

Priorities of a Spirit-Filled Church

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. I'm Jim Wieslowski.

I'm a member of the North Berkeley Community Group. Today we're reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, beginning at verse 42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

[1 : 14] And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. One day, Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, Look at us. So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

But Peter said, Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up. And instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

[2 : 14] Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful.

And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

When Peter saw this, he said to them, Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

[3 : 21] We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man who you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please take a seat. Good morning, Christ Church. It's good to be with you today. And last Sunday, someone asked my wife, Catherine, are you hugging yet? And that's such a great question right now.

I met somebody for the first time this past Monday. We've both been fully vaccinated. And I shook his hand. And we both stood there like, okay, this is really strange. We haven't done this in a really

long time.

We had our soul care retreat last Saturday. And I said, hey, why don't we just mingle for a minute before lunch comes? And everybody kind of froze like, what is mingling? And it was like, hey, this is where you talk to the human beings around you.

[4 : 35] So back to this question, are you hugging yet? Yeah, we're all just kind of these awkward middle schoolers right now, right?

We're trying to learn after a year of being so socially distanced, so socially disconnected, how to be together again. And the answer for us is, yes, we are hugging again.

And all the different kinds of hugs. You know, this morning I gave somebody the side hug, which is like the, hey, let's keep this brief, casual, and relaxed hug. You know, somebody gave me a quick hug earlier.

It's like a quick tap out hug, you know? And some of us give the T-Rex hug sort of right here. And some of us give the seventh grade dance hug, which is like out here.

And some of us give the London Bridge hug where we kind of lean in and it's polite, but still a little formal and cold. All these hugs, we are willing to give the bear hug, the bro hug, where you come in, clasp the double tap on the back.

[5 : 34] Whatever hug you feel comfortable with, I just want to give us permission right now to ask that question of each other. Because California is doing the best in the nation with COVID.

Praise God, right? Vaccines are on the rise. Disneyland open on Friday. And we should be dancing in the streets, whether you like Disney or not. I don't know. But God has answered our prayers.

We've asked him to help us with this. And I think that we can lean in and ask each other, are you hugging? Are you hugging yet? But speaking of hugging and of dancing in the street, we talked last week about Pentecost.

And we talked about what is it that happens when the Holy Spirit comes on his people. And what we saw is that the Holy Spirit launched a ministry of speaking about the wonderful works of God in ways that were understandable and relevant to everybody who heard them.

And 3,000 people were converted on the day of Pentecost and brought into the church on day one. It was from that time, over the next three centuries, that the church grew explosively in Greco-Roman culture, Asian culture, African culture, Middle Eastern culture, totally upended and changed the way everybody thought and everybody imagined reality to be.

[6 : 59] But Christianity, of course, was not just a new set of ideas. Christianity was a new community centered around one person, the living, resurrected Christ.

And these first Christians were marked not by a momentary enthusiasm. There was kind of this flash in the pan that quickly faded away. And maybe you've had that experience where you had a spiritual high, but it never really materialized and took root in long-term commitments.

But in this church, we see a portrait of how the Holy Spirit comes and becomes authentically embodied in the life of a community over time. And so what are the marks of a living church? What does Jesus want his church to be like? As we go back to the beginning, go back to take a fresh look at this first spirit-filled church in history in Jerusalem, I want to encourage us not to idealize or romanticize the church, but to be realistic.

Not to look at it with tinted spectacles or speak of it in hushed tones. Because if we do that, we'll miss all of its problems. Right? We'll miss all of its rivalries and hypocrisies.

[8 : 11] All of its immoralities and its heresies that marred the early life of the church and which mars the church today. But despite all of these failures, despite all of these blemishes, these men and women and children were filled with the Holy Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And what was the evidence that they had the presence of the Holy Spirit? What were the marks of that living church? And how does that bear on Christ's church as we reopen and we reopen our doors?

We reweave our community. We relaunch our ministry. And what I want to say is that Acts chapter 2 tells us that spirit-filled Christians live up to God, live into the church, and live out to the world.

That's what we see in this story, that spirit-filled Christians live up to God, live into the church, and live out to the world. And when you read the Gospels, you see this in Jesus' life on every page.

He had three great loves. He was living his life up to the Father, in with his disciples, and out with the crowds. And so it's no surprise that we see the loves of Jesus and the life of Jesus being imitated and being replicated and reproduced in the life of his disciple community.

[9 : 25] So first of all, spirit-filled Christians live up to God. What does that mean? Well, we're told in verse 42 that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So this was a learning church that desired the deep truths of God and the wonderful works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that came through the apostles.

When the Holy Spirit came, it's like he opened a school there in Jerusalem, and the teachers of that school were the apostles whom Jesus chose and trained, and the students of that school were all these 3,000 converts that enrolled in the kindergarten there on the day of Pentecost.

