

SERMON TEXT FOR EASTER 4A

PREACHE MAY 7, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Acts 2.42-47, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 2.19-25, John 10.1-10

In a few weeks we will celebrate the Festival of Pentecost - that great day in the Church when the Spirit took hold and those present - and those who have followed - were never the same.

In many respects, that Pentecost day sounds much like a modern-day **revival** meeting. These aren't popular among **Lutherans**, but you probably know what I'm talking about. The first ever "Gospel revival," is described in Acts like this: there is a **wind** that blows through, there is imagery of **fire**, the **Spirit** is tangible and touchable. People are **bewildered** and amazed and **perplexed**, and because of the revelry the crowds think that it's a huge, open-air **drinking party**. Then **Peter** stands up and gives the kind of sermon that most of us as preachers can only **dream** of giving - so successful that 3,000 people join the young Christian community.

After that day, things **calm down** quite a bit, until we come to today's first lesson: *"The baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."*

Did you hear that last sentence? These new Christians were literally **giving away everything that they had** so that no one would be hungry or homeless! And they were doing it all in **awe** and with **gladness** and **joy**. The result was that the community just kept **growing** every single day.

This story of the beginning of the Church is just **glorious**. This is the Church **alive**. This is the Church **on the move**. This is the Church as the **bride of Christ**, as God intended.

But let's be really **honest** for a moment. **This is not how I have experienced the Church**. And when I look out at **you**, or think about **other** brothers and sisters, I am reminded of those who have been **cut out** or **left behind** or **excluded** from or **betrayed by** the church. The church as described in Acts is not how **they** – or many of **us** – have experienced the church.

Instead, we see a church that, in the name of Christ, committed systematic **genocide** against peoples. We find a church that has participated in **power struggles with other nations**, and used its power for **oppression** and **injustice** in the name of God. We see a church that has **persecuted those of other religions** in the **name** of Christ because they did not bear or **confess** his name.

And for many of us, it's more **personal** than that. We've witnessed people who were told that they simply didn't have the **gifts necessary** for ordained ministry or to serve on Church Council. We've seen congregations fight over

what the Bible **really says**, and when they can't agree, one group simply walks out the door and either starts a new church or walks away from the church altogether.

We have witnessed churches full of **gossip** and **backbiting**, churches and individuals **claiming** to speak for the church that have **told** us they **loved** us, and then **silenced our voices** because of our **gender** or our **age** or our **race** or our **sexual orientation**. My friends, if we are the bride of Christ, we are not wearing white. //

Isn't the Church supposed to be the **answer** to our woundedness? Instead, many of us sit here and, if truly honest, we must admit that the Church is the **reason** we are wounded. And I think that the word "wounded" is apt here.

A wound is ordinarily a **physical** problem: a cut, a bruise, a breakage. Paul says that the Church is *a* **body** - the Body of Christ. We, the individual **members** of the church, are the eyes and ears and hands of Christ on earth. Our diversity of roles and personalities and gifts and problems **work together**, to make Christ known the world. We are **one body, many parts**.

We are **diverse**, but we are **called** to be united. We are called to enter into intimate, interdependent relationships with people who are **ridiculously different** from us - a hand and a liver, a kneecap and the lungs, skin and bones. And this also means that **when the Church fails to live *into* that unity**, when she **excludes** or **eliminates** or **hurts** individual people, **the whole body is**

wounded - just like breaking an arm or having open heart surgery or having your skin burned. **One part** does not suffer without the **whole body** suffering.

And the bad news is that we have **failed** at **living into that unity**, and will **continue** to fail - every single one of us. Someone will enter our church, and they will be messy or just "different" in a way that we cannot cope with; or, maybe **beautiful** in a way that our ugly and our messy and our different can't handle. **Every single one of us will come face to face with the person that we will refuse to love.** We will be **excluded** from communities, yes, and we will also be **part** of communities that **exclude**. //

But the news does not end with the **bad** news, friends. It never ends with **Good Friday. The Good News is that God is still working! The Church is God's Beloved**, and God is not done **working** with her - either in the **structures** and **institutions** or in the **individual people** that together make up this Body of Christ.

The **Church** is still moving and reforming, reshaping and repenting. The **Spirit** is still moving. **Jesus is not done with us** - even when we feel like the **Church** is done with us or feel like **we are done with the Church**. He is at work in the Church, transforming it today and moving us towards a **new heaven** and a **new earth**, where we will be for the **first** time a truly **beloved community** as the Bride of Christ. Because *"he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* AMEN