



**ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
ONE HEART AND SOUL
ACTS 4:23-37
03-14-21**

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Affirmation # 9

Because **people shape culture**, we will teach, empower and equip all to be credible witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ and agents of his mission of making all things new. We will be proactive in how we engage culture, seeking not to be shaped by it but to be shapers of it.

Welcome

Good morning! So glad you can join us today as we seek to demonstrate Christ's love, grow in faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ of Nazareth and share the hope that we have in him. God is with us! God is for us! And, he that is with us and in us is infinitely greater than any other. Our God reigns!

May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance today!

Call to Worship – Psalm 54 -- TO THE CHOIRMASTER: WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS. A MASKIL OF DAVID, WHEN THE ZIPHITES WENT AND TOLD SAUL, "IS NOT DAVID HIDING AMONG US?"

Psalm 54 reiterates that which Peter has been preaching to the religious leaders at the temple – that it is Jesus Christ of Nazareth who saves. It is by his might and by his name that we are healed. We also saw last week that where the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, there will be persecution; there will be adversaries; there will be antagonists; there will be hostility; there will be enemies. However, whatever trouble we find ourselves in, God has and will overcome. It will not have the final say in our lives even if it takes our life because the Good News is that God, in Christ has defeated the most powerful and dreaded enemies – sin and death. In the end, God will have the final word. Salvation will have the final word. Eternal life will have the final word. Love will have the final word.

O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.

For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves.

Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them.

With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Song – Holy, Holy, Holy -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

Holy, holy, holy!



*Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty, God in three persons
Blessed Trinity!
Holy, holy, holy!
Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy
There is none beside Thee
Perfect in power, in love and purity
Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty
All thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty, God in three persons
Blessed Trinity*

Christ Candle – Nepal

We light the Christ candle as a visible sign of God’s presence with us; that he has come as light into a world of darkness. We light the Christ candle to remind ourselves that Jesus is the light and that in him we become light too. We are never a light on our own. The light we have and can offer to others is the light of Jesus of Nazareth. May we be God’s light in 2021.

Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name’s sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. **May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don’t share the same freedom that we do. The 32st place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is Nepal.**

Of the 30 million people living in Nepal, 1 million are Christians. Most of the persecution of Christians in Nepal comes from Hindu radical groups whose goal is to return Nepal to a Hindu state. Seen as betraying their ancestor’s faith, Christian converts from Hinduism continue to live under intense pressure, including anti-conversion laws. Nepal also saw attacks on church buildings, and reports surfaced of Christians being beaten, arrested and sentenced to prison. Christians also had to flee their homes and villages due to threats.

Prayer Points: Pray with converts from Hinduism, who experience persecution from their family and community and are at risk under anti-conversion laws. Pray for believer’s protection and discernment to know when and where to share their faith. Pray with churches in Nepal as they gather for worship under the threat of violence.



Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Light the Christ candle at this time

Song – Before The Throne Of God Above -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LULK2nZ6sCc>

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heav'n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart
When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me
Behold Him there, the risen Lamb
My perfect, spotless Righteousness
The great unchangeable I AM
The King of glory and of grace
One with Himself, I cannot die
My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high
With Christ my Savior and my God
One with Himself, I cannot die
My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high
With Christ my Savior and my God
With Christ my Savior and my God
With Christ my Savior and my God*

Song – Yet Not I But Christ In Me -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>

*What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer
There is no more for heaven now to give
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace
To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus*



*For my life is wholly bound to His
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing: all is mine!
Yet not I, but through Christ in me*

*The night is dark but I am not forsaken
For by my side, the Saviour He will stay
I labour on in weakness and rejoicing
For in my need, His power is displayed*

*To this I hold, my Shepherd will defend me
Through the deepest valley He will lead
Oh the night has been won, and I shall overcome!
Yet not I, but through Christ in me*

*No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven
The future sure, the price it has been paid
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon
And He was raised to overthrow the grave*

*To this I hold, my sin has been defeated
Jesus now and ever is my plea
Oh the chains are released, I can sing: I am free!
Yet not I, but through Christ in me*

*With every breath I long to follow Jesus
For He has said that He will bring me home
And day by day I know He will renew me
Until I stand with joy before the throne*

*To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
All the glory evermore to Him
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

*To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
All the glory evermore to Him
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

*When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!*

Centering Prayer – From: Every Moment Holy (Liturgy for a)

**For a long season, O Lord,
I considered as an impossibility
what I now know as unshakeable truth:**

That after loss, pain, tragedy, tears,
sorrow, doubt, defeat, and disarray,



I will hold a more costly and precious joy
than any I have held before;
and this not in denial of my loss,
but manifest in the very wreckage of it.

