



NAC-USA  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

Apostles'  
Doctrine

Fellowship

The Breaking  
of Bread

Prayer

# MIDWEEK SCRIPT

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**2016**

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June

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## Session 1 – Apostles’ Doctrine

Hello and welcome to our first midweek experience for June. Last month we celebrated the feast of Pentecost. The activity of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost encouraged the apostles to go out and fulfill their commission to “make disciples of all nations.” The divine services in June explore the actions of the first apostles in various situations and congregations as they went about this task. Many of these “actions” are documented in the book of Acts, as this book is also known as the Acts of the Apostles.

One of the most well-known verses is Acts 2:42: “and they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The first Sunday divine service for June is based on this very verse.

The beginning of this verse says that “they continued steadfastly...” Why did the first Christians need to continue steadfastly and be devoted to the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer? Christianity was brand new! Many had just come to faith in Jesus on Pentecost through Peter’s teaching about Jesus. Verse 41 of this chapter indicates that about 3,000 were baptized that day. These new Christians devoted themselves to daily learning about Jesus because there was so much for them to learn, and the apostles had the knowledge because they were Jesus’ witnesses during His time on earth. They were there at the Sermon on the Mount; they heard the parables about the Kingdom of God; they had experienced life with Christ. The new Christians needed to learn of Him and what it meant to be His follower, and they did that by being devoted to the apostles’ doctrine, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

The four components of this verse have often been referred to as “the walls” of the church and we’ll be digging deeper into each of these “walls” during the four midweek experiences this month. In this first session, we’ll be exploring the apostles’ doctrine.

Before we dive into what the apostles’ doctrine **is**, it is important to understand what the apostles’ doctrine **is not**. The apostles’ doctrine **is not** a doctrine **about** the apostles, but rather the apostles’ doctrine refers to what the early apostles’ preached and taught. They taught about Jesus Christ.

Our Catechism explains that as Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, many who became Christians remained, at least in part, stuck in their previous religious or philosophical views. The fusion of these views with Christian doctrine resulted in heresies, or beliefs contrary to what the apostles were teaching, which caused uncertainty and insecurity among the believers. In particular, the doctrines of the Trinity and of the essence, or nature, of Jesus Christ ignited serious disputes. To counter this development, efforts were made to formulate a creed in order to bind the faith of the whole congregation, as well as the individual believers. A creed summarizes the essential content of a doctrine of faith. It is unifying and keeps the tenets of faith clear to the believers.

The Apostles’ Creed developed early in the history of Christianity, as the young faith began to grow. Many people were coming to believe in Christ, and the church needed a way to explain its most important doctrines. The basic tenets of the Apostle’s Creed were compiled in the second century and lightly supplemented in the fourth century. Some of its essential statements are based upon the sermon preached by Apostle Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10: 34–43), and though it was not written by the apostles, the Creed summarizes their teachings.

The Apostles’ Creed has the following wording:

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Did that sound familiar? It should! The Apostles’ Creed is the foundation for our first three Articles of Faith.

This creed was created to strengthen foundational consistency in Christian churches and also to protect against heresies being taught. A fundamental **part** of the Apostles' Creed is the apostles' doctrine referenced in Acts 2:42.

Simply put, the apostolic doctrine is the unadulterated message of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ, according to the teaching of the early Christian apostles, as demonstrated in the New Testament and as believed and practiced by the early Christians. This is one of the primary points that makes our church "apostolic" – we proclaim the apostolic doctrine!

The other element that makes our church "apostolic" is that we believe that the apostle ministry is active today. The apostolic ministry is the ministry given by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, with all its powers, namely to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, and forgive sins (Matthew 28: 19; John 20: 23). I want to introduce a word that potentially sounds perhaps a little funny: "apostolicity" The apostolicity of the church consists of these two components: first, the fact that it continues the proclamation of the apostolic doctrine, which is the death, resurrection, and return of Christ as attested in Holy Scripture, and second, that the apostle ministry has and will be active in it until the return of Christ.

The apostle ministry is the only ministry that Jesus ever instituted during His life on earth. The other ministries then proceeded from the apostle ministry. The important thing to understand is that ministries are not an end unto themselves, but rather serve to edify the church as the body of Christ.