Spirit-filled Christians were not just enjoying mystical experiences with God that caused them to neglect their intellect or stop thinking or to despise theology.

But the fullness of the Spirit had them engaging their minds in the truth of divine revelation that we find in the Holy Scriptures. Do you know Jesus' favorite name for the Holy Spirit?

He loved to call the Spirit the Spirit of truth. And you know that you have the Holy Spirit when you spend time seeking the truth about Jesus.

[10 : 39] But these early Christians, they didn't say, well, we have the Holy Spirit now as our only teacher, and so we don't need any human teachers any longer. No, they sat at the feet of the apostles, eager to learn all that they could.

If the apostles had podcasts and YouTube, these Christians would have been gobbling up all that content, and not just for the sake of information, but for the sake of imitation.

Right? If Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, then please teach us how to walk in the way, how to trust the truth, how to live his life.

The apostles are the authoritative teachers that Jesus taught, and so to sit at their feet is to have Jesus teaching us through his apostles and through the Holy Spirit.

Don't you wish you could have been there to be a part of these sessions as the apostles interpreted the Bible and as they talked about the works of Jesus and all the words of Jesus and the ways of Jesus?

[11 : 40] Jesus, but in many ways we can be there because all of that has been written down for us in the New Testament. And what is this apostles' teaching all about?

It's about the love of God the Father. It's about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. What the apostles teach us is that the Father who made us, sent his Son to deliver us, who sent the Spirit to transform us.

The apostles teach us how to have a living relationship with the living God. And so Christians submit our reason, we submit our experience to these scriptures, to the special revelation of God to guide us in interpreting history, to guide us in how to live our lives, to guide us in the way we engage with our culture.

So what we see here is the Spirit of God leads the people of God to submit to the Word of God. That's the first mark of an authentic, living church.

I read this from N.T. Wright this week, who's a great New Testament scholar. He says, And that's a grave danger for us, living in the secular Bay Area, to become secularists with a little bit of Jesus sprinkled on top.

[13 : 21] But what we see is that Spirit-filled Christians devote their time to the deep truths, to learn the truths, to digest the truths that Jesus gave to these apostles.

And I'm not sure we could call ourselves apostolic Christians or call ourselves an apostolic church if we spend zero to five minutes every day in the apostles' teaching.

But what I do want to suggest is that we all committed ourselves to spending 30 minutes a day.

Dare I say, 60 minutes a day in the apostles' teaching, we would have a revival breakout.

We would have a massive spiritual awakening breakout among us. But this is not just a church that's learning about the triune God. They're also worshiping the triune God.

Because it says, They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. And then it goes on in verse 46, and it says, Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

[14 : 23] They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God. The prayers there are not private prayers, but they're prayer services, prayer meetings.

And they met to do that both in the temple and in their homes. And so we see the church had this balance of the structured and the unstructured, the formal and informal, the organized and organic, the traditional and the spontaneous.

And really we need both. If all you have is your community group at home, you really, really need the whole of the congregation gathered at the temple.

If all you have is the congregation of the temple, you really, really need a smaller group of people gathered together studying God's word and praying together in a home, or in our case, on a Zoom screen.

When they gathered together, they worshipped God. And that worship was marked by a reverent rejoicing. We're told they had glad hearts as they praised God.

[15:27] That word there means that they had an exuberant, unfiltered joy. Because God the Father has sent His Son and sent His Spirit to save us, so how could we not be joyful?

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy. Sometimes, have you ever been to a Christian worship service and you think, oh no, I think I've come into a funeral by accident.

You know, nobody's smiling, nobody's laughing, the music is way too slow, in the minor key. It's just this mournful lamentation and dirge.

And I think to myself, man, cheer up. Jesus died, but guess what? Jesus is risen from the dead, so where's your joy?

Where's your enthusiasm? They were rejoicing, it says, but they were also filled with awe. They were filled with awe because the presence and the power of this high and holy God had come among them and was doing great works to transform the lives of people in their very midst.

[16:33] And so the fear of God fell upon them. You should know that on Tuesdays at 11 a.m., our staff gathers for our worship planning meeting.

And right now, the main question on our minds is, okay, we haven't sung together in over a year. That's like a muscle we haven't exercised. So what are the heart songs of Christchurch?

The songs that are going to get us to sing together and not just sing timidly, but to sing boldly and robustly and loudly and joyfully and with one voice. What are the songs that are just going to free us up a little more to clap our hands?

I know a couple of you did that this morning. We clapped our hands. We raised our hands. What are the songs that will cause us to bow our heads before God or to get our feet moving or to grasp our heart in just awe and wonder for God?

And Christchurch, just as I want to give you permission to ask, are you hugging yet? I give you permission to worship with reverent rejoicing. With rejoicing reverence. That's what our souls really, really need right now.