And so I know this unexpected joy
is no glib and passing fancy.
It is rather the diamond-hard treasure
unearthed and recognized
only when lesser hopes have collapsed.
It is the knowledge of your unwavering
faithfulness, O Christ, now experienced
and owned. It is the bright beacon
of your promises blooming in the night
like signal fires upon mountain peaks.

I came to the end of my own hope, O God,
and found that your hope held me still.
I saw through the ruin of my own happiness
that your better joy stood firm—
an unassailable fortress that even death
could not throw down.

**And you have lifted me from where
I lay wounded on war-torn fields, and have
planted my feet solidly upon your ramparts**

Offering – World Renew

At World Renew, we join with the world's families to change the story of hunger, poverty and illness. For nearly 60 years, hundreds of thousands of people have shared in this calling: staff, local partners, global communities and people like you. Every day people like you give in response to a disaster, offer monthly support to Free a Family™ from poverty, or travel with our volunteer teams to help renew hope firsthand. Together, we change stories, and those stories change the world.

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

Scripture Reading – Acts 4:23-37

We continue our series in the New Testament book of Acts by engaging with Acts 4:23-37. There are two parts to our reading: (1) a practice – prayer and (2) a sign – unity. Remember that Peter and John were just imprisoned for proclaiming that it was Jesus Christ of Nazareth that had healed the crippled man of 40 plus years and that it was only through him that people are saved. They were persecuted because of Jesus. Then they were threatened and bullied to not speak his name anymore but they refused to comply. Because the Jewish leaders could find nothing to indict them with, they had to release them. These verses are their response to the persecution and bullying.



With this in mind, please read Acts 4:23-37 now.

Gospel Message – ONE HEART AND SOUL

Mstislav “slava” Rostropovich was a world class cellist and a staunch believer in the newly forming Soviet Union under Gorbachev and Yeltsin (contra Stalin and Lenin). In fact, he was banned from Russia and stripped of his identity as a musician and a Russian early in his career as a musician. In the early 1990’s there was a coup attempt against the newly forming Russia and Slava didn’t hesitate. He hopped on a plane to Moscow without telling his wife or family because he knew they would not approve. After talking his way through security at the airport he made it to the Government house where the coup attempt was taking place. Being friends with Yeltsin, he was let in and handed a high-power automatic weapon that he took briefly then gave back. It is said that instead, he took out his cello his first night there, with the coup outside the walls looking to overtake Yeltsin and the government and played throughout the night. The coup failed and many said it was the music of Slava that kept the coup from regrouping and attacking again. The beauty of the music overcame the ugly desires to kill and overthrow. Some of you may remember the stories of WWI when the troops from both sides stopped fighting on Christmas day and even sang songs together before re-engaging in war the following day! The importance of something greater interrupted for a moment the division and hostility between the two sides and they saw themselves as equals, as human beings, together, one, whole. Beauty and greatness overcame hostility and division.

Imagine a 1,000-piece puzzle that you have been working on missing 50 of the pieces and the rest of them have a part broken off and/or the coloring is faded. How frustrating would that be. We human beings in community are like that. Some don’t show up or contribute to the community in any significant way. The rest do so but imperfectly with faded and broken lives in which there is sin and rebellion. Community is messy and hard. That is why when we read something like what we see in Acts 2 or Acts 4 about a community that had “everything in common” and are functioning as a community ought to, where each piece is contributing and the colors are crisp and the pieces are whole, we long for it; we desire it; we want it. Especially in the face of persecution and difficulty. We all remember 911 and how the nation, how cities and towns and families and churches came together as one, as Americans. Sometimes it takes a calamity, a crisis to remind us of what is important; to remind us of the others around us; to shake us and jolt us back into the bigger picture of life and out of the shallow and small bubbles we might have been living in; to value and prioritize that which is great and beautiful.