As documented in Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church." The builder is thus Jesus Christ. It is also for this reason that the Chief Apostle and apostles understand themselves as existing in a relationship of complete dependency on Christ. They know and point to the fact that the whole process of growth of the body, the church, is affected and guided by the head, who is Christ. For this reason, we as apostles understand we are servants of all and not lords over the congregation. Through the activity of the apostles, we endeavor to help others to see and experience that Christ is active in His church.

So, in conclusion, the apostles' doctrine as referred to in Acts 2:42 is not teaching about apostles, but rather the unmodified message of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ, according to the teaching of the early Christian apostles, as demonstrated in the New Testament and as believed and practiced by the early Christians. This teaching lead to the creation of the Apostles' Creed in the second century. The Apostle's Creed was intentionally created to bring people together. It was not meant to be a defense of faith, but rather a succinct summary of what all Christians believe. When we say that we believe that Christ died, resurrected and will ultimately return, we are joining a global community that transcends borders and time. Finally, we believe that the apostles of today, just like the apostles of the early church, help us prepare ourselves for Christ's return by growing in the mind and spirit of Christ.

I invite you back to the next session when we'll explore the next component of Acts 2:42 and what it means to have "Christian fellowship."

## **Session 2 – Fellowship**

Last time, we began our month-long study of Acts 2:42 with a discussion about the first church being devoted to the apostles' teachings. In today's session we will talk about their devotion to fellowship.

Have you ever really thought about what the word "fellowship" meant to the people in the first church? The Greek term for fellowship means, "that which is shared in common." In the New Testament, this word was used to denote the believers' common participation with the Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, that is where Christian fellowship begins for us all – with our personal relationship with God, which we all have in common. In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul wrote, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." The Triune God has always been in fellowship. When Jesus came to the earth, He continued in fellowship with the Father and He showed the disciples also how to have a relationship with His Father. After His sacrificial work on the cross, the pathway was opened for mankind to share in fellowship with God. The unique, eternal fellowship within the

Triune God was manifested in time through the incarnation of the Son. Jesus introduced this fellowship to the apostles, and then through the apostles it was extended to each and every believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The community of believers is united by their fellowship with the Triune God. Jesus prayed for us all in John 17:20-21 – “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who **will** believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” By being participants in the grace of God, we all have something to share with our fellow believers.

Luke informs us in Acts that the church grew by great numbers during its early years. Acts 2:47 says that “the Lord added to their number **daily** those who were being saved.” How did that happen during a time when the people were under the rule of Romans and were very few in number? Growth happened because of the believers’ willingness to share their belief in Jesus Christ. That was the source of their conversation! Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection – along with the impact of His forgiveness and grace on each individual—was what they wanted to talk about. They reflected the love that they had received and shared their blessings to help others experience the love of Jesus. They shared all aspects of their lives, including time, food, housing, and their talents. They shared the good times and challenges of life. They celebrated together and they helped each other overcome trials.

The time we live in today is certainly much different than that of the first believers. Our world is much larger. The competition for our time is intense. Yet, our calling as Christians remains the same as it was in the beginning – to share our belief in Jesus Christ and to live as He taught us. We are not meant to live our Christian lives in isolation. We are meant to live out our lives of faith in the world that God has placed us in today. We do that by firstly being devoted to our fellowship with Him through listening to His Word, reading Scriptures, engaging in prayer, opening our hearts to the impulses of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately communing with Him in the sacraments. Then, being empowered by our fellowship with the Triune God, we extend love to our family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, and openly live out our faith.

A danger that we face today is that, due to the craziness of life, we forget about God and no longer include Him in our fellowship. We get together and we speak about everything else in life because Jesus has been pushed from the forefront of our thoughts. Sin and darkness can creep in and the unity of our fellowship becomes divided. 1 John 1:6-7 says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” Let’s take this message from Scripture to heart and keep Jesus at the center of our fellowship.

Our Christian fellowship is rooted in love and respect for others. Paul expressed that thought to the Philippians with these words: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4). When we approach our fellowship with each other with love and respect, then we will have the opportunity to experience the joy that those in the first church also experienced.

By being and remaining devoted to fellowship, we build up the church by strengthening our relationship with our God and with each other. When our fellowship is strong, we demonstrate our unity and then the light of our faith will shine for all to see and experience.

