

EASTER 4
ACTS 2:42-47
1 PETER 2:19-25
JOHN 10:1-10
MAY 6, 7, 2017

YEAR A

Acts 2:46,47 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The community of faith in Jerusalem had a witness that moved in many ways. The church was not just one restricted unit but it gave its witness through serving God and the people in need. This witness was made known in the selling of property and giving the money to the church. The witness was also demonstrated in worship at the Jerusalem temple. The witness and the serving benefited its members and those on the outside of the church. The church does not exist for its own sake, but to care for its most vulnerable members. We are here to make Christ known in our communities and in the world. We are a means by which God extends salvation to others. As we read in these verses from Acts 2, all praised God for all God had done and for all God gave them. They did not regard the treasures or earthly possessions as items to be hoarded but as gifts to be shared. They had plenty of earthly things but their abundance came from their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our Lord's Prayer we pray that God would provide for us by giving us our daily bread. We pray that our needs would be met. Daily bread includes food on the table, a place to live and a family to belong to. Daily bread is also clothing to keep us warm and to protect us from the elements. Many of us see the abundant life as going beyond our daily needs. We enjoy having our desires met. We need a better car that is more efficient. I need to wear the right kind of clothes. You need to drink the kind of beer because it tastes better and will make you part of the in

crowd. Women need to wear a certain make-up or dye their hair using a particular hair color. Abundant life might mean having what I want when I want it.

We are all people that have desires. If we are created in God's image we have desires. Desires are not bad. It does make a difference what our desires make us do. It makes a difference how our desires and wants make us act. God desires that we have life and that we have it abundantly. God desires that we remain obedient to God's will and come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We have come to believe that God sent God's Son that we would experience the forgiveness of sins and that we would have life. We have come to believe that life is good, special and important. Each of us believes that our life is important and that we matter to others. We desire to be accepted and to be loved. Beyond that, each of us has desires unique to us.

John 10:9, 10 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Jesus offers an abundant life. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. We hear these words from our Lord but we wonder about the meaning of an abundant life. Does abundant life mean a life that gathers wealth and material things? Is abundant life a life that does not want for anything because it has everything needed? Jesus talks about abundance in terms of coming in and going out and finding pasture. Abundance comes from God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The 23rd Psalm tells about the Lord being our shepherd. Because the Lord is our shepherd we have everything we need. Because the Lord is my shepherd I am given a soft place to land when I fall down or when I need to rest. I am led beside the still waters where I find a place of

nourishment and water that will not splash up in my face when I drink it. When I am troubled the Lord touches my life giving the assurance of God's presence. When my enemies are around me God protects me. When we are faced with the thought of death the Lord says, "Do not be afraid for I am with you." The Lord walks with us as we near that hour of death.

The Lord's abundance is about entering in through the gate of our Lord. We enter by and through Jesus and we are saved. When we seek our fulfillment and our abundance apart from Jesus Christ we are often disappointed. Jesus talks in other places of scripture about storing up treasures in heaven where there is no destruction and there is no disappointment. He says that merely storing up treasures on earth leaves us open to thieves, moths and rust. Seeking abundance on earth often means we are disappointed because we fail to achieve what we hoped to achieve. We feel vulnerable because someone stole what was ours. We are upset because we did not win the Powerball.

The other day I watched as Jeremiah was trying to pound nails into a piece of board. I looked even though he did not know I was watching. He first used a small hammer to drive large nails. He soon discovered that might not be the best choice for hammering nails. He kept at it with the small hammer continuing to try to accomplish what he was trying to do. Although a hammer was the right tool a larger hammer would have worked better. Jeremiah discovered that he could get the nails started with the small hammer but he could not complete the job as easily as he could have with a larger hammer. After I suggested a larger hammer he told me it makes sense that larger hammer would work better for larger nails.

Sometimes we try to live our lives this same way. We work so hard but never quite accomplish what we hoped. We look for things that might meet the needs and desires in our lives only to have them fail us. We settle for something that wasn't meant for the task at hand and are disappointed when things become more difficult. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem came to understand the meaning of abundance. They came to know the abundance our Lord gives. There is nothing wrong with owning property and having nice things but all of the wealth in the world cannot buy us into the kingdom of God. There is only one way. Jesus says that he is the gate and the way to the Father is through the gate he provides. The abundance Jesus gives is received by faith. We believe that Jesus is Lord. He is our salvation and our source of life. Jesus gets first place in our lives. Because Jesus is Lord we do not allow our things to get in the way of serving God. Because Jesus is the author of salvation and the gate we come to Jesus knowing that his abundance truly is abundance. What our Lord gives cannot be stolen. It does not become useless because of rust and does not get eaten up by moths. It does not wear out and is never rendered useless.

Jesus is the gate by which we enter into the presence of God. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. What are the desires of your life? Since we are created in God's image we have desires. Let your desires be for the Lord. AMEN