

## “You won’t stop me!” Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

How are you, Brothers and Sisters? How are we, how is our congregation, how is our little Christian community going? Often, when such questions are asked, we tend to look back to those “golden years” of the Church. O, back then...

Remember, we had such a huge Sunday School? Remember, we had these youth organizations? Remember, we used to have so many members? Remember that time, when almost everyone was a Christian? Remember that revival? And so on...

Our today’s reading from Acts actually gives us an opportunity to take a look at what the very beginning of the Christian church looked like. How was it back then? What was going on? What did they do? Can we learn something from them?

Isn’t it interesting how our God works? From time to time I have heard fellow Christians exclaim with longings: “Oh, if our pastors could preach like Jesus did, then, then...”. Jesus was preaching, teaching, serving, encouraging the community of His followers for good three years. And as a result, He had gathered some 500+ followers, who could be counted as His disciples, according to Paul.

But then, came the day of Pentecost; Peter preached, the apostles preached, the simple folk, the simple message. And, just like that... around three thousand souls repented, were baptised and joined to the body of Christ, the Church.

3000... If we read in Acts chapter 4, there were already 5000 of those who had heard the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection and believed. We can only say “wow”, that’s quite amazing! That’s quite something!

But what did this first Christian community look like? What can we learn from them? For they were led by the apostles themselves, and they consisted of many who were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection.

Let’s see what the Holy Spirit through Luke has recorded for our benefit. So, what did they do? As the first thing Luke mentions that they “**devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**”

But, of course, we could say, this is what the Lord Jesus Christ commanded to His disciples, this is how He builds His Church. By His words that are Spirit and life. What was that apostles’ teaching? Remember, the apostles were those who were with Jesus since His baptism to the day He ascended back to His Father. Jesus had

instructed and sent them to be His witness to all the nations. To tell everyone what they had seen and heard, to tell what Jesus had taught and spoken, to proclaim the Good News that God has reconciled us with Himself. The bond is mended.

That if you turn back to God, whoever you are, turning away from trusting in created things to give what only God can give you, He welcomes us, forgives our rebellion, our disobedience, our foolishness and all the mess that our sins have created.

And surely, the apostles had to work overtime teaching. For they had just had three thousand souls joining them. Yes, most likely they already knew well the Scriptures of the OT, but they had to be taught about the fulfilment of all God's promises through Jesus Christ, and what it meant for them, the message of the NT.

Just imagine how incredibly vibrant that community would be? A few thousand who had just heard that Gospel of grace, who were filled with joy and curiosity, thirsting to hear more and more, to find out everything that could be known about this God, who had come as one of us and dwelt among us. And they had the privilege to listen to those who have walked with Jesus, seen Him, listen to Him, touched him.

What an excitement! The Word of God brought them together, and they rejoiced in the Christian fellowship, gathering around the Lord's Supper, the most holy meal that Jesus had given to them, joining their hearts and voices together in prayer.

Drinking from the cup and eating the bread that granted them the forgiveness of all their sins, new life and salvation, Jesus' presence and protection, the gift of the Holy Spirit and more and more, praying days and nights... How beautiful!

**"And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."** And the Lord Jesus Christ, just as He had promised, confirmed their message with wonders and signs, so that those who heard the apostles' teaching and witnessed those wonders were filled with awe.

But, of course, for they experienced something out of this world, they witnessed God's power manifested among them, the Kingdom of God breaking into their world, into their lives and changing everything. Of course, they were in awe.

**"And all who believed were together and had all things in common."** This is the amazing thing that happens when the Spirit of God creates a new community of God's people. We want to be together; we want to be with other Christians.

We want to hear the Word of God, we want to hear more about Jesus, we want to share our joy with our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is one of those signs that God's Spirit is truly at work among us, when people of different backgrounds...

... different ages, different nations, different interests and so on, suddenly feel the greatest affection to someone they barely know... just because they have been brought together and united in the most intimate way by the same Spirit of God.

When we suddenly feel at home with someone who is every way different, because we all have something in common, something that goes deeper than anything else in this world, even deeper than our family connections. The Spirit of God in us.