In our next session we will continue our discussion of Acts 2:42 and discover what it means to be steadfast in “the breaking of bread,” which will include many references to food. You just might want to bring something to share!

### Session 3 – The Breaking of Bread

Bread and wine – the two together are the sacred and material at once; heaven and earth; the divine and the daily. We'll take a look today at both the natural table that we sit around in our homes and the table of Christ that we are welcomed to each time we celebrate communion.

In ancient times, the breaking of bread often signified the beginning of a meal. When we read in Acts 2:42 that the first church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers,” we need to recognize that there is a double significance to the phrase “breaking of bread.” It speaks to both the daily partaking of an ordinary meal by this community of faith and also to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

The first church gathered daily in large groups in the temple for worship and instruction, and they also gathered in homes for fellowship, nurturing, and communion. The same is true for us today. We gather together in our churches in larger gatherings on Sunday for prayer, worship, and the instruction and teaching of God’s word. It is also necessary for us to gather around a table in our homes at other times for fellowship, caring for each other and connecting to each other and to God.

The Bible is filled with references to food: life changing forever because of a bite of fruit, an inheritance traded for a bowl of stew, waking up in the desert to the ground strewn with bread, water turning to wine, and above all, the Last Supper – where bread and wine would become permanently linked with the body and blood of Christ in the creation of a sacrament that remains a center point of our Christian faith.

For Jesus, the table and food were always linked with teaching. Sitting around the table of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, Jesus teaches us about choosing what is important, whether it is listening or anointing with oil. While dining with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus teaches us about our Physician and repentance. His feeding of the five thousand teaches us compassion, and the Last Supper teaches us about sacrifice and service. The breaking of bread with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus teaches us to trust in the promises of Christ. We could learn from Jesus’ example here. What happens around our tables, whether in small group, in our families, or when we invite friends and neighbors? Are Jesus’ teachings alive there? Are relationships built and formed, both naturally and spiritually? Food is important because while these experiences aren’t about the food itself, they wouldn’t have happened without it.

When we sit around a table, we embrace the joys and sorrows of those we love. We come to a table to feed one another and to be fed. It’s not surprising that when someone dies, the family is often overwhelmed with food. Food is the language of care that speaks when we have no words to say. Food is also the language of celebration. It’s what we offer at weddings, anniversaries, and other happy events. Food connects us, bears our traditions, envelops our sense of home and family, brings up our deepest memories, and allows us to live and breathe each day.

For the first Christians, their daily devotion to the breaking of bread was a way for them to remain intentionally focused on Jesus. This remains true for us today. When we eat, we should think of God and His provision in our lives. When we eat bread and drink wine, can’t we think of the body and blood of Jesus every time, not just at church? These constant reminders of Christ and His sacrificial love focus our attention on Him.

When we come to a table, we come because we are hungry. We come with a need and we allow someone else to fill that need. We allow ourselves to be fed. The same happens during communion. We come to Christ’s table with a need that we cannot fill on our own and **He** takes care of it. “This is my body which is broken for you,” Jesus says. “And this is my blood shed for you. Every time you eat this bread and drink this wine, remember Me.”

At the time of the Last Supper, all the disciples were gathered. Even in the face of betrayal, Jesus offered the bread and wine to Judas. We all come to the table with our sin. Maybe we are ashamed; maybe we feel unworthy; or maybe we have distanced ourselves from Christ. Jesus offers the bread and wine to all of us. His love for us is manifested in this meal.

Bread and wine – these building blocks of a common meal should be reminders to us: “Christ is here.” Every time we eat, every time we gather, every time the table is filled, we are reminded: “He is here.”

Please join me next time for the conclusion of our study of Acts 2:42 – remaining steadfast in prayer.

#### Session 4 – Prayer

Today we come to the last subject of our month-long study of Acts 2:42 – it is called “steadfastness in prayer.” Our prayer is the breathing of our soul. If we have difficulty breathing physically, it becomes difficult to sustain life. The same holds true for us spiritually. Prayer is the outlet for our soul and our spiritual exchange to our God and Father. It is a two-way function just like breathing is: something comes out and something goes in. When we pray to our Heavenly Father and pour out what lives in our souls, we can also expect to receive a feeling of peace, strength, and other impulses from God in return. David expressed these thoughts in the Psalms and we can see how God influenced him while he prayed. For example, in Psalm 13:1-2, David begins his prayer in despair, saying: “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” Then three verses later he concludes: “But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (v. 5-6).

