

**Acts 4:32-35 (Second Sunday of Easter—Series B)**  
**“Faith Toward God and Love Toward One Another”**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**  
**April 11, 2021**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the First Reading from Acts 4:

<sup>32</sup>Now the multitude of believers were one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but they held everything in common. <sup>33</sup>And the apostles, with great power, were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon all of them.

<sup>34</sup>For there was no needy among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses were selling them and were bringing the proceeds from the sales, <sup>35</sup>and they were placing them at the apostles' feet, and they were distributed to each just as anyone had need.

During the Season of Easter we have a reading from the Book of Acts each week instead of a reading from the Old Testament. Acts is volume 2 of Luke's God-inspired texts, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Our readings from Acts will serve as the sermon texts for these Sundays of Easter as we continue to announce “Christ is Risen, Alleluia! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!”

Acts 4 takes place sometime after Jesus' Ascension into heaven and the Day of Pentecost, which was fifty days after His resurrection. The apostles continued to give witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They continued to talk about it, to preach about it, and to announce that the Lord Jesus had died for the sins of the world and was raised to life again on the third day. That is the central message of Christianity. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is alive, the living Lord and Savior.

Of course, to be raised from the dead means that He once was dead. Jesus was crucified. He died and was buried. At the beginning of Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested and taken before the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They had healed a lame man in

the name of Jesus. They were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. When questioned, "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'" (Acts 4:8–12 ESV).

This is the message of Easter. Christ has died for the sins of the world. Christ is risen from the dead. He gives forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe in His name. There is salvation from sin and death only in Jesus—the Crucified and Risen One. And this is the faith that saves us from sin, death, and hell. By God's great grace, you and I receive the blessings of Jesus' cross and empty tomb in the Means of Grace.

In Holy Baptism, God the Holy Spirit created saving faith in your hearts that trusts in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, just as the words and promises of God declare. In Absolution, God announces to you through the pastor, speaking in the stead and by the command of Christ, that your sins stand forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's Supper, it is the Crucified and Risen Jesus who comes to you in and under the bread and wine with His true Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all your sins, for eternal life, salvation, and the strengthening of your Baptismal faith.

It is this most holy faith in Jesus that unites us together in His mystical Body called the Church, the Communion of Saints, all the believers in Jesus in heaven and on earth. Luke writes, "Now the multitude of believers were one heart and soul." What a wonderful picture of the Church! This great outward body of believers had one living personality. Its whole active life was one in thought, feeling, and will. "They all wanted one thing: to be saved eternally; they all thought one thing: only to be faithful to the Lord Jesus; they all experienced one thing: the comfort of the Holy Spirit."

What held these first Christians together, what holds us Christians together, is our one faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Faith is the bond of unity in the Lord's Church that centers us on the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation He alone won for us. Faith is thicker than blood! Luther: "In this communion of saints we are all brothers and sisters so closely united that a closer relationship cannot be conceived. For here we have one Baptism, one Christ, one Sacrament, one food, one Gospel, one faith, one Spirit, one spiritual body; and each is a member of the other. No other brotherhood is so deeply rooted and so closely knit."<sup>1</sup>

The Risen and Glorified Savior lives and rules as the Head of His Church to keep it and to bless it. He makes sure that His Word is proclaimed in Law and Gospel. And from the Word, from the preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins,

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<sup>1</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 275.

springs the faith and the love of the Church. Faith brings unity to the Church and faith brings works of love within the Church.

St. Luke records by the power of the Holy Spirit, "No one said that any of his possessions was his own, but they held everything in common. . . . For there was no needy among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses were selling them and were bringing the proceeds from the sales, and they were placing them at the apostles' feet, and they were distributed to each just as anyone had need." Faith produces many visible results—the fruits of faith. Those who believe show their faith by what they do. As Jesus said in the Upper Room before His betrayal and arrest, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. . . . By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:5–12 ESV).

And that is what the early Christians were doing in Acts 4. Their living, active faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus was producing the good fruit of love. They were taking care of each other, providing for the needs of one another, even as they gathered together to hear the preaching of the Word and to receive the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). We know that selfishness and our own self-centeredness often shows itself, sometimes in shameful ways, so that true Christian love and generosity do not flourish. But the Holy Spirit continues the

good work begun in us in our Baptism, empowering us to repent of our self-centeredness and enabling us to overcome selfishness through the forgiveness and new life that flows to us from Christ. You and I are indeed new creations who can love one another in the Body of Christ, the Church. We are filled with the Gospel power of the Spirit so that we don't think of ourselves first, but each other, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (Rom 12:3). We have come to know the love that God has for us in the person and work of His Son, Jesus, our Risen Savior. We believe that God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in us through His Holy Spirit. It is this love that is perfected within us as we love one another in the family of the Church (1 John 4:16-17).

Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Through faith in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we love God and we love our neighbor—anyone to whom we can show the love and mercy of Christ. And there is no closer neighbor than your sister or brother in Christ in the family of the Christian Church. Our love for others begins with our love for each other in this congregation, in the Christian Church at-large, and then extends to all other people, even our enemies. In the Post-Communion Collect we pray that the Lord's Supper—the Body and Blood of Jesus—would strengthen us “in faith” toward God and “in fervent love toward one another.” That “one another” is the Church, believers in Jesus Christ, in this congregation and in the Holy Christian Church throughout the world. “Faith” in the God who gave us His Son to be crucified for our sins and be raised again for our justification empowers our “love” toward each other in the family of Christ, the Church. And that love is so abundant that it overflows from the Church to everyone.

By the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, be strengthened in your Baptismal faith through the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for you! Receive the forgiveness of sins and the new life of faith. And in that faith, show love, help, care, and mercy to your brothers and sisters in Christ here and throughout the world. United in one heart and soul in Christ, be generous with yourselves, your prayers, your money, and your possessions to support one another in love just as anyone has need. Amen.