

A Devoted, Joyful Church

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning and happy Trinity Sunday.

I'm Tonya and I'm a part of the Oikos in the Oaks and the Women Reading Women Friday monthly book group. Today's scripture reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verse 8, chapter 2, verse 14a, and verses 37 through 47 as printed in liturgy.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other disciples, Brothers, what shall we do?

[1 : 14] Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promises for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

With many other words he warned them and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. Those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

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 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. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

[2 : 23] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Tonya, for that reading. Well, we're considering the question, what is the Christian church?

What is the church's nature? What's the church's message? What's the church's mission? Who are Christians? What are they supposed to do?

If we want to know the answers to those questions, we need to look at the origins of the church. We need to go back to the beginning and discover how the church started, what the church did.

And what do we find in the Acts of the Apostles? We've been just kind of marinating in this text for several weeks now. What we find is really the only divinely inspired authoritative account of the Christian church.

If you want to know the identity of the church, the task of the church, the character of the church's proclamation, you need to look at the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of the Apostles in the New Testament.

[3 : 34] Because here we have an authoritative statement about what Christianity is and what it really means to be a Christian. This is God's blueprint for the church.

And it's not just an exercise in theory. It's a blueprint against which we can test ourselves and we can examine ourselves.

And we can make sure that we're Christians. We can look at these marks and characteristics of the Christian church and what it's meant to be. And we can ask, am I like that?

Are we like that? Do we conform to this pattern that they've set? Is this true of us? Is this the sort of thing that we do and are planning to do?

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, he said, Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and not tried. And so what we want to do is explore this difficult thing called Christianity.

[4 : 41] And we want to try to do it. And so we want to ask the question today, what are the marks of a healthy church? What are the marks of a living church? And I want to talk about five things today.

And don't worry, I've got a plane to catch this afternoon. So I got to get out of here. But we're going to talk about a learning church, a caring church, a worshipping church, a praying church, and an evangelizing church.

A learning, caring, worshipping, praying, and evangelizing church. I want to start with a learning church. And just look back at verse 41. One, that those who accepted the apostle Peter's message, that Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

Those who accepted his message were baptized. And about 3,000 were added to their number that day. And it says they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

On Pentecost, the resurrected Jesus poured out the spirit of truth. And the result was about 120 disciples who were praying there on Pentecost Sunday.

[5 : 49] They began to declare the wonderful works that God had done to save humanity through his son, Jesus. And one of those disciples stood up, Peter, the apostle Peter.

And he preached the first Christian sermon. And as a result, 3,000 people were called by God. They were baptized by God. They were saved by God. They were added to the number of the church by God that we talked about last week.

And it says that they immediately devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. Which means that they were hungry and they were thirsty for doctrine. They wanted to, and they had a deep desire to learn the truths.

That Jesus had given to his apostles, Peter, John, Matthew, that he was going to give to the apostle Paul. These spirit-filled Christians, they didn't just stop thinking on Pentecost.

And go, wow, we're filled with the spirit. Don't have to think anymore. They didn't neglect their intellect. They didn't check their brains at the door. Therefore, they didn't despise theology.

[6 : 59] Rather, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth, came and made their minds begin to feast on the truth. Of the divinely inspired and authoritative revelation of God that's given to us in the scriptures.

And was interpreted for us by Jesus and by his apostles. And this really started, you can go back to Easter Sunday. Jesus, he was raised from the dead.

And what's one of the first things he does? He finds two people and he says, let's do a Bible study. This is Easter Sunday afternoon, okay? If you're raised from the dead, are you starting a Bible study that afternoon?

Jesus went and he found two people, started a Bible study. And it says in Luke 24, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

And Jesus said, he said, everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms. He'd been doing this for three years.

[7 : 58] But when somebody's raised from the dead, you start really paying attention to the Bible study, right? And don't you wish you had been there? Jesus pulls out the Old Testament, as it were, and he says, look, this is all about the promises that God made.

And you, my apostles, are going to go and write the New Testament about how all those promises of God have been fulfilled in me. In my life, in my death, in my resurrection.

In Acts chapter 1, we learn that Jesus spent the next 40 days after his resurrection. He spent 40 days, all day, every day with his apostles.

