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Sermon Text: Acts 2:42-47
Church: Does it Matter?
Preached at Trinity CRC October 1, 2017

Good morning church.

I have been assigned to preach this sermon from the book of Acts 2:42-47.

In some Bibles you will read a subtitle above it that says, "The Fellowship of Believers."

So this is what we're looking at this morning: the church.

This passage can be a little overwhelming to us.

As we read of the early church and look at our current situation we see the disconnect.

If we hold our present-day church up next to this portrayal of the church it's a little defeating.

I could really drop the hammer this morning and tell us how we need to be more like this...

To meet together more...

To sell our possessions and give to those in need...

To be better at being the church.

But this is not what our passage is getting at.

This morning we're going to be talking about God's work of establishing the church.

How the Lord creates and sustains His church by His power.

We're going to read more of the chapter so we get a feel for what's going on.

Turn with me to Acts 2.

We'll be reading vv. 29-47.

People of God, hear the Word of the Lord from Acts 2:29-47.

(READING OF ACTS 2:29-47)

"Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

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

As we did with the book of Revelation last week,

It is important to ask ourselves what is going on behind the scenes of our passage today.

Why do we think Luke wrote what he did in Acts?

Luke is writing to Christians in the mid to late 1st century.

And he is writing with a purpose.

I don't know if you know it or not, but the Gospel of Luke and Acts go together.

Acts is the sequel to Luke...

Or the continuation of Luke's Gospel.

At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, he says very clearly that he writes:

"So that you may have certainty." (Luke 1:4)

"So that you may know that the things you've heard and things you've been taught are true."

Luke is writing to assure Christians of the things they've been taught.

Now why would they need assurance?

There was a question of legitimacy hanging over the head of the early church.

Legitimacy:

Was Christianity really the way to go?

Were Christians really the people of God?

Christianity did not just appear one day out of nowhere...

It didn't just come wandering in one fateful day.

Christianity was birthed out of Judaism.

David was a Jew.

Mary and Joseph were Jews.

Jesus was a Jew...

And so were his followers.

For centuries these people and their ancestors followed the Laws of God given to Moses.

They celebrated festivals and they kept themselves ritually clean...

They see themselves as children of Abraham...

People of the covenant.

And they are waiting for God to send them the Messiah.

Then Jesus comes along and stirs things up.

Some say that he's the long anticipated Messiah;

The one who comes from the line of David.

He still quotes the same Hebrew Scriptures...

He still goes to the Temple...

He still follows most of the customs of Judaism...

But you can tell that he's different.

And people start following him.

A new sect of Judaism is born and now there's trouble.

A group splits off from the old branch...

And they claim to be the new legitimate successors of the covenant.

These followers of Christ claim to be the continuation of God's people!

The continuation of Judaism!

We can understand *now* why this group needs assurance.

Here they are...

The outcasts from traditional Judaism...

Claiming that Christ is the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

And that to be God's people it now has to come through Christ.

The implication is that Jews outside of Christ are cut off from the covenant.

Can this be accurate?!

Does this new group really matter that much?

Are they legitimate?

Are they really who they claim to be?

God's people?

Joining with God to carry out his plan?

Think of how heretical and shocking this must have been to the Jews...

To those who had been practicing this religion faithfully for centuries.

The legitimacy of the early church was challenged.

Does this group matter?

It's easy to see the parallel today.

Last week Pastor Rich and I went to a conference at King's University.

Around the registration table they had 2 wood doors set up.

On one of the doors was the question:

"Does the church matter?"

People were invited to respond with their thoughts by writing on the door.

Here is a sampling of what was written (slides on screen):

This person responded with a question of their own: "Does the church exist?"

"I think community is important, but the social pressures, politics, and constructs of the church is overbearing. Community is better than the organization of going to church."

“It matters if it matters to you. So, it depends.”

“Nope! Jesus did not need a temple. Love does not equal church.”

“Saying that the institution doesn’t matter doesn’t mean that God or community doesn’t matter.”

“Community is important. Humans are pack animals.”