[17:39] So what we see is the spirit-filled Christians, they live their life up to God. But we don't just live our life up to God. We live our life into the church. We live our life into the church.

And I want you to note all the plurals of this passage. They, they, they, they, they, together, together, together, everyone, all, anyone. These first Christians were not living in isolation, but they said, we need each other.

And so when they devoted themselves, what that means is that they committed that most precious resource of their time to be together. Not just one morning on a Sunday.

Not just one evening during the week. We're told that every day they met together. And what were they doing when they gathered? They had these consistent, continual, persevering patterns.

It's no wonder that they had such a resilient faith. And that they turned the Roman Empire upside down. This church said, this group of people, this community is more important than any other potential time investment.

[18:49] More than entertainment. More than sports. Yes, we are resolved among ourselves to discipline our time so that the people of God are our top priority.

And they made predictable patterns to be sure that was the case. And when they came together in the morning, in the evening, before and after church, what did they do? Well, we already saw they engaged in the word and prayer.

But now we're also told they devoted themselves to the fellowship. To the fellowship. And that word *koinonia* is so often misunderstood as hanging out over coffee.

And that's what fellowship is. But fellowship is something much deeper than that. It means sharing in common. And what were they sharing together? They were sharing the grace of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They were sharing in the divine, eternal life of God himself. They were sharing in the abundant life of the resurrected Jesus. And it was that common participation in God that gave them a common

life together.

[19 : 52] It was the tuning fork of Jesus in their lives. And Jesus' love in their lives. That then worked out among themselves a common love for and care for and support and service toward each other.

And that's what we see in verse 44. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. And when needs would arise, they practiced radical, voluntary generosity. Thinking to themselves, you know, the Father shared His Son.

And the Son shared His life with us. And so we are going to mirror God's gracious generosity by sharing our gifts to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And I think that's a question for us right now. Do we know Christ Church? Not just our little slice of Christ Church, but do we know the family of Christ Church well enough to know her needs?

[20 : 57] And are we positioned in such a way that we say, you know, God has given this gift to me in order to be able to meet your need? Part of their caring was sharing meals together as the family of God.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of the bread, it says. And they would practice the Lord's Supper. And they would experience that as the living Lord inviting them, saying, you are welcome and you are wanted into a personal relationship with me.

And then they would extend that welcome and that hospitality out into what they called agape feast or love feast, where they would say, you and you and you.

You are welcomed and you are wanted into a personal relationship with me. This is Jesus' entire ministry, really, is going from one meal to the next meal to the next meal.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner, from a drink with this person to a snack with this person. This is how Jesus welcomed people into the new family of his father.

[22 : 08] You know, some people say that the greatest miracle that Jesus performed was having 12 close friends in his 30s. Right? And how did he do that? He did it by breaking bread.

And every meal was a sign of unity, solidarity, and deep friendship. I want to suggest to Christchurch that as vaccinations rise and California is going to reopen very soon in June, and we're rebuilding our post-COVID lives, I want us to be asking ourselves, what are our predictable patterns?

We're going to be asking ourselves on Wednesday nights or on Saturday nights to whatever night of the week to open up our patio, to open up our table to break bread with our church family.

And if you're thinking right now of only your circle of friends at Christchurch or the people you like, I want to say that God has people here for you that you don't know or that you don't like that he wants you to break bread with.

When Jesus commands us in the New Testament to welcome one another, what that means is to aggressively receive one another into our lives like Jesus did for us.

[23 : 17] Right? When Jesus took hold of you with initiative, when he expressed special interest and concern for you and brought you in with acceptance and affection, that's what we're doing when we're breaking bread with one another.

Given the deep disconnection, the deep, deep disconnection that this pandemic has brought into our lives, I think we need to take a page from Jesus' playbook, to take a page from the regular rhythms of these first Christians and make as our summer project at Christchurch to eat as many meals as we can with as many people as we can.

You guys up for that? Now some of you introverts are like, no! But look at Jesus, look at the church, yes! I want you to pull out our church directory.

It's on our website, you can pull it up on your church center app. You can scroll through all the people that you don't know at Christchurch. Maybe some of you start down at the bottom end so we don't just invite the A's.

But say, Lord, who do you want me to invite to coffee? Who should I get together with for lunch? Lord, who needs to come and share our pizza and our wine this week? Who should take part in our tacos and beer night?

[24 : 35] And as you do that, think about mixing and matching. Who doesn't know each other? If we're going to be a family, we've got to act like a family. And families that stick together eat

together.

When you do that, I would encourage you to say a blessing. And say, God, would you make this table into a holy place? Lord, would you make this bread breaking into a sacred act?

Lord, would you give us here and now a foretaste of what you were talking about when you said, one day you're going to eat and drink with me at my table in my kingdom? Because every time we break bread together, that's what we're looking forward to.

