

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 7, 2017

Devoted—we may well have a good grip on what we are devoted to. I have a few different grippers here. I have these needle nose pliers. They are good for reaching a tight spot, not as good for getting a really good grip. Now you can get a better grip with these pliers (channel lock type), but more limited as to what you can reach. Then I have these, sort of a best of both worlds. These are needle nose vise-grips. You can reach some harder spots and still really clamp down. I use these quit a lot.

I have a couple of others to complete my set. Here I have a smaller pair of channel locks. I cleaned them up for the occasion. The handles were almost black. And then I have this set of tweezers. These will work if you are just looking for a pinch.

Today in our text we certainly see a show of devotion, quite a show from the members of the infant church. We witness their devotion as it is evidenced by their actions. What kind of devotion is evidenced by our actions?

It is a devoted bunch in our text, quite a bunch. It is from those 3000 that heard and were baptized on the day of Pentecost. They were devoted, busy, day by day. It was in the temple courts and even house by house for them. They were devoted to the Apostles' teaching, eager to hear the words of these men who had been with Jesus. These men were not only teaching; they were also doing signs and wonders. Yes, they were devoted to the teaching and to the fellowship. They must have been hanging on to the teaching, trying to get a better grasp of it. They were also devoted to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. This breaking of bread is likely a reference to receiving the Lord's Supper together. We learn also they were breaking bread in their homes. It's possible that also in

smaller groups (as opposed to their larger groupings in the Temple) they were receiving the Lord's Supper.

Yes, they were very devoted in their time. And we see they were very devoted in their resources. It seems pretty amazing to us. "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." (vs 44, 45) It looks like they had a grip on the right understanding of their gifts. So it was not a vise grip on their stuff. It was enough of a grip, enough to know their goods met their needs, but they were freed to see they could move the goods around as needed, put it in someone else's plate and let go. They were selling their stuff and doing good with it. What stuff? We are not told but later we learn some were selling land. It could have been valuables like gold, or silver, maybe expensive perfumes. They were doing good with the goods.

How is it with this bunch? How do we devote our time and resources? It is certainly not day to day gathering here. We do gather week by week remembering the Sabbath to keep it holy. We gather as God's people to receive the gifts He gives and we give back from what has been given in worship, prayers, and offerings. God promises to be here, why would I not want to be here? How's that working out? It's not a secret. I can see who is here and who is not. I can always check the attendance book if I want to know more. Of course that won't tell me everything. That won't indicate to me whether or not you are getting a grip on the Apostle's teaching somewhere else.

How is the devotion of the resources? Maybe this is where I need to give the trigger warning that I understand is being used on some college campuses. I'm going to refer to money. Well not only will I talk about, we look at it. You will find a chart on page 24 of your worship folder. What do we make of it? Well, to begin with, I don't think we want to

make too much of it. Yet there is information there right in front of us. The givers are not named though obviously we all have names. I know your names and I see the numbers, but I don't know which name goes with which number.

But let's take a look. For 2016 we see the highest 10 contributors gave \$106,054 out of \$162,371 or 65% of the total. So far this year the highest 10 gave \$29,893 out of \$43,893 or 64% of the total. For last year that was 10 out of 44 givers so the 65% came from 23% of the givers and so far this year 37 givers which means the 64% was from 27% of the contributors. You can also see our year to date budget numbers. You'll also see it has been adjusted—a little higher need than before.

We could play around with the numbers. You see we are \$279/week short of just over 9%. If everyone increased by 9%, now it has to be everyone, then we would be there. If 6 more started to give at \$45/week we would be close; 12 at \$25 even better. Yes, we can learn some things, make some observations, but these numbers are limited in what they will tell us.

We notice the verse, "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." (2 Corinthians 8:12) The numbers in this chart really tell us nothing about readiness. Are we latching onto our stuff with this (the vise grips)? That would certainly be questionable, no not even questionable, lack of readiness. When it comes to things of our Lord will the tweezer suffice? Just a pinch, thank you! If we are latching to our stuff with a vise grip than it is more of our possessions possessing us. It is wrong headed devotion.

We look back at the bunch in our text again. They understood devotion. They knew the Divine was devoted to them—totally. They had heard that message straight from the mouths of the apostles, even heard it in their own languages. They had heard of Jesus

crucified, of their part in the matter because of their sin. They had heard God had raised Him up and that He was seated at God's right hand. It was Jesus who had poured out the Holy Spirit. It was happening just like the prophet Joel had spoken. They had entered into the last days. They were cut to the heart, repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, totally. They had received the same Holy Spirit in baptism as had been poured out on the apostles. It was a life changing experience. It was even a life giving experience. God's kingdom had come among them and now they were serving as His royal priests! They were saved by grace through faith and now they were God's new creations. God was working through them to do His work.

God's devotion was total. Today emphasizes that as today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The Good Shepherd has come that we may have life and have it abundantly. Does this help explain what they were doing in Jerusalem? Did they apostles tell them the money given from the selling of their goods was seed money sown in faith from which they would reap a bountiful harvest, one that even included more goods? No, there was no such promise, but they heard and believed the Apostles' message. They had the abundance of forgiveness, the abundance of fellowship with brothers and sisters, an abundance of opportunities for service, and sometimes, as they would soon learn (and as Petr writes about in our Epistles from 1 Peter 2) an abundance of suffering for the faith. There was an abundance of opportunity to grow in the faith and they were taking advantage of it.

Do we understand how devoted our Lord is to us? We were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. (1 Peter 2:25) We have been redeemed from the futile way of life handed down to us from our forefathers. (1

Peter 2:24) We have died to sin and we live for righteousness (doing the right thing, like letting go of the death grip on our goods).

Divine devotion to us and now what? Is the readiness there? Again we look at that bunch of our text. We might ask, “Didn’t they have jobs?” Probably not all of them. If they were among the pilgrims who stayed from Passover till Pentecost they had not yet returned to their homeland. So, “no” they probably did not all have jobs. And others, sure they had jobs and responsibilities, but their actions showed they coveted time with the apostles and with one another.

So what about this bunch? If you go to page 26 you will see another table. You see I don’t have a number for givers. Ready givers are first fruit givers. We give from what the Lord has given, off the top, not from what we don’t have. As far as amount given you see we will have “enough.” And as far as finances available for ready gives you will also see “enough.” Joined together as God’s ready givers there will be enough for the work God puts before us. And there will be enough for our needs. And yes we will be rich, not in dollars or possessions necessarily, but in peace and joy.

So are you ready for readiness? “Well,” you say, “I’m not so sure about that, but I am ready for the message to be over.” Try it. It’s freeing! Be dedicated, not a tweezer tester and taster, but a locked in follower, dedicated to the Apostles’ teaching, to the breaking of bread and prayers. Be here next week, and the week after that, and the week after that, and if you are out of town gathered with like minded believers in that town. A vise grip on the this life can get in the way of the abundant life. That’s what Satan would delight in.

Yes, give it a try, God will lead. You have heard me say this before, but I guess you will have to hear it again. Nancy and I first gave first fruits giving a try in 1984. I believe it

was about this time of the year. We decided we would give 10% of what God gave us. It didn't seem so hard because when we started Nancy had just lost her job. It turned out there was enough. And as the years have gone by there has always been enough. We've been blessed to be able to increase that percentage.

Try it, be devoted to the Apostle's teaching, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. You see, really, it's about God's devotion to us, His unrelenting, saving, empowering, renewing, supplying devotion. For Jesus' sake. Amen