for one another. So we have two kinds of prayer. We have prayers of the people on Sunday morning, and we have individual prayers through the week.

[24:16] For some of you who are new, you know that Jim and Marty Fuller put out a little email when there are prayer needs. And if you'd like to get on that list, I'd like to let Jim or Marty know.

They'll add you to it. So we have up to the moment prayer for people who are in need. That's it. Okay. We're at the end.

Perhaps, perhaps we are in Acts 2 parish. On an examining this, we are in Acts 2 parish.

Three questions. Are you saved? Have you received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Second question, are you sanctified? Have you invited the Holy Spirit to manufacture in your life a Christ-like appearance?

And number three, are you committed to a parish community? Are you following Jesus along beside others? That's an Acts 2 parish. Praise God, we're doing it.

[25:19] You know, there's a Marine barracks where as the Marine walks out, there's a big mirror.

And on the mirror it says, you are a Marine. Do you look like one? We are followers of Christ.

Do we look like Him? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.