Again this is just a sampling of what people think of the church today.

Maybe some of us share these same thoughts.

Does the church even matter?

The institution itself and the people of the church.

Why do we trouble our bodies every Sunday morning to get here?

Why do we give up our time?

Why do we mingle with people who are different from us just because they show up here?

Does it even matter what we’re doing here?

It seems like the world has already worked past this question...

It’s no longer on their agenda.

They’ve answered in the negative:

“No, church does not matter.”

“There might be a god out there; but the church and Christianity doesn’t lay claim to this god.”

For people in the church the question is still there to wrestle with.

We’ve been doing church for decades...

Coming to this place “religiously” (pun intended).

But why?

Is it just out of habit?

We grew up in the church—

The Christian Reformed Church...

The Catholic Church...

The Methodist Church...

Or any other Christian church...

We grew up in church, and this is what we do.

We come because we've always come.

This is what our parents had us do...

These are the people we went to school with...

Church is what we do!

But do we ever stop to think about it?

Does it matter what we do here?

Some people have thought about it and said "No."

"The church doesn't matter, so there is no need to show up here."

We lament this.

Others of us are on the bubble.

We think, "the people matter...family matters...community matters..."

"But other than that, I just don't think the church matters."

We're close to making a decision on this matter like most of world already has...

A decision that will see us leaving the church...

Because it just doesn't matter that much.

Or like some of the answers on the door we say:

The church matters because the people matter.

This is my community!

I love these people.

And I do not disagree.

The people of the church do matter...

But this is not the foundational reason that the church matters.

The point that we need to recover this morning is that...

God established the church, therefore it matters.

God stamps the church and says “mine.”

“These are *my* people, whom I’ve gathered for *myself* through Christ.”

“I choose them and I anoint them!”

Luke answers the looming question of legitimacy...

He encourages this new group coming from Judaism...

With strong words of affirmation.

First, the Holy Spirit is poured out on this group at Pentecost.

They speak and understand in the language of the Spirit.

Then filled with the Spirit Peter preaches to the crowd;

He tells them how Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ...

He does this by quoting the Psalms.

And to confirm the words of Peter’s message the Holy Spirit convicts the people and they repent...

Three thousand are added to their number that day.

Then in v. 43 “everyone is filled with ‘awe’...”

Luke uses this word “awe”—

Or respect, reverence, fear—

When talking about peoples’ response to something God has done.

The people sense that God is moving in and through this new group.

Continuing in v. 43 we read that:

“Many wonders and miraculous signs are done by the apostles...”

It is God performing the wonders and signs *through* the apostles!

He is validating them as his people.

And in our final verse the Lord continues to add numbers to the new group.

Luke is pouring affirmation after affirmation over this new group...

The followers of Jesus Christ...

The Church...

It is indeed legitimate.

It's affirmed through Old Testament fulfillment...

Affirmed through signs and wonders...

Favor from the people...

The coming of the Spirit...

And the addition of people to the church!

God has continued his covenant through Christ Jesus...

And he has chosen this new group to carry the message.

God is the one who established this new group.

God says that the church matters.

And *we* are the continuation of this church.

You and I.

Nurses, engineers, firefighters, day home workers, EA's, pastors, chaplains, those living in retirement, farmers, electricians, carpenters, builders, real-estate agents, advisors, lab workers, graphic designers, business people, those raising our youth, mechanics, gardeners, construction supervisors and students.

God has formed us into his people.

God has established his church here.

The world may doubt our legitimacy as God's people...

(Maybe rightfully so after some of the mishaps of the church)

We may follow suit and doubt our legitimacy as God's people...

Doubt that God has indeed formed us into his people in Christ.

"How can these be God's people...?"

"I see how these people act outside of the church walls!"

OR

"How can *I* be part of God's people?"

"I know the things I say, think, and do!"

But church, this is not our decision.

This is *his* decision.

God has made the choice to make us his people.

Through the blood of Christ he has purchased us as his own.

He gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community of people.

And as his people he gathers us here every week...

Because he knows that we need it...

