



Community CRC
Oakdale
ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
FOLLOW THE LEADER
ACTS 5:12-42
04-18-21

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 # 10

Because **love identifies with the marginalized and vulnerable**, we will engage individually and corporately with organizations and churches who are mercy and justice oriented to help give tangible expression of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. CCRC will look for ways to encourage and incorporate both “to” and “with” forms of love.

Welcome

Good Morning!!

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 63 -- A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE WAS IN THE WILDERNESS OF JUDAH.

David is in the wilderness of Judah (Picture Right). It literally is a desolate and barren and dry place! But notice what this barren place sparks in David – his desire for God! Think of the best meal you have ever had. David compares this to the experience of his praising God and meditating on him throughout the night hours. And, I’m pretty sure he saw a jackal or two pass by on give him trouble on more than one occasion (if not here than when he was a shepherd and trying to protect his sheep from them).



O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals.

But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

Song – Good And Gracious King -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8YwJkmZlcs>



*I approach the throne of glory
Nothing in my hands I bring
But the promise of acceptance
From a good and gracious King*

*I will give to You my burden
As You give to me Your strength
Come and fill me with Your Spirit
As I sing to You this praise*

*You deserve the greater glory
Overcome, I lift my voice
To the King in need of nothing
Empty handed I rejoice
You deserve the greater glory
Overcome with joy I sing
By Your love I am accepted
You're a good and gracious King*

*O what grace that You would see me
As Your child and as Your friend
Safe, secure in You forever
I pour out my praise again*

*You deserve the greater glory
Overcome, I lift my voice
To the King in need of nothing
Empty handed I rejoice
You deserve the greater glory
Overcome with joy I sing
By Your love I am accepted
You're a good and gracious King*

*Holy, holy, Lord Almighty
Good and gracious
Good and gracious
Holy, holy, Lord Almighty
Good and gracious King*

*Holy, holy, Lord Almighty
Good and gracious
Good and gracious
Holy, holy, Lord Almighty
Good and gracious King*

*You deserve the greater glory
Overcome, I lift my voice
To the King in need of nothing*



*Empty handed I rejoice
You deserve the greater glory
Overcome with joy I sing
By Your love I am accepted
You're a good and gracious King
You're a good and gracious King*

Song – Is He Worthy -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c6pl6CaiD0>

*Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)
Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)
But do you know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through? (We do)
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)
Is all creation groaning? (It is)
Is a new creation coming? (It is)
Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? (It is)
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? (It is)
Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave
Is He worthy? Is He worthy
Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this?
He is
Does the Father truly love us? (He does)
Does the Spirit move among us? (He does)
And does Jesus, our Messiah, hold forever those He loves? (He does)
Does our God intend to dwell again with us? (He does)
Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave
From every people and tribe (People and tribe)
Every nation and tongue (Every nation and tongue)
He has made us a kingdom and priests to God
To reign with the Son
Is He worthy? Is He worthy
Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Is He worthy of this?
He is, He is
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?*



*He is, He is
He is worthy, He is worthy
He is*

Christ Candle – Brunei

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 37th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is Brunei.**

Of the 440,000 people living in Brunei, 55,000 are disciples of Jesus Christ. Brunei is similar to many of the other countries we have looked at the past 36 weeks. It is a Muslim country and to turn from Islam is considered illegal and punishable by law. Known converts are not recognized as official citizens and can be legally separated from their spouse and children. Some Christian groups are not permitted as churches and must submit operational reports to the government every year. Strict Shariah law regulates all of society, including Christians.

Prayer Points: Pray for Christians as they share the gospel but do so illegally. Pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ as they must worship secretly and at the risk of legal punishment. Pray for churches who cannot import Christian materials and whose services are sometimes monitored.

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

Light the Christ candle at this time

Song – Spirit of the Living God -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fylslaNsJ5o&t=1s>

*O Spirit of the living God, thou Light and Fire Divine
Descend upon Thy Church once more and make it truly Thine
Fill it with love and joy and power, with righteousness and peace
Till Christ shall dwell in human hearts, and sin and sorrow cease.
Blow, wind of God, with wisdom blow until our minds are free
From mists of error, clouds of doubt, which blind our eyes to Thee
Burn, winged fire, inspire our lips with flaming love and zeal
To preach to all Thy great good news, God's glorious commonweal.
So shall we know the power of Christ, who came this world to save
So shall we rise with Him to life which soars beyond the grave
And earth shall win true holiness which makes Thy children whole
Till, perfected by Thee, we reach creation's glorious goal.*



Song – Be Still My Soul (In You I Rest) -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mq59iE3MhXM>

*Be still, my soul, The Lord is on thy side
Bear patiently, the cross of grief or pain
Leave to thy God, to order and provide
In every change, He faithful will remain
Be still, my soul, thy best thy heavenly friend
Through thorny ways, leads to a joyful end
Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake
All now mysterious shall be bright at last
Be still, my soul, the waves and wind still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below*

*In You I rest, in You I found my hope
In You I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul*

*Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored
Be still, my soul, when change and tears are past
All safe and blessed, we shall meet at last*

*In You I rest, in You I found my hope
In You I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul*

*In You I rest, in You I found my hope
In You I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul
Be still, my soul
Be still, my soul*

Centering Prayer –

Offering – Bethany Home

Bethany Home is operated under the conviction that seniors, being image bearers of God and the objects of Christ's love, are deserving of security, support, and compassionate care. It is our mission to provide such security, support, and care of the highest quality, at levels appropriate to each individual's needs, managing and developing resources responsibly to assure excellent standards of service.