Peter and John had been imprisoned and bullied by the religious leaders over preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and doing the good deed of healing a crippled man from birth in the name of Jesus. Reality was setting in that just as they treated Jesus Christ badly, they might also treat them in the same way. It’s important to recognize their response to this persecution. Or maybe what they did not do. They did not organize a protest against the Roman government. They did not whine or complain or get angry or belittle their enemies or plot ways to overthrow them. No. Instead they gather and they pray and then they continue to live out the truths of the gospel as the ecclesia, the called-out ones, the Church. In other words, they directed their gaze to God and stayed focused on being his loving witnesses in word and in deed. They remained one of heart and one of soul. They did not fight or divide but kept the main thing the main thing. They did not gaze at the problem, they gazed at God. Let’s take a closer look at their prayer for it is very instructive of what their oneness was



centered on and what we are to be centered on today as well. What we will see is that they gazed on the sovereignty of God and the beauty of God. They chose to hear the music (Rostropovich) and recognize the importance of the day (soldiers on Christmas Day) and that transcended them out of chaos, out of darkness and into the light and order of a dynamic and living and vital community of believers.

First, notice Luke says that Peter and John went to their “friends.” There are more than five thousand people who are now disciples of Jesus over a very short period of time and they were already “friends.” Now, most likely they went back to the original 120 at Pentecost whom they had been around a while longer but regardless, they were now friends. Friends look favorably on each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt. Friends lead with love. Friends lead with grace. Friends lead with mercy. Friends lead with truth. Friends make room for one another. Friends lay down their lives for one another. The disciples of Jesus are friends of one another, not enemies. Peter and John tell their friends what had happened to them and their response is to pray. They lift up their voices together to God. Likely, there were only a few who prayed out loud while the others were nodding and saying “amen” in agreement with them. Note how the prayer is started and how they first see and address God – “Sovereign Lord.” Sovereign Lord. Most everything wrong in this world and in the Church would be righted if this simple phrase was remembered and believed. The very first thing they do is remind themselves of who they are and who God is – their relationship. It was not an equal relationship by any stretch of the imagination. God is supreme. God is almighty. God is the one who is in control. They are subject to the supreme. They are weak. They are not in control. They are to be faithful followers. They confirm that they understand what this means in day-to-day life in the following verses.

The very first thing they say and recognize and declare about this “Sovereign Lord” is that it was He that “made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” The Sovereign Lord is Creator. The Romans had their own gods for the land and the sea. The early disciples were declaring that they are all false gods; that there is only one God who made all things and it wasn’t the Roman gods. This Creator made the heavens. Look up into the sky and see the sun and moon and the planets and the stars – God made that. With the Hubble telescope and the satellites that we have sent out past the farthest planets we have access to an increasingly amazing and astounding and mysterious universe! The trillions upon trillion of galaxies and stars and the vastness of the size of the universe pushes beyond our common abilities to even understand. All this did not just appear out of nowhere by nothing. That is scientifically impossible. You cannot get something from nothing. Only God can do that. And look how beautiful it is and how beneficial it is – God is a good God, a glorious God and creative God and a providential God who cares for his creation. God made the earth. Look around! The flowers and trees and vegetables and fruits; the mountains and the rivers and the valleys and the oceans and snow and rain and wind and dirt and rocks and minerals and elements and molecules and atoms and quarks. God made them all. Not chance. God made the sea – the fish and the underwater plants, starfish and octopi and clams and sponges and crabs and lobsters and whales and sharks and salmon and halibut and on and on. God made them all. Not chance. They all serve a purpose; they are all created. God is powerful. God is beautiful. God is sovereignly creative and fun and playful and abundant.

They then quote Psalm 2:1-2 which is about the kings and nations of the empires of the world plotting against God. And God’s response? He “laughs” at them (v. 4) and tells them that his Son would “break



them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (v. 9). So they better be wise and serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling and to "kiss the Son" otherwise the wrath of God and his Son would be upon them. Wow! What a powerful and profound and poignant and precise Psalm to choose to demonstrate their understanding of God's sovereignty, of his almighty control. They then take this understanding and apply it in order to understand what was happening in their day. Those that had "gathered together against your holy servant Jesus" including Herod and Pilate, were according to "whatever your [God's] hand and your plan had predestined to take place." This was no accident. Jesus' death at the hands of Herod and Pilate and the religious leaders what not a mistake but was by the hands of God himself – the hands of his plans. It was exactly as God had planned it to be! God was in control. God was in control over the killing of Jesus Christ. It was all known to God and not a surprise. He was not enacting a plan B or scrambling because he had lost control. He was not panicking. While they could not see it at first, now with Jesus appearing to them and with the sending of the Holy Spirit and with the sign of healing through the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, they get it. They believe. And God sends them another tangible sign of his presence – he shakes the place where they were at. The way it is written would indicate that this was not an earthquake but God shaking the place much like the mighty wind and the tongues of fire on Pentecost. God was present and they were all "filled with the Holy Spirit." Meaning, they were all deeply and fully connecting with the Holy Spirit "to the full." And they do so with their whole being – heart and soul.