And it says he was teaching them about the kingdom of God. Teaching them about that grand theme of the Bible. That God is king and he's bringing everything under his kingship through Jesus. Well, the apostles would do what Jesus told them to do. Which is that they would go on and they would write it all down. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

[9 : 02] Romans. First and second Corinthians. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. First and second Thessalonians.

First and second Peter. First John. Hebrews. All of it is the apostles' teaching. It's the teaching that Jesus gave to us through the apostles. And a Christian is somebody who feasts on that.

And they didn't just learn this teaching for one hour a week. It says in verse 46 that every day they continued to meet together.

They came together regularly and willingly day by day. When they finished their day's work. They go to one another's house. And they would study the Bible. Because they were hungry and thirsty for the truth.

They were eager to sit at the feet of the apostles and learn. And they would say, tell us, how is Jesus our prophet and our priest and our king? How did Jesus in his death, how did he bring God's covenant with his people to a climax?

[10 : 06] How did Jesus in his resurrection launch the kingdom of God? How did Jesus in his life? How did Jesus in his life? What are the, if this is true, how should we then start living?

If that's true. And this is what they were devouring. Every day was the doctrine of God's word so they could apply it to their lives.

And let's just pause here for a little bit of application. If you're exploring Christianity and you do not yet have a modern translation of the Bible, we want to give you one of those because we're really excited about it.

We think it's great that we have the Bible in our own language and we can have a copy in our hands. We would love to give you a copy. And we'd love to encourage you to start reading the Gospel of Mark.

And just read the shortest of the stories of Jesus that we have. Read it with a Christian friend. Read it with a group of people. We actually have an exploring Christianity group that's been meeting on Thursday night.

[11 : 07] They would love to welcome you this week to explore the Gospel of Mark. Secondly, if you are a person who's wanting to learn the big picture of the Bible and the golden thread of the Bible and the great themes of the Bible, I brought a stack of about six of my favorite children's Bibles today.

And I found that these are not just good for children. They're wonderful for adults, especially if you like pictures in your books. These are phenomenal Bibles and I'd encourage you to get one if you don't have one.

And it's a great way to learn the Bible. But also if you're a parent, if you're a grandparent, I just want to encourage you that part of your, if you're a Christian, part of your duty, part of your responsibility is to get your kids or your grandkids on a daily IV drip of the apostles' teaching.

And if you don't have a way to do that, I've got a way for you to do that. Third point of application is that if you're a newer Christian and you're trying to build your life on a solid foundation, think about the fact that they devoted themselves to gather together before work and after work on a daily basis to learn the apostles' teaching.

They literally could not imagine owning their own copy of one of these and having it at their fingertips. And they also couldn't imagine owning one of these but only reading it one day a week.

[12 : 36] So, if that's you, if you're not, if you've got one of these but you don't really open it very often, I think Peter and the other apostles will say, you're not yet devoted to the apostles' teaching.

And if you read it about five minutes a day, that's better than nothing. But I think these first Christians on the day of Pentecost would come to you and they would say, why are you starving yourself?

Why are you dehydrating yourself? Aren't you hungry? Aren't you thirsty? Fourth point of application is that if you're one of those solo Christians, Lone Ranger Christians, and you're not yet part of a weekly small group that's reading the Bible together and exploring the Bible together, I want to encourage you to make that a top priority this summer.

Because we won't grow without other Christians. We need other Christians to help us learn about the love of God the Father and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

We need other Christians to help us develop a personal relationship with this God, the Father who made us and the Son who delivers us and the Holy Spirit who transforms us.

[13 : 45] We need other Christians who can help us learn what it means to submit my reason and to submit my experience to something greater than my reason and my experience.

to God's authoritative word, which is our only infallible rule for faith and practice. We need other Christians to help us think through all of those downstream moral implications and all those downstream ethical consequences of the gospel.

What does it mean to live my life in line with the gospel? What does it mean to live a life worthy of the gospel? You're not going to figure that out on your own. And my fifth point of application is that if you're a more established Christian, I want to remind you of something you probably already know, which is that the verse 42 is a divinely inspired order.

The teaching and the doctrine is first and most important in all the marks of the church in this series. Why is that? Because the teaching defines and the teaching controls and the teaching determines everything else in the life of the church and the life of a Christian.

