

“Scattered, but not Quiet”

May is a month filled with memorable milestones. Many graduations take place in May. Many youth confirmations take place in May. Milestone events like these mean – parties, celebrating, happiness, thankfulness, positive vibes, and excitement as the next chapter in life is about to begin. Today we celebrate Pentecost (in our Christian Freedom we celebrate one week early). We just heard a few minutes ago the amazing events that took place on that first Pentecost. Certainly a memorable and milestone event that took place 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead! Pentecost followed another memorable milestone event that took place 10 days earlier when Jesus ascended into Heaven! Memorable milestone events, while never forgotten, are fleeting emotional high points in life. Most days in life are lived in the valley of reality. Listen to God share with us the valley of reality for the early Christian church after the memorable milestone moments of Jesus Ascension and Pentecost. Acts 8:1-5, 8.

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there... ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.”

“On that day.” The day being talked about is when Stephen, one of the leaders (along with Philip) of the soup kitchen ministry carried out by the Jerusalem Christian church, was killed for boldly sharing God’s Word in Jerusalem. At that moment Christians were forced to jump off the mountaintop high of Ascension and Pentecost down into the valley of reality. For their own safety they relocated away from Jerusalem. The thing that strikes me most about this account are these words: **“All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”** (Acts 8:1b, 4). The public ministers, the 12 apostles, stayed put in Jerusalem while the lay people relocated to other villages, towns, and cities in the Israelite territories of Judea and Samaria. And wherever they went the laypeople, Christians like you, shared the Word of God! They were scattered because of the persecution, but they weren’t quiet about their Christian faith. God be praised!

May is graduation month and as exciting as that day is it also brings with it the reality that these graduates will be scattering to high school, college, or into the real world of adulting – no more school, but a job. Things will not be the same for these graduates and their families. May is youth confirmation month and as exciting as that is the reality is that these confirmands will be scattering to the real world of high school, more independence, more responsibility, and more temptation. Things will not be the same for these confirmands and their families. Maybe there aren’t any graduations or confirmations for you or your family this year, but you are still feeling “scattered” this May. Perhaps the journey for you or someone you love from good or stable health to the reality of health issues is leaving you feel a bit

scattered. Perhaps you are living in the reality of the death of a loved one and you feel scattered because of it. Perhaps the reality of your employment or lack of employment is leaving you feel a bit scattered. Perhaps the reality of the lingering effects of Covid over a year later is leaving you feeling a bit scattered. Perhaps the reality of the political division within our country is leaving you feeling a bit scattered. Perhaps (you fill in the blank _____) has you feeling a bit scattered this May. And it makes no difference to the demons what is going on in your life. They will use the memorable milestone moments in your life to distract you from seeing your need for Jesus and to lead you into spiritual laziness because life is good. And they will use the valley of reality moments in your life to get you to turn your back on God because he is allowing hardship in your life. Either way, the demons will use it as an opportunity to **“destroy the church”** (Acts 8:2) or to put it another way – to destroy your faith in Jesus and lead you to spend eternity in Hell.

Our sermon lesson serves as a beautiful reminder, however, that destruction of the Christian church and your faith in Jesus doesn't have to be the final chapter of your “scattered” story. **“All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”** (Acts 8:1b, 4). The early Christians were scattered because of the reality of persecution, but they weren't quiet about their Christian faith. Christ's loving forgiveness, peace that surpasses understanding, and eternal promises went with them wherever they were and no matter what was going on in their lives. And the same is true for you and me. Every moment in life, whether a memorable milestone moment or a valley of reality moment, is an opportunity to take Christ with you. And wherever Christ is there is **“great joy”** (Acts 8:8). Take Christ with you as you remember your baptism and how God the Holy Spirit marked you with the Triune God's name and set you apart with the privilege of being his representative on this earth. Take Christ with you as you regularly receive Holy Communion with sincere repentance and God reassures you in a very personal way, through the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, that he forgives you even though you continue to struggle with sin. Take Christ with you as you remember the Bible lessons learned in Sunday School, confirmation classes, Sunday sermons, Bible Classes, and home Bible Study because through such Bible Study the living and active Word of God has become a part of you to encourage, equip. and guide you throughout your life. Take Christ with you home, to school, to work, to the hospital, to the parties you host and attend, and wherever you might find yourself in life and while your Christian actions and words might lead to some persecution, they will also bring joy to you and others.

Over the last few years I have seen and read many articles about how the Christian church is in decline as Christians give up the Christian faith for various reasons. That doesn't need to be your story. Let's learn from those early Christians and follow their example. Life might leave you scattered, but that doesn't mean you have to be quiet. Take Christ with you wherever you go. Proclaim him to others with your words and actions. Bring real joy to this world because you have plenty of joy to share. Amen.