He knows that we are sinful, frail and forgetful.

So he invites us here to encounter him!

To hear teaching from his Word...

To receive nourishment at the Table...

To be reassured of our union with Christ in baptism,

To be reminded of our union with each other through baptism

And to offer him our prayers and praises in response.

As we gather together as a church every Lord's Day, we experience a taste of the fellowship named in our passage.

This gathering is one that's only possible because of the work of the Spirit.

It is evidence of God's work when we meet together and share a meal...

It is evidence of God's work when we help meet the needs of those around us...

It is evidence of God's work when we meet for prayer.

By the gift of God and the work of the Spirit we live as God's people.

One of the reasons I accepted a call to serve in this church was a sense of the Spirit at work.

God is moving in this place...

Equipping and empowering Trinity for service.

And the church does not end here!

We don't cease being the church once we exit through those doors.

We go back into our work and our lives still claiming the legitimate title of "church."

We are God's people in our places of work...

We are God's people in our homes.

And this means that God's Spirit *still* empowers us.

The Lord is *still* carrying out his purpose through us during the week.

He is *still* calling people to faith in Christ through our lives...

Individually and collectively.

And so we expect and anticipate witnessing God's work wherever we are.

People of God...

Our passage today paints a picture for us of the power of the Spirit at work in the church.

As we continue to surrender and submit ourselves to our gracious God...

And accept his invitation to participate with him...

As we continue to gather in the power of the Spirit...

We live into our identity as his people...

As his church.

I'd like to close us with a story today that is evidence of God's power through his church...

How God continues to establish and legitimize his church.

Even in the most unexpected people.

Nabeel Qureshi was born in the US into a devout Muslim family.

(<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2017/09/16/nabeel-qureshi-1983-2017/>)

His whole family life revolved around Islam.

By age 5 Nabeel had read the entire Qur'an in Arabic...

And he had memorized many of its chapters.

His parents trained him in apologetics so that he would know the Islam faith and know how to defend it.

Nabeel was a smart young man.

He ended up with like 3 or 4 master's degrees, a medical degree, and a PhD from Oxford.

So this guy was no pushover when it came to arguing for his faith.

One day in college (before all of his degrees) Nabeel saw a young man reading the Bible...

He thought this odd so he went up to him...

He wanted to challenge Christianity.

The two of them ended up becoming best friends...

Best friends who had no problem challenging each other's beliefs.

After a few years of this friendship Nabeel began questioning his faith.

I began mourning the impact of the decision I knew I had to make. On the first day of my second year of medical school, it became too much to bear. Yearning for comfort...I placed the Qur'an and the Bible in front of me. I turned to the Qur'an, but there was no comfort there. For the first time, the book seemed utterly irrelevant to my suffering. Irrelevant to my life. It felt like a dead book.

With nowhere left to go, I opened up the New Testament and started reading. Very quickly, I came to the passage that said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Electric, the words leapt off the page and jump-started my heart. I could not put the Bible down. I began reading fervently, reaching [Matthew 10:37](#), which taught me that I must love God more than my mother and father.

"But Jesus," I said, "accepting you would be like dying. I will have to give up everything."

The next verses spoke to me, saying, "He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for my sake will find it" (NASB). Jesus was being very blunt: For Muslims, following the gospel is more than a call to prayer. It is a call to die.

I knelt at the foot of my bed and gave up my life.

This all birthed out of a friendship with one of God's people.

Yes, God is still establishing and legitimizing his church.

The Spirit is still moving in and through God's people.

The church does matter because God established it and God sustains it.

People of God I invite you to seek out where the Spirit is moving throughout your day...

You don't have to be a Christian apologist by trade in order to be used by God...

This young man started with a friendship.

As God's people we all have stories of how his love wooed us...

Of how his sacrifice grabbed us...

And his faithfulness comforted us.

We all have our stories how the Spirit worked powerfully in us.

God is still using his church...

Still empowering his witnesses to reach a lost and broken world.

I ask that the Spirit would open our eyes during the day to where God's power is already active in and through his people.

Amen.