

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” What an amazing picture of the early church. And how it is a far cry from the world we live in today.

Talking about the Church at large, how many different denominations are there? Hundreds if not thousands if you count every little sub-denomination out there. There’s even forty different flavors of Lutheranism just in North America alone. Even in our local congregations, there can be divisions. What times should we have services? What constitutes a safe gathering in this pandemic world? What kinds of songs should we be singing? What color should the carpet be? How can we recapture the picture of the early church?

On this second Sunday of Easter, we acknowledge that 3. The reality of the resurrection unites us. **“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”** Everything ties back to the resurrection of our Lord. A Christian historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, once said, “If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters.” Our faith revolves around Jesus Christ, and reality of His life, death, and resurrection, every other teaching flows from that.

It’s not enough for Jesus just to die, lots of people died, but only one man in the history of the world has been raised again in this fashion, and that is the man Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is the single, identifying mark of Christianity compared to other world religions.

The resurrection is God the Father’s stamp of approval upon Jesus and His entire ministry. Every aspect of what Jesus has done on this earth is commended and approved of in this event. The resurrection is God the Father’s stamp of approval upon creation itself. Our destiny as Christians is not to a ghostly otherworldly existence, but an embodied existence in a renewed creation. At the resurrection God the Father handed over all authority on heaven and earth to Jesus.

The resurrection unites us. We are Easter people. Paul writes, **“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”** To be a Christian means to be transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus so that the old sinful self is crucified and buried, and the Holy Spirit daily raises a new self to live in righteousness and purity forever.

And so it is that the resurrection touches upon every aspect of our teaching as Christians. Every denominational division can somehow be tied into a misunderstanding or false teaching on the resurrection and what it means for us as Christians because the resurrection encompasses aspects of all teachings of the

Christian church: what we teach on Jesus to be sure, but who we believe God is, what is the nature of the church, what we believe about the sacraments, what we believe about the end times, and what we believe about who we are and how we should live.

Every division is something that is bad, but the solution is not to just ignore all differences, but to reunite on the basis of our resurrection hope and to gather together to discuss what Scripture teaches us. True teaching is the only way we can become one again. True teaching only occurs when the Holy Spirit guides us through God’s Word back to the feet of the resurrected Christ who forgives, reconciles, and brings new life. **“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul,”** How does this occur? True unity comes about as we by faith gather around the resurrected Jesus and proclaim, like Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”

It is grounded in this resurrection reality that we can then testify and witness to those in our lives. 2. The reality of the resurrection makes us into testifying people. **“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”**

Look at the transformation the resurrection worked in the disciples. John’s Gospel comments, **“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews...”** The disciples were scattered after the death of Jesus, and at the time they still did not know that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They were fearful. They were shy. Sharing their faith was the last thing on their minds.

But **“...Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”** This encounter with the Lord changed them. They were glad when they saw Jesus, and they were glad for Jesus to speak a word of peace to them.

Coming face to face with the resurrected Lord gave them joy. Seeing Jesus gave them the power to share their faith with others. Why? Because even despite the seeming defeat that Jesus faced on the cross, Jesus was victorious. If not even the harrowing events of Jesus’ arrest, torture, and death could stop Him, then what could stop the disciples? The resurrection gave the disciples something for which they themselves could hope, and the resurrection gave the disciples a hope they could share with others.

The truth of Jesus’ resurrection fills us with such joy that we can’t help but share the good news with others. The resurrection means that our death is not the end. The resurrection means that for us, pain, suffering, and failure is not our fate. Jesus has in store for us new life: comfort, peace, and success. And Jesus wants others to experience that same bliss by trusting in Him as Savior.

And so Jesus is calling us to be witnesses to the resurrection. The apostle Peter would later go on to write, “**but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**” We are to be ready to explain to others how and why the resurrection of Jesus is a true, literal event. That is part of what it means to give “**...testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.**”

But part of what it means to give “**...testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.**” Is through our actions in a changed life. To be resurrection people means not only to talk the talk, but to walk the walk. And we walk the walk as the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and makes us holy.

How does this happen? How does the Holy Spirit fill us? It happens as we do the same things that the early Church did: “**And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**” As we as the Church gather together to build one another up through learning from the Bible, receiving the Lord’s Supper, and praying for one another, God gives us the power to be His resurrection witnesses. Living a life regularly connected to these means of grace is as crucial as breathing.

Finally, 1. The reality of the resurrection makes us into giving people. Luke records in the book of Acts, “**There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.**” Now in the Bible, there are things that are prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive means the things that we are to do. Descriptive merely describes what practices were in the early Church.

This passage is not a prescription for us as Christians to surrender private property and join a commune. This merely describes the way things were in the early Church. However, what we can say is that the Bible teaches us—it prescribes to us—that the resurrection frees us to be generous.

We can be generous because we know that our future is secure. The resurrection proclaims to us that Christ is preparing a place for us in heaven. We don’t need to worry about where we are going, Christ has it under control. And our Heavenly Father promises to take care of the in between.

When it comes to the things of this world, you cannot take it with you. Hearse’s don’t have hitches for u-haul trailers. The early church knew that. That doesn’t mean that you give away everything you have, but it does mean that God is freeing us to look at what we have been given in light of Jesus rising from the dead.

The resurrection teaches us that there is more to existence than just this life. So we can spare some of what God has so graciously given to us in helping the needy and supporting Gospel outreach here in this place by donating to the local

church. That's what the early church understood, and the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to live that way also.

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” How can we recapture the picture of the early church? **THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION UNITES US TO TESTIFY AND TO GIVE.** We cannot change our old habits unless the resurrected Christ first comes to us to change us. May it be said of Faith Lutheran Church that we are those who are so devoted to living out what the Bible teaches and receiving the gifts Christ gives here on Sunday, that we may be united to testify and to give due to Christ's resurrection victory. Amen!