**Acts 2:42-47**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

**“Life Together”**

 Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you for the Lamb that was slain has arisen as the Good Shepherd of the Sheep, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen. During the Easter Season, Good Shepherd Sunday stands out. This image of Christ caring for His Church gains much attention today as it did in the earliest times of Christianity. Jesus makes the point why He alone is the Good Shepherd stating in our Gospel reading, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” However, what does this care look like by the Good Shepherd that laid down His life for the sheep? How is Jesus caring for us today more than just a nice picture of being the Good Shepherd?

 Our First Reading from Acts shows us the abundant life that rose up from Jesus. Immediately, after the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church. It was a life gathered around and cared for by Jesus. If church was an option for Christians, why did they have this deep devotion together around apostolic teaching? Was this because they thought themselves to be “better” than others? No. It was always about the Good Shepherd caring for His Sheep. Christ’s Word and Sacraments are beyond mere ceremony, but the foundation of life for sinners and the mercy we Christians need as a poor straying sheep. Christ’s flock, the Church, is lead to pleasant pastures when gathered by the Good Shepherd.

1. **Only the Gospel leads any out of unpleasant pastures to be in Christ’s Church.**
2. Peter called out on that first Pentecost with the Shepherds voice.
* Those Jews were to repent for their current pasture was an unpleasant lie.
* He told them the truth, “God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified” (2:36).
* Yet, this call to repent cut to the heart out of love to bring the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection.
* The Good Shepherd would claim them as His sheep, for Peter said, “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” (2:38).
1. More than enough unpleasant pastures today need to hear the Gospel.
* Repent for the enticements of false religions, cults, or worldly agendas are lies that deny the light of Christ and His cross.
* The claim made upon you by baptism has promised straying sheep can return, “to the Shepherd and Overseer” of our souls.
* Forgiveness won by Christ released us to be in His kingdom instead of the unpleasant pastures crafted by the devil.
* By a new creation from water, the Holy Spirit has filled us with life that always sees the victory remains for us is in Jesus.
1. **The Church receives a pleasant pasture because the Good Shepherd gathers them.**
2. Take to hear that verse, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
* This was a holistic approach to life based around worship before Jesus bodily present caring for His Church by Word and Sacrament.
* They had a pleasant pasture because attention centered on God’s service that came by the means of grace Jesus provided.
* These baptized were a new kind of people, “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13).
* What made the Church was Christ and Christ was what the Church celebrated for His death and life proclaimed Him the Good Shepherd.
1. Every Sunday is a little Easter, where Jesus still gathers His Church to Himself.
* What makes it a pleasant pasture has everything to do with the Apostolic Word for Jesus is present serving His gifts of salvation.
* Churches can turn out to be a den of the devil, good pastors can fall prey to disgrace, and even the sheep can appear like ordinary sinners.
* However, the teachings of the Word stand upon Jesus offering forgiveness, life, and salvation to trust in Him as the Good Shepherd.
* After calling out with His voice to repent and believe in Him. Christ draws near to give us His true body and blood as the joy of Himself on earth, a pleasant pasture to eat and drink.
1. **By the Gospel, our Good Shepherd now uses us to care for the pastures of life in this world.**
2. Where Christ has brought His service, a service of love goes out in His Name.
* The Church had yet to face persecution so we note, “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.”
* This was a fellowship not formed by governments of men like socialism or communism having to pry things out of people’s hands.
* Instead, where Christ laid down His life for the sheep, freedom was love laying down their lives for others.
* Since the Good Shepherd lead the way that justified sinners, it was natural for the sheep to follow Him.
1. Liturgy means service, so what God gives at worship forms us to serve others in life.
* The apostolic teaching is the good confession of Christ that accompanies acts of mercy in the world.
* The fellowship is unlike any other club, interest group, or political party, but life shared among the baptized.
* The breaking of bread is communion with Christ who joins us to be His body in this place where we bear one another’s burdens.
* The prayers are taking what the Church does together back into our personal devotional life during the week.

 I bet there are far more people confused over the Church than hostile to it. Some see the church to be a business, others a nice building for a wedding or funeral, still others a relic from the past or even a bunch of religious fanatics. Gathering today is to have the Word proclaim again Christ as life for a sinful world. His death carried the burden and guilt of all by the cross. His resurrection promises salvation is a gift God freely gives. His Word and Sacraments show Him present ready to forgive, full of life, and with a kingdom that has no end. Christ’s flock, the Church, is lead to pleasant pastures when gathered by the Good Shepherd. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.