2014

Easter 4 • Acts 2:42–47 • May 11, 2014

Bruce Schuchard

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, schuchardb@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholar.csl.edu/cj

Part of the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol40/iss2/6

This Homiletical Help is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Journal by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.
So those who heard and received in faith the testimony of Peter on the day of Pentecost were all that day baptized, all three thousand of them (Acts 2:41). All were added to the communion, to the fellowship, of the saints. And so “they devoted themselves” not only to “the apostles’ teaching” but also to its κοινωνία (2:42), to the conviction that theirs was the gracious gift of a sharing, of a common participation, in the things of a singular and extraordinary household and family: the household and family of our heavenly brother, whose own Father in heaven above is therefore also our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to this and on account of this they devoted themselves in all things and in every way for the common good, as one of course would, as one of course should. For that is what household and family is; that is what household and family does, or at least should do. For that is what they knew themselves to be: a heavenly household and family at the table of their heavenly householder in the communion of “the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (2:42). “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles” (2:43), so that all might be given to see the glory and the wonder of their restoration, their oneness, in Christ.

And so all who believed were and remained quite naturally and quite regularly together. All who believed quite naturally and quite regularly shared κοινός (all things in common) (2:44), as would, as should, the superabundantly blessed persons of a singular household and family. And their joy and their generosity in doing so was as one would expect it to be amongst those who know themselves to be united by God’s grace as the singular household and family of the creator of the cosmos. “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:45). After all, what else was there for any of them otherwise to do? What did they in such blessed communion in any way lack (so thus to hold back?), in blessed communion with a beloved Son whose own communion was and is with the God and Father of us all? Therefore, they did only that which seemed infinitely natural. In blessed communion with one another, they acted as would, they acted as should, all who know that what they have is not their own. In blessed fellowship with one another, they were exceeding-ly, they were joyfully, generous with one another as beloved brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, of the one who loved us first.

Therefore, day by day they continued together in worship. Day by day they gave and they received, they shared, in everything, not just in the breaking of the bread and of the prayers of the Table of Our Lord but also in the very sharing of their homes, in all that they had, “with glad and generous hearts” (2:46), receiving one another as one would receive a beloved brother or sister, for that is what they knew themselves to be. Therefore, on account of this their manner of giving thanks and praise to God, they were held in favor by all the people, as one again might expect.
And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:47), and continues still to do so from “every nation under heaven” (2:5). May the Spirit-wrought conviction of those who have been added still be that of those who thus were so, for Jesus’s sake.

We all like to be a part of a winning team. Up to this point in the book of Acts, the church was the winning team. Yes, there had been arrests and there had been threats. However, the believers were bold, public preaching was well received, and the harvest was bountiful. The nature of “winning” for the church changes with the martyrdom of Saint Stephen. I wonder how many of the disciples reflected back on Jesus’s words, “. . . and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Mt 10:22).

While our text gives us plenty of material regarding this pivotal moment in the life of the young Christian church, I would like to focus on Stephen’s persecution. The church’s response to persecution mirrors Stephen’s response.

The text gives us two words that form Stephen’s response—grace and power. Notice the event begins with, “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8).

We are told that he had great power. Yet in this tragic event, he does not seem to be very powerful. There are no great signs and wonders to persuade anyone. There are no thunderbolts from heaven to terrify the enemy. In fact, he is taken outside the city like trash and put down like a sick animal. The picture hardly fits the world’s standard of power. Yet there is no greater power than confidence in God’s word to work through our weaknesses. While miracles would continue, increasingly, power among the believers would be understood as a bold witness of Christ in the face of persecution.

Grace is the second word that formed Stephen’s response to persecution. Notice two things about Stephen’s example of grace. First, he had no trouble calling the people out for their sins. He pointed out how their ancestors had rejected God’s prophets. He calls them out for trusting in Solomon’s temple, rather than the God who had made his dwelling among his people. He pulls no punches calling them “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised.” This would hardly seem to be the words of a “grace-filled” servant of the word. Yet we are reminded in God’s word that we have been called to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Grace spoken with his dying breath gained greater significance because he laid the foundation of sin with the law. Stephen called them out for their sin and then released them of their guilt with his final words of intercession.

Finally, notice God’s grace in persecution. Jesus foretold of his death with these words from John’s gospel: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Stephen