Luke writes that they were together. Together. They wanted to be together. They couldn't have enough of Christian community. They couldn't part, they couldn't go home, they were drawn to other fellow Christians. I trust many of you have experienced such moments, which means that the Spirit of God is alive in you.

But, if we don't want to be with fellow Christian, if we don't want to listen and delight in the Word of God, if we are now drawn to Christian community, we need to be really concerned. Are we still Christians? Has our faith grown cold?

Have daily worries and busyness choked it? Have temptations of this world hardened our hearts? Have we rejected the gentle invitation of God's Spirit? Then we need to get on our knees and pray for God's grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**“And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”** What a generosity! And again, we should say, of course! As they listened to the apostles' teaching, as the Holy Spirit gave them new hearts, they learned to appreciate that everything they had, everything they possessed was given to them by their gracious Lord.

Yes, for their own sake, to provide for their needs, of course, but also, to use it for those in need, especially in the household of faith. If you know, if it really sinks in what Jesus Christ has done for you so undeservedly, that you owe Him everything, including your own life, how can we not be generous to those in need?!

**“And day by day... [they were together] ... praising God and having favour with all the people.”** That is what happens when the Holy Spirit convinces us that, indeed, the almighty God is your Father, that Jesus Christ is your brother, that you are an heir of God's Kingdom and that new and glorious life awaits you in New Heavens and New Earth.

Then you are filled with joy, it overflows and you can't help yourself, you need to praise this God, you just can't keep silent experiencing such grace and beauty. We may burst if we don't get to share it with others, and when we do praise and proclaim our beautiful God Jesus Christ, our joy is complete.

By the way, that's what this witnessing, or outreach is about. Letting the Spirit fill our hearts with abundant joy for what Jesus has done for us, and then letting this joy overflow in our praise in the presence of all people. And the result was?

**“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”** This is an important reminder. We do not add new numbers to the Church of Christ. It is always the work of the Lord – He calls, He invites, He creates new hearts and He brings people into fellowship with the Trinity and all God's people. Yes, He uses us as His messengers, but creating faith and new heart – only He can do that.

Now, think about this, if there was a community, where the Spirit was at work so vividly, where the Word of God was spoken and learned with such passion, where Christian love filled all relationships and people just couldn't have enough of one another, where they poured their hearts and possessions in service to one another, how can such community not be attractive? How could people not be drawn to such

a community where your deepest longings are satisfied? This is what the first Christian community was like. What a beauty! What a miracle! But now, back home... today and here. What about us? Are we like that community?

Can we possibly be like that community? So passionate about the apostles' teaching and being together, rejoicing in the Lord's Supper, joined in prayer, longing to spend more time in Christian fellowship, generously caring for one another?

What do you think? Honestly? Sadly, but it doesn't seem that we have it in us...

But there is someone who disagrees. And He disagrees passionately. Do you know who? His name is Jesus Christ. He says: "You are my people, I have chosen you from before the foundation of the world, I went to the cross for you, I laid down my life for each one of you.

I have purchased you with my sufferings and death, you all are mine. And I believe that I can change you. For you are good material. Much better than you believe. I believe you have great potential. More than you know. We can do great things together. I have given you my Spirit, yes, I have given you my life, true life.

I know you struggle. I know some of you are tired and worn out. I know some are exceedingly busy. I know some are worried about pressures from the world and from false teachers. I know all your burdens and hindrances. I know it is not easy.

But I will never give up on you. Never. I will keep trying. I will keep speaking to you my life-giving message, I will keep loving you, I will keep embracing you, even if you are hesitant to respond. For I believe in you...

I know that you can be as beautiful and as attractive a community as that first congregation in Jerusalem. So, yes, I will never stop trying, and even you will not stop me or persuade me to quit. I know I will succeed with you. If not fully in this age... then in the age to come. For I know you. You are mine."

How are we, Brothers and Sisters? How is our Christian community going? Don't rely on what you see, don't rely on our own wisdom. The same Lord Jesus Christ who gathered that first community, He has called and gathered you. He has given to you the same Spirit.

Let's pray that He helps us to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching, to prayer and breaking of the bread, may He create in us thirst and hunger for Christian fellowship and give us generous hearts, may He help us to praise Him and... if that is His good and gracious will, may He add to our numbers those who are saved.

For this is His Church. We are His. You and me.

Amen.