That's what we're building our lives around. Spirit-filled Christians live our lives up to God. And we live our lives into the church.

But we don't just live our lives up to God and into the church. We live them out to the world. So far, I've talked about the biblical teaching of the Presbyterians and the worshiping of the Pentecostals and the Catholics.

[25 : 38] I've talked about the caring of the Lutherans and the bread breaking of the Anglicans. But you know what we're missing so far? The evangelizing of the Baptists. We're missing the mercy ministry of the Methodists.

If all we talk about is the interior life of the church, we will have said nothing about the compassionate outreach of the church to those beyond our community. If you isolate this verse, 42, and you think that you have a comprehensive view of the church, you will have said nothing about the world and all of its pain and all of its tragedy.

But listen to what verse 47 says. It says, The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Without that verse, without this story of healing and proclamation that comes in Acts 3 and the whole rest of the book of Acts, the church is like the Dead Sea.

All input with no outlet. A church that's devoted only to nurturing her interior life becomes a privatized cul-de-sac.

A one-way, dead-end street. Now, some people overcorrect that and focus only on the exterior life of the church, which I promise you that leads only to burnout and exhaustion, like a body without food.

[26 : 56] But what I want you to see for just a minute as we close is that the Lord added to their number those who were being saved, those who were being rescued. What does that mean?

Saved from what? Rescued to what? We said last week that the risen, living, contemporary Christ looks at us in our bondage and in our weakness.

He looks at us who are bound up in sin and under the weakness of the shadow of death. And He makes two promises to us. He promises to give us freedom and power.

He promises to give us the freedom of being forgiven because of His life and death in our place.

And He promises to give us the power of the Holy Spirit who can come in and do what we can't do for ourselves, to give us life, to give us the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience and all of those things.

And so, Christchurch, I want us to think about, as we go through the book of Acts, I want us to look at all the people around us in our lives through these two lenses of freedom and power.

[28 : 06] Freedom and power. God has intentionally placed you in the lives of friends, neighbors, and co-workers that think they don't need God. And it's no accident that you may be the only Christian in their lives, right?

And here they are. They're made in the image of God. They're living in the creation of God. They are on an intense quest for freedom and power.

A freedom and power that's beyond this world that no one, nothing can give them but God alone.

And God has put you in their lives to help them discover that. And so the first step of evangelism is just to believe this.

To trust that God is at work in their lives and in your life and their lives. And the second step of evangelism, I would say, is to begin to pray for them, our Father in heaven.

May your kingdom come and your will be done in this neighbor's life, in this co-worker's life, in this friend's life, as it is in heaven.

[29 : 12] Lord, would you open a door of opportunity to build a relationship of trust with this person? Lord, would you open my mouth at some point to just speak the powerful name of Jesus to this person?

Lord, would you open their heart to see that the freedom and power they want comes through Christ? And I would say the third step of evangelism is to just invite those people to our tables and

ask them good questions and be good listeners.

Hey, where do you think most people are trying to find freedom and power in their lives these days?

In what ways are you seeking liberation and empowerment? How's that working for you?

How's that going in your life? And then I would say the fourth step of evangelism is to step out with boldness and to say, you know what?

Jesus has given me a freedom to know God as my Father who accepts me and forgives me. And so I'm no longer walking around wondering if I'm good enough or if I am doing enough or if people are going to like me or like what I do because that's already been settled for me.

[30 : 24] I'm just, I've been liberated by the love of God as my Father. And what's more, I have a new power that I didn't have before. Before I could never say no to myself, but now the Holy Spirit's come into my life and I can not only say no to me, I can say yes to people I used to despise and look down on and think that were beneath me.

I serve Trump supporters now. I mean, I serve people that like Joe Biden as if, you know, everything he says is great. I'm amazed at what God is doing in my life to give me freedom and power and just say, hey, I'd love to talk with you more about that if you're open to that.

But Christ Church, I just, I wonder. I wonder what would happen if we began to act and to talk with a little more of the boldness, a little more of the faith that we see in these first Christians because this pandemic has people around us that are starving for love, starving to be loved by us.

This pandemic has people in a search mode, a spiritual search mode for a freedom and power that they know they haven't found yet and that probably doesn't lie within the bounds of this world.

And Jesus, Jesus has given us freedom and he's given us power and he's given us the ability to share that with other people. So if we would humble ourselves, if we would seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, seek the direction of the Holy Spirit, seek the energy of the Holy Spirit, I believe, I believe that God would do the amazing things that we see him doing here in this first church, adding to their number on a regular basis, adding to our number on a regular basis, those like us who are being rescued, who are being saved.

[32 : 16] This is a spirit-filled church. Isn't this what we want? To be a spirit-filled church that lives our lives up to God and into the church and out to the world.

If that's what we want, I pray that God would give us the deepest desires of our heart. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.