

End Times – 2 (Judgment)
Love Takes Time – 2
Acts 2:37-47
November 7, 2010

“You are the children of God” by faith in Jesus, the eternal Son of God, due entirely to the gift of God’s determined, devoted love for sinful people. All this we heard from God last Sunday in the portion of God’s Word named 1 John.

Being the children of God means we are brothers and sisters of one another. As God’s household, God’s family, time together with our heavenly Father is vital, necessary, essential. Time together with one another is too!

It is God’s Word which has enabled us to be God’s children. It is also the same Word of God we need to maintain our faith in the eternal Son, our Lord Jesus. God’s Word is necessary certainly to grow our faith in Him. God’s Gospel alone can make our trust and reliance on our Savior more and more productive. What God says also makes us able successfully to struggle against our inner sinfulness and all temptation.

These verses show us clearly how we need one another during our walk of faith. We need to spend time with the Holy Scripture and with fellow children of God, as brothers and sisters of Christ. We all need that help

(To) Grow Together in the Gospel.

As we read these words about this early first-century Christian congregation in Jerusalem, really the first such New Testament congregation, perhaps we marvel. What a wonderful, ideal congregation! “If only it could be that way today,” we think, “in this congregation.”

Well, why not? These people were just ordinary people. It was nothing in them that made them God’s children and such a wonderful congregation. In themselves, there was only sin, just as is the case with us.

They had just listened to Peter’s Pentecost Day sermon. In that sermon, Peter and the other apostles, too, preached God’s law and His Gospel, the same condemning holy will of God and the same blessed Good News as we have today.

Peter pulled no punches, minced no words, spared no one. They got the law full strength. They had sinned. They had rejected Jesus, even helped kill Jesus. That cut their hearts. It jabbed into them. They now certainly knew that they were spiritually, fatally wounded. Just the kind of people Jesus heals with the Gospel.

Jesus had died for them. Jesus rose from the dead. He did that to assure them of God’s full, free forgiveness.

When they urgently asked Peter what to do, Peter directed them to a humble confession of their sin with the word 'repent' and to Jesus' forgiveness, also in Baptism. Jesus, our redeemer, has placed Himself into His Baptism by His Word, has placed His forgiveness of sin into His Baptism and has placed the gift of the Holy Spirit into Baptism all by His Word. The Holy Spirit is the One who, by the Gospel of forgiveness, works faith in the Savior and works rebirth, new life and eternal salvation. This promise, Peter assured them, was for them, for their children and for anyone and everyone no matter where on this planet or no matter how distant in time they lived. God would call these sinners to this forgiveness for forgiveness by this promise.

The Law and Gospel worked; thousands of people repented and were baptized. They were ready for Judgment Day. Everyone in Christ Jesus is judged no longer guilty, judged innocent in the sight of God.

So, that congregation of new believers in our Savior came to love God's Word. They devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching. That's the Bible. And so, they gathered together daily at the temple to hear that Word of God and to thank and praise God for it. They united not only at the temple but they did so for the same reason and purpose. They did so to grow and be strengthened in their Christian faith. They did it so that their reliance on Jesus would be more and more productive. The whole, entire Christian life flows out of one's trust in our Lord and Savior. God's commandments and the whole law would enable them to fight sin and satan every day and also let them know what God's will was for their daily living, which they now loved and delighted in.

All of this is internal, spiritual growth. But as they heard God's Word, they also shared it and showed it by their lives of loving concern for one another. This gospel, shared and showed, was God's tool for making still more people His children. The church grew in numbers, too!

How does this compare to the church we see, even right here? We still need the Law and Gospel. We, too, are sinners, mortally wounded by sin. And God's law needs to diagnose us as fatally ill. Self-centeredness shows, so does undervaluing time spent with God's Word and with God's people. We are tempted with little time for Jesus and His interests. We may not necessarily be bubbling over with joy and enthusiasm for serving our Lord or His people.

Some people here are devoted to what the prophets and apostles teach – the Bible. But some certainly are not devoted to it. They hear it and use it so infrequently that they cannot possibly be growing in it. In fact, some surely are going backward, and so love from faith, love for God, love for their brothers and sisters and love for their neighbor is suffering, too. Some are devoted to regular worship while others will use every excuse in the book not to worship or don't even think about it anymore.

Some, by gathering together frequently here and in their homes, know one another's needs and try to help. Others have little contact with their brothers, so how can they know? Without Gospel motivation, how can they even care?

Some very much look for chances to share Jesus' Good News with anyone and see the need for us as a congregation to work at getting God's Word out to people or people here to hear the

Gospel. Others seem just not to be very interested or concerned about whether or not the message of the Savior goes out from here or not. Well, they don't seem to care to hear it themselves, why would they care if anyone else does?

If you love your Savior and His Word, love to hear it and read it and learn it and live it, if you treasure the time you get to spend with Jesus and your other Christian brothers and sisters, if you love them and want to help supply them according to their needs as they care about your needs, if you want to fight sin and the devil, keep giving time to gathering together around God's Word and Sacrament.

For those among us who do not care much about any of this, let the rest of us at least, as did Peter, urgently plead with them to be saved from this corrupt generation. We need to work and to work hard and to work ceaselessly to get this Word out to the people around us. A good many of them are lost. They are not the children of God. Do we love Jesus? Do we love these lost souls? Then let's give them of our time! Amen.