Spirit-filled people focused on the Sovereign Lord are a people who are all in. Christianity was not a side gig or something optional in their life. It was their life. All of it. This is what is meant by "heart and soul." Their intellect and their emotions and their longings and their desires; their whole being was united. Again, this is plural; this is referring to the community as a whole. As we will see in chapter five, there are problems within this "oneness." But for now, they are one in heart and soul – in totality. They were on the same page, heading in the same direction, at the same pace and with the same purpose and goal. It cannot get any better than this on this side of Jesus' second bodily coming. This is what we long for. This is what we are created for. This is what we all want. This is how we flourish as a church – the community in Christ and with Christ and for Christ. Each person seeing themselves as an individual in community and seeking to submit to the will of the Sovereign Lord together, not simply as individuals. The text mentions two primary ways but we are also reminded of how the community was described in Acts 2 as being devoted to four things: (1) the apostle's teaching, (2) prayer, (3) communion and (4) koinia (fellowship together). In acts 4 they are shown to be proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – particularly his resurrection from the dead (life after life after death) and their radical sharing with one another. If there was anyone who had need, someone would sell something they owned whether extra land or an extra home so that the one in need would no longer be in need. What was mine is yours and what is yours is mine seemed to be the prevailing mindset. However, this is not a recipe for socialism or communism. It is individual families volunteering to sell and share that which they own for the welfare of another.

Friends. In our culture today we need a much greater sense of community, of the corporate nature of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are taught to think too highly of my stuff and my things; of what I earned and what I deserve that we have a hard time thinking generously towards the other. While this church is an amazing group of generous folks, I am wondering, myself included how easily I would part from a car or second house or something valuable for another. The disciples back then first



focused on God's identity as sovereign Lord and that they were to be subordinate together under him to be his witnesses together as a community. Might we not develop a deeper sense of community if we too focus more on God's sovereign lordship over his creation, including each one of us and our mutual submission to him? Might we not be more willing to generously share and proclaim the excellencies of the good news of Jesus Christ of Nazareth if we loosened our individualistic and entitlement to material possessions and see ourselves not as kings of our own lives but as stewards to God – entrusted with gifts and resource to use for his kingdom purposes? Let us seek the higher good of being deeper in community with one another – sharing each other's burdens, coming alongside each other and we encourage, build up, inspire, reassure and seek first the kingdom of God. And as we said before, this community is not something that we just create but something that we give ourselves to in and through the inworking of the person and power of the Holy Spirit. He is the one that unites us in Christ and with one another. May we submit to his leading and guiding and we continue to be his body in our little neck of the woods! May we see his beauty and may we see his greatness in such a way that we put aside for good our petty and little differences that might divide and separate us. Just like the beauty of the music of Rostropovich and the greatness of Christmas Day that stopped conflict dead in its tracks (for a time anyways), may we continually turn our eyes to Jesus. May we fix our gaze on him and only glance at the opposition or obstacles we may face.

Communion Meditation

Because of Jesus, we can experience spiritual community in which we are of one heart and one soul. Not only that, but more importantly because of Jesus Christ we experience peace and oneness with God. He that knew no sin became sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (1 Corinthians 5:20). May the communion table remind us of our unity in Christ and shape us towards that unity in the Spirit. Professing one Creed helps us focus on that which unites us rather than that which divides us.

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

**We believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven
Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come to judge the living and the dead.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."



Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Song – Turn Your Eyes -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJDELcuYX3g>

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace*

*Turn your eyes to the hillside
Where justice and mercy embraced
There the Son of God gave His life for us
And our measureless debt was erased*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

*Turn your eyes to the morning
And see Christ the Lion awake
What a glorious dawn, fear of death is gone
For we carry His life in our veins*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

*Turn your eyes to the heavens
Our King will return for His own
Every knee will bow, every tongue will shout,
'All glory to Jesus alone!'*

*Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Savior ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to You*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus

As disciples of Jesus of Nazareth who have been saved and given the responsibility to give witness to him, may we continually turn our eyes to him each day to keep us focused on him and the opportunities we have and not on the opposition or obstacles that can distract us.

We are sent out by God into the world as his witnesses. As we go, may we know with our minds and believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. And may we live in a manner worthy of that Good News at work, at home, at school and in our neighborhood to the glory of God and through the person and power of the Holy Spirit.