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 5:12-42

We continue our series in Acts called, Acts of the Holy Spirit by engaging with Acts 5:12-42. This passage follows the difficult story of Ananias and Sapphira in which we saw two people drop dead after lying to the Holy Spirit and deceiving the Church. We navigated that passage by not erring to far to the right or to far to the left (Elder and younger brother thinking and lostness) but from the Third Way of the gospel of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This third way embraces the seriousness of sin and its due consequence – judgement and death without becoming legalistic and saying this text is prescriptive in that if we are deceptive, we will be judged and die. It also recognizes the grace in the text in that no one else dropped dead (that we are aware of) for there were assuredly more folks who were living hypocritically (we were reminded that Peter himself was called Satan by Jesus and yet he did not drop dead). Yet, we don't go too far and turn it into cheap grace and not acknowledge that grace was earned by Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross for us. Now we see the disciple's response to the death of Ananias and Sapphira. It is one in which they without hesitation continue to follow their leader through thick and thin.

With this in mind, please read Acts 5:12-42

Gospel Message – Follow the Leader

Most of us as kids played this game. I know I have although we put our own twist on it. It's called, Follow the Leader. You know this game, right? One person, the leader gets to lead wherever they wanted – over rocks, into and out of trees, through puddles, running, walking backwards, somersaulting, skipping, walking on their hands, shooting a basket and on and on. We put a slight spin to it (and I'm sure many of you have done this too in various sways) – we would also play follow the leader on our bikes! Over jumps, up and down a large dirt pile, weaving in and out of parked cars, fast, slow, popping a wheelie, no hands and more. Needless to say, there were a few more bruises, scrapes, cuts and near disasters – which made it all the more fun and challenging.

Ananias and Sapphira are dead and buried and there is great fear that has swept over the church and has spilled over into the people outside of the church. The people had agreed to meet in the temple outer courts by Solomon's Porch (portico) and verse 13 says that, "none of the rest dared to join them"! No doubt. If you didn't really believe in Jesus of Nazareth, there was no reason to join the group as you might end up like Ananias and Sapphira! Who is going to risk that! That is one way to keep the false believers out of the church! Yet, despite the fear, verse 14 goes on to say that they continued to grow in number – "crowds of both men and women" (apparently Luke has stopped counting at this point!). It's just a whole lot of people are becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. An no wonder, there were many wonders being done by the Apostles; to such a degree that people who sick were just trying to get close enough to Peter so that when he passed by his shadow might fall on them and they might be healed. Either they were desperate and hoping that his shadow would heal them or there had been some who had been healed and now others were trying for the same thing. Furthermore, people from nearby towns like Bethany were bringing their sick and those "troubled by unclean spirits" and they all were being healed! Can you imagine the scene? I find it difficult to as it is so foreign to Christianity in general since the first century.



In the end, the people of Jesus Christ, Christians were “held in high honor.” Not so much today. Christianity has been sliding to the margins of society and down in favor for well over five decades now. As the country goes more licentious (younger brother) the number of “unreligious” rise (as well as the more militant atheists). It has been said before that study after study confirms that people’s general impression of Christians is not good. The first things that come to people’s minds when they think of Christians are that they are judgmental, arrogant, homophobic, self-centered and pushy. Not exactly the most impressive list for people to hold you in high honor. We have also said that while we are not at all responsible for how people respond to us, we are completely responsible for what we give people to respond to. We started this series out by noting the first identity calling of the disciple of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). We are to image Christ to others. That is what we are responsible for. What happens after that is not on our shoulders or in our control. People may fall to their knees in humble, repentant allegiance of Jesus Christ or they may laugh and spit in your face. Most likely, it will be something in between; more like a cold shoulder or brush you off attitude as if you are not worthy of their time or attention. We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, must acknowledge this marginalization and posture of intolerance to us that is rightly based on poor Christian witness by some folks who call themselves Christians but do not act like it at all (at least the biblical version of what that look like). Let’s see how the early disciple’s persecution and challenges and fear so that we too might be able to navigate them in a way that honors Christ Jesus. What we will see is that they continued to follow their leader – no matter what was happening, whether hostility or hospitality.