The first verses are full of despair, but by the end, David expresses confidence in God’s will and is praising Him. We, too, can feel safe in expressing to God how we really feel, even if it is despair and frustration, knowing that He will give us His peace and His help.

However, we know that our prayers should not always focus on just ourselves. An important part of our prayer life is remembering those with whom we have fellowship in our congregations, our families, our communities, and those we have come into contact with in various ways. Today I would like to highlight one special group that is in need of salvation and that our prayers can help: the souls that have entered into eternity. Within days we celebrate again a service for the departed, and while these services only happen three times per year, they are an integral part of our New Apostolic faith. We might wonder from time to time what all is involved and how these souls can receive help. Is there a way that the departed can receive salvation? Our Catechism explains very nicely that Jesus Christ is Lord over both the dead and the living, and it is the will of God that ALL men shall be saved.

We are surrounded by a visible and invisible world. Man is a physical and spiritual being, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. At one time in our life, our physical body comes to an end, resulting in our natural death. It is our belief that the spiritual being with soul and spirit enter into the invisible world and the realms of the departed. Our Chief Apostle mentioned on Easter that our natural death is not the end of everything, but our souls continue on in eternity waiting for when Jesus Christ will return. This future scene is portrayed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of an Archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first! Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord.”

We have further evidence of the availability of salvation for the dead in 1 Peter 3:19-20, when Jesus himself, after His death, visited the souls in Noah’s time and showed them that there is help for their eternal salvation. His “preaching” implied an opportunity to change the condition for those souls who accepted His teaching of salvation in faith. This shows us that souls can also attain their salvation in the realms of the departed.

A soul’s condition upon entering the beyond is based on either their proximity to God or their remoteness from God. Souls do not change immediately from an unbeliever to a believer, from a soul filled with hatred to a lover of Jesus Christ, from an unforgiving nature to a reconciled soul. No... a soul enters into the beyond in the exact same spiritual condition as he or she lived on earth. But there is hope: the same message of the apostles’ doctrine that we hear in the divine services and the offer of the sacraments are also available to the souls in eternity! When we hear God’s word in the services, we examine ourselves and are often admonished to change and live according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the same preaching, the departed can also become aware of their conditions and the need to change.

There is also an opportunity for the souls in the departed to partake in the sacraments. You might have witnessed that our Chief Apostle and the District Apostles celebrate Holy Communion for the departed every Sunday by utilizing two ministers as proxies. In the services for the departed, which take place three times per year, they **also** invite the souls

which the Lord has prepared in eternity for Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing, in addition to Holy Communion. Just as Jesus Christ brought His sacrifice on earth, salvation is imparted here on earth through the apostolate. Jesus commissioned His apostles to continue His work of salvation, by offering the sacraments of Holy Baptism with Water, Holy Sealing, and Holy Communion. Jesus' words to Nicodemus are valid for all, "Unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The same holds true for the souls in eternity. As I mentioned at the beginning, Jesus Christ is Lord over the dead and living.

Now, what can **we** do to help the souls in the departed? The answer lies in our topic today from Acts 2:42 – continue steadfastly in prayer. If we ask and plead with our Heavenly Father on behalf of these souls, would that not touch His heart? We have heard many times that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Our intercessory prayers to the Lord will make a difference for the many unredeemed souls so that they can believe in Jesus Christ and His teachings and accept a willingness to change their condition and accept salvation. However, let us be clear, we can only intercede to God. Redemption can only happen through Jesus Christ Himself. We ALL, here on earth as well as in the beyond, completely live by His grace.

Our prayers should include intercession for the departed not only before the service for the departed, but also as a part of our everyday lives. Just as we include our neighbors and our friends with whom we have visible fellowship, let us also include our "invisible" neighbors and friends who are in need of salvation and grace, just as we are.

I wish you a day filled with joy and peace in the service for the departed, and may you truly feel part of a wonderful work in a world that is still visibly hidden from us until Jesus Christ will return.