

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: The Gate

Lesson: Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter. During the season of Easter, we greet each other by saying "Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed."

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When I was a college student, I had a question about my Christian faith. It was, "Why did God send Jesus to this earth?" To be more specific, I wondered, "If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, why did He need Jesus? Couldn't He have saved us without sending Jesus?" These were the types of questions I had.

In the Bible, God is often described as a shepherd and Christians as sheep. I have never raised sheep myself, but I have heard and learned about them. Sheep have very narrow vision and poor eyesight. Even if a vast meadow is beside them, they cannot recognize it. And when there is a cliff in front of them, they can fall without noticing it. That's why it is said that there must always be a shepherd by the side of the sheep.

In John 10, Jesus says that He is the gate for the sheep. He also strongly states that anyone who tries to enter the sheep pen without going through Him is a thief and a robber. This is because only Jesus Christ is the gate of truth, the gate of salvation, and the gate of life.

From the beginning of Genesis, God has continuously expressed and showed God's love for us. God has also sent us prophets like Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, and John the Baptist. However, like sheep, our spiritual vision was very narrow,

and even before Jesus opened our eyes, we were spiritually blind. Looking at the history of Israel, some kings repented and turned back to God, but as generations passed, kings forgot about God, worshiped other idols, and became increasingly wicked. Eventually, Israel was destroyed.

God was perfect, but we were imperfect. Although God showed us His love, we did not see or realize it because we were like sheep with narrow and limited vision, unable to see the vast meadows of God's love. Therefore, God sent us Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, to guide us.

When Jesus Christ came to this earth, we still didn't understand that He was the Christ because His life was so different from what we had imagined and expected. First of all, Jesus was born in a humble stable. The place where baby Jesus lay was not a soft bed but a dirty, smelly, and very lowly manger.

Additionally, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he rode on a very young donkey. People must have been puzzled because his appearance was different from what they had imagined. They might have silently questioned, "Is he really the Messiah?" Jesus did not meet their expectations. Instead, he was arrested by soldiers, naked in front of everyone, whipped, mocked, and crucified.

When Jesus was dying without resisting, his disciples all fled and people denied him. Even to prove that they were not on Jesus' side, they mocked Jesus with the soldiers and shouted to kill him quickly. So Jesus faced death alone and in loneliness, being abandoned by everyone on the cross.

But, as Jesus had said before he died, he came back to life after three days. He appeared to Mary Magdalene first and then to his followers, showing them that he was really alive by letting them touch his hands, feet, and side. Upon realizing that Jesus had indeed risen, the disciples accepted him as Christ, and all repented and were born again in the name of Christ, getting baptized. The important thing here is being "born again."

Galatians 2:20 – "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

When the disciples truly believed in Jesus Christ, they did not hold onto their own egos, experiences, thoughts, plans, and everything they had, but they were crucified with Christ. And they were born again through Christ. Being born again means that they made a decision to let go of everything and follow the will and life

of Christ. In other words, they decided to follow the life and love that Jesus Christ showed on this earth because his life and love were the good news, the key to happiness, and the door to salvation.

In the Gospel, after John the Baptist was put in prison Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The good news was that “The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near.”

We tend to understand and accept the concept of the kingdom of God, or heaven, as something that happens after physical death, influenced by Greek philosophy. Like you, I also believe in the kingdom of God that we will enter after physical death. However, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God was not about the afterlife, but about the present life.

Jesus said that we can enter the kingdom of God while we are still alive. That is good news to us and it is the door of our happiness and salvation.

So, how can we enter the kingdom of God?

By looking at the life of Jesus Christ, we can understand what the kingdom of God is and what a life of joy and happiness looks like.

Friends, did Jesus Christ come to this earth to serve us or to be served by us?

The key to entering the kingdom of God lies in serving others based on the love of Christ. The key is to serve others, to share with others, and to be with others.

We usually think that we will be happy when we receive good service from others, when we have more than others, when we make more money than others, when we win in competition with others, and when we enjoy good things alone or with families. That's why we sometimes envy and admire the lives of the rich and successful. However, if we think about it carefully, we can see that not all of those who have millions or billions of dollars are happy. Some of them suffer from depression, and some rely on drugs and alcohol to live. This means that success, money, and fame do not necessarily correspond to joy and happiness in life.

It may sound a bit cliché, but this is the truth that Jesus taught us. Friends, the happiness of life comes from serving others. The joy of life comes from sharing and being together with others. The disciples who realized what the key to the truth of life and salvation is gathered together every day, shared fellowship, broke bread remembering the life of Jesus Christ, and pledged to follow his life. They even shared everything they had and sold them to give to those in need. And the

kingdom of God was present in their lives, and they were already the people of the kingdom of God on this earth.

Today is a very important day for us. It's a precious day for us because today, our three churches come together to praise God, worship together, and after the service, share joy and love over a meal.

I pray in the name of Christ that the Holy Spirit will be with all of you who have gathered here today, helping you to understand and believe in the love of Christ, to love each other as family in Christ, to fellowship and share with each other, and to pray for each other sincerely. Amen.