

## **First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

*Today's reading is the conclusion of Peter's sermon preached following the giving of the Holy Spirit to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. The center of his preaching is the bold declaration that God has made the crucified Jesus both Lord and Christ. (Sundays and Seasons, Augsburg)*

<sup>14a</sup>Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed [the crowd], <sup>36</sup>“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” <sup>38</sup>Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” <sup>40</sup>And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup>So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

## **Wouldn't It Be Nice?**

The Beach Boys sang, “Wouldn't it be nice to live together in the kind of world where we belong?” Those words came to mind after reading The Acts of the Apostles text above. For those of you who remember the first two lines of the song, might think I have really gone over the edge to make that association. The first two lines are, “Wouldn't it be nice if we were older, then we wouldn't have to wait so long?” I had forgotten that, so Google refreshed my memory and made me feel much, much older. For me now, it wouldn't be nice if I were older. 69 is old enough. But, I not ready to die just yet. And, yes, that reminds you of a Kenny Chesney song with lyrics, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, Have a mansion high above the clouds. Everybody want to go to heaven. But nobody want to go now.”

As I read the text, I thought a thought I often think when this reading is read, “Wouldn't it be nice to preach like Peter, someplace in public, and then witness the baptism of 3,000 people?” Another thought followed, “Wouldn't it be nice to live together as a congregation in and of the church,” you know, “in the kind of world where we belong.” The COVID life is not the world in which we belong, is it? It is the new world in which we find ourselves, not unlike immigrants who came for economic reasons and never stopped longing for “home,” the world they knew.

So, wouldn't it be nice to live in the world where we belong and see All Saints Lutheran Church grow by 3,000 in one day. This would be more than we could handle, actually. Growth of 25 per year for ten years, make it 50 over five years, would set our hearts on fire! And if that does happen, I will say, “See! All I needed to do was get out of the Spirit's way!”

But, here we are in a COVID world in which the Spirit is not roaring through, forgiving sins and inspiring preachers. We live in a different world altogether. The optimist may say, "Perhaps the Spirit is blowing through with the virus, to bring us all to our knees "so that our sins may be forgiven" (3:38).

I do wait and do watch now, eager to witness what God shall do during this exodus from what we knew to what we are coming to know. The wait is hard, though a call from Phillip or Shirley or Ingrid, Connie, Sonya, or others is all it takes for my blessings seem all the greater. And, to some extent, make me wonder about all of the blessings I have.

Remember this one? "Tell me Lord, what have I ever done, to deserve only one of the blessings I've known?" "Why Me Lord," was popularized by Johnny Cash.

We know The Acts of the Apostles is composed by the author of The Gospel According to Luke. At the close of Luke, Jesus tells the disciples to stay in the city "until you have been clothed with power on high." Jesus leads them out as far as Bethany where he ascends. They return to the city and, in the Temple, they continuously bless God. Then comes Pentecost.

In this text from Acts, St. Luke wrestles with the tension of spirit and body as St. John also did. In Luke, Jesus rises and appears to the women disciples. Upon telling the disciples, Peter runs to the tomb. Later in the day, Jesus walks with a couple of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, where he is revealed and vanishes in the breaking of bread (The Gospel reading for the Sunday). They return to Jerusalem to tell the disciples about their experience. At the discussion follows, Jesus suddenly appears. "While in their joy" (24:31), Jesus asks them for some fish to eat! A spirit wouldn't need to eat...but the body gets hungry. Some have suggested that the early communion included fish. Wine was poured. Bread was broken and eaten with fish. More wine was poured as thanksgivings rose. The Ascension does not happen 40 days later as Liturgical Tradition places it, but rather much sooner, like the morning after the resurrection. The time stamp is not real clear to me. Matthew has no such story at all, and neither does John though his Jesus speaks of it a couple of times. Mark concludes, "...and they were terrified and ran from the tomb and said nothing to any one!"

Well, this has seemed to get me no where in spite of my musical memory. One last thought, however. "And he (Peter) testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

This notion of a corrupt generation provides another reason to sing, "Wouldn't it be nice to live together, in the kind of world where we belong."

Christians have made many attempts to cluster together apart from corrupt generations over time. Many have set themselves a part with some success, while others fell into their own corruption and decline. But today, ours is not the wish of love-struct teenagers, but mature adults suffering with the world as it suffers in its own corruption. We strive to be the salt of the

earth and the light on the hill, of which Jesus spoke; all while trusting the Spirit of Jesus and the Father will provide us sufficient faith, hope, and love as time and life requires.

No, we do not end our days with bread and fish and wine celebrating the baptisms of 3,000, but we do live together in God's Household of Hope.

Peace in the morning when you rise.

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