And when the church lowers the authority of the teaching, and when the church puts something else at its center, the problems that follow are sadly predictable.

[15 : 14] If you know anything about the New Testament or the history of the church, if a church tries to substitute ethics for doctrine, or politics for the gospel, or philosophies and isms for the apostles' teaching, the church is in serious danger.

And the apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus about this. He says in Ephesians 4, he says, it's possible to be tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, every wind of doctrine, and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming.

If you want to get a sense for the problems that arise when churches lower the authority of the teaching and they put something else at the center, read Galatians. Read Corinthians.

Paul's worked up because the church has gotten into a mess. I have the privilege the next few days of going to a gathering of pastors.

We're going to be with a great teacher from the University of Oxford. His name's N.T. Wright. He's a great Bible scholar. And he writes this. He says, where no attention is given to teaching and to constant, lifelong Christian learning, people quickly revert to the worldview or mindset of the surrounding culture and end up with their minds shaped by whatever social pressures are most persuasive with Jesus somewhere around as a pale influence or memory.

[16 : 45] And because we don't want that to happen at Christ Church, we put together some classes this summer, this fall, and we hope that they'll help you learn the apostles' teaching. We hope that you'll take advantage of these great opportunities.

But we see that clearly we're called to be a learning church. But also we're called to be a caring church. We're called to be a caring church. Look at verse 42.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship. The message of the apostles, the message of Peter, led to this inward change.

And then that inward change was expressed outwardly through these 3,000 baptisms. And the reason they immediately devoted themselves to the teaching and to fellowship is because these people had been born again from above by the Holy Spirit.

This is how Peter puts it. Peter who preached that sermon, he wrote a letter called 1 Peter. And he says in 1 Peter 2, he says, like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

[17 : 54] That's what fellowship is about. Fellowship is about having the same cravings. Fellowship is about being a bunch of newborn babies that are growing up to become like Jesus.

You see, that word fellowship has become so watered down that, and so, so shallow, so superficial that we think the word fellowship means that we'll gather together two or three Sundays a month.

We'll get together in a church building. We will shake hands. We'll do a thing for about an hour.

We'll have a cup of coffee. We'll be friendly and nice and we'll go home. We'll come back and we'll do it again.

But the word koinonia in Greek, that word koinonia means a deep sharing in common. And what is it that we share in common?

Peter says we're newborn babies who are sharing the same new life. We're sharing in the same cravings for the same nourishment.

[19 : 00] and we've been born of the same spirit. We've been regenerated. We've experienced the new birth. We've had the divine life of God the Father planted in our souls so that we now are members.

We're sons and daughters of a royal family. We're rejoicing in the same king and the same savior. That's the koinonia. We share Jesus together and we delight in the same message about Jesus. We delight in the same teaching of Jesus. We've come into this realm of grace so that we share in the resurrection life of Jesus.

We share in the righteousness of Jesus and all of our eyes are fixed on the same person and on the same thing. We're looking out to where we're going. We're looking out to the eternal glory for which we're preparing ourselves.

that is what fellowship means. That's what we share in common. The new life of God. The new cravings for God and that cannot help but express itself and that's why they were meeting together every morning and every evening before and after work because they said to themselves if we've been united by these eternal bonds in the spirit with Jesus and in the presence of the Father well we've got to express that in real life and that's why the Apostle John said in 1 John 3 he said we know that we pass from death to life because we love the brothers and we love the sisters and from that moment that those 3,000 were converted and baptized nothing could keep them away from Christian fellowship.

[20 : 45] Nothing of lesser worth nothing of lesser priority was going to crowd out or distract them from Christian fellowship because it had become the biggest thing it had become the deepest thing in their lives and how do we know that?

Well look at verse 44 it says all the believers were together and had everything in common they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. they put their money where their mouth was.

The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love and when needs began to arise in the community they began to practice love they began to practice radical voluntary generosity because they thought to themselves well the father shared his son and the son shared his life and therefore we are going to mirror the gracious generosity of God by sharing our resources to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

They were not just devoting that most precious resource of their time but they also said that if God has given me a super abundance and I find my brother or sister in Christ in need or maybe even suffering because of their faith I'm prepared to help them as I would my own flesh and blood. No wonder the Acts later says in Acts 17 that they they were turning the world upside down because they were living in a way that was totally countercultural to the world.