The Holy Spirit is doing amazing things through the apostles and the Jewish religious leaders are not liking it at all. In their anger, they arrest them and throw them into prison. Near daybreak, an angel of the Lord appeared and opened the doors and led them outside of the prison without being noticed by the guards (who’s lives were on the line if a prisoner escaped on their watch). The angel of the Lord instructs them to go straight to the temple and speak to the people “all the words of this life.” In other words, the gospel of Jesus Christ and what it means to be a disciple of his. And they do. They follow their leader. Unafraid of the authorities, they march right back to the temple and pick up right where they left off! A modern example of this very miracle happened to Brother Yun. His is a fascinating story of faith that I cannot fully dive into here but you are encouraged to read for yourself. There is a book you may have heard of that details his life, *The Heavenly Man*. In 1997 he was imprisoned for the third time. Because he was being a major thorn in the Communist China’s governments flesh, they decided to not just torture him but maim him by busting up his legs so there would be no way he could escape. Well, that is exactly what he ended up doing. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he got up and walked past a dozen guards and walked through several locked gates that unlocked. He walked right out of the prison and no one noticed a thing. It wasn’t until he was out that he realized that his legs had been miraculously healed!

The religious leaders find the apostle’s prison cells empty and were perplexed when a person came to them and told them that they had been seen in the temple courts teaching again. They went to get them but did not take them by force as they were afraid of being stoned by the people there. The apostles comply and they head back to the meet with them knowing that they wanted them dead. Talk about courage! The leaders admonish them and Peter again affirms that they “must obey God rather than men...the God that raised Jesus from the dead whom you had killed – that God! He is our Leader and our Savior. He is the one that we will follow. Well, this does not sit well with the religious leaders



and they become enraged and want to kill them on the spot. But Gamaliel, a Pharisee has the apostles put outside so they could talk privately. He persuades them that if this movement is not of God, it will fail and dwindle away. If it is of God, then you will not be able to stop and you find yourself opposing God himself. They listen to him but end up beating the apostles and again charge them not to speak in the name of Jesus again before letting them go.

What is their response to being beaten and bullied? “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name (of Jesus Christ of Nazareth). Think about that for a moment. Put yourself in their shoes. Feel the pain of the beating still stinging and throbbing and bleeding. What might be your response? Furthermore, “every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” Counted worthy and continued preaching in teaching not just privately in homes but publicly in the temple court!! Our call to give witness to Jesus Christ of Nazareth is a fulltime call. It does not mean that we all become pastors and worship and youth discipleship leaders. It does mean that we all have the joyful responsibility of credibly and coherently imaging God wherever we are – at home, at work, at school, in the neighborhood – wherever. We are to be both verbal and visible witnesses in what we say and do.

Furthermore, and this is easy to say but very hard to grasp, we are to rejoice if we are persecuted for being a follower of Jesus Christ and counted worthy to suffer shame in his name. Let that sink in for a moment. In the United States, this is largely a foreign concept (not as much for minority Christians) where our country was founded on Judeo-Christian values and Christianity has enjoyed the majority opinion and favor of the people. That is eroding and no one knows how far it will go. In the end, it does not change our responsibility and mission to image God. It does mean that we will need to learn how to do that in a different environment than before – a more hostile environment. Skills in improvisational conversation around challenging topics (marriage, gender, government etc.) are vitally needed. Learning to listen well, clarify definitions and seek to build bridges of understanding will be important postures and skills to develop in order to witness well. We will need to put off unrighteous anger that seeks to hurt and tear down; hostile intentions that seek to dominate and overpower; prideful and arrogant assumptions of high status and mean and unkind words that shame and denigrate others. This is not the way of Jesus Christ. If we are to follow our leader, then we are to take the road of low status, serving, generosity, giving, kindness and patience with those who don’t know him (his feistier encounters are all with the religious leaders who have perverted the true gospel of the kingdom of God). We’ll need to confront false and fake versions of Christianity (including national and political distortions). This is a challenging time. Our words and actions matter. We are active participants in God’s divine drama and we will be held accountable for how we navigate this. We are not to be complacent and lazy, banking on a faith that is dead because it lacks the good works that always accompany faith that is alive. Let’s follow our leader well by training to be more like Jesus Christ of Nazareth and not some co-opted Americanized version of him.

Communion Meditation

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 – Because He Lives -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBvU7arNhQs>

I believe in the Son
I believe in the Risen One
I believe I overcome
By the power of His blood
Amen, Amen
I'm alive, I'm alive
Because He lives
Amen, Amen
Let my song join the one that never ends
Because He lives
I was dead in the grave
I was covered in sin and shame
I heard mercy call my name
He rolled the stone away
Amen, Amen
I'm alive, I'm alive
Because He lives
Amen, Amen
Let my song join the one that never ends
Because He lives
I can face tomorrow
Because He lives
Every fear is gone
I know He holds my life my future in His hands
Amen, Amen



I'm alive, I'm alive
Because He lives
Amen, Amen
Let my song join the one that never ends
Amen, Amen
I'm alive, I'm alive
Because He lives
Amen, Amen
Let my song join the one that never ends
Because He lives
Because He lives

Sending as Disciples of Jesus

As disciples of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, we are to follow him as our leader through the Holy Spirit. May we continue to strive to put off our old self and put on our new self in Christ.

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.