[22 : 22] They weren't just caring for their family and their nearest kin they were caring Jews caring for Gentiles Gentiles caring for Jews. So let's just pause here for some practical application.

If you identify as a Christian and someone were to audit your time and they were to audit your money would it be clear to that person would it be obvious to them that you are devoted to a caring Christian fellowship?

And I say that because our society is experiencing an epidemic of isolation and loneliness. Our society is experiencing an epidemic of addiction to dopamine to distraction to our devices. Our society is living in incredible fear and despair about a coming nuclear holocaust a coming robot apocalypse. Our society is like really afraid but the church is called to be different. The church is called to be a counterculture and the church says to God and to one another we're going to live like family.

[23 : 34] We're going to live devoted to each other. We're going to care for each other in the most practical of ways. We're called to discipline our time so that we will get together often with the people who share our same cravings for God and that is going to remain a top priority for us.

We're not going to let sports we're not going to let entertainment we're not going to let social media we're not going to let all these things just drain the time out of our lives and then we give God and his people the leftovers.

No. We're going to have predictable persevering patterns of time. We're going to have continuing consistent habits of money so that we can show our father's care for our brothers and sisters in Christ in practical ordinary everyday ways.

The second point of application is again if you're not part of a small group which is our matrix for belonging and care and accountability it's our way of making sure that people are getting together to read the Bible and to pray and to encourage and strengthen each other.

We have three new groups they've just started. We have community groups restarting at the end of the summer. I want to urge you to do something different than our culture. I want to urge you not to walk alone.

[25 : 01] I want to urge you to find people. Take a risk. Have some courage to just find some people that are total strangers to you now that God probably has designed to become some of your deepest and closest friends.

We have a staff member coming starting on July 1st Dylan. He's really tall and convincing. His job he's our groups and formation director and his job is going to be to come and help you find a group that's right for you.

He told me I don't take no for an answer. I get people in groups. Just know he's coming for you. He's coming for you. It's a learning church.

It's a caring church. But also we're called to be a worshiping church. A worshiping church. The apostles teaching led to this deep daily Christian fellowship and the breaking of bread. It says that in verse 46 that every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts and they broke bread in their homes and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

There were no church buildings. They met in each other's houses. They would share a meal together like lunch or breakfast or whatever and then they would take one loaf of bread and they would break it into pieces.

[26 : 14] They would hand it around to the others. They would take a cup of wine. They would pour it. They would drink it. They would pass it around to the others. And they did this because on the night before Jesus crossed he said do this.

So that when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost these new converts immediately began to gather early on Sunday morning. The time when Jesus was raised from the dead. And they said we want to come together at that very moment.

and we want to share in holy communion. And that ensured that their worship was unified and centered on Jesus and on his cross.

On his sacrificial self-giving love and his broken body and his outpoured blood to forgive our sins and to win a victory for us over death.

This bread and this wine was for them a symbol of their savior. And what happened in their hearts as they broke the bread of their savior it says that they had glad and sincere hearts and that they were praising God and they were enjoying one another.

[27 : 19] Why were they full of gladness? Why were they full of praise? Why were they full of joy? Because they had been set free. They had been set free from sin and death and hell and the devil.

They were excited about that. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 2.20 I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

They were so full of joy that my God, the God who created the universe, loves me so much that he died the cruelest and most heinous grotesque death possible.

Death on a cross in order that he might bring me into a relationship with him of holy communion. And gladness and joy and praise filled their hearts and it began to erupt from their hearts like a geyser because it just had to come out.

It had to express itself. And I love one of my favorite stories in Acts is Acts 16. Paul and Silas they take the gospel to Europe. They go to Philippi and they preach the gospel and people don't like it very much so they're stripped and they're flogged and they have their backs beaten with rods and they're thrown into this dark prison and their feet are fastened in stocks.

[28 : 46] And you remember what happened? It says that at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and other prisoners were listening to them. And why did they sing?

How did they worship in the darkness? How did they worship in pain and persecution? How did they have a worship service in the most unlikely of places?

And how in the world did they worship with low budget non professional music? I mean no AV team, no slides, nothing. How did they, we don't know.

How did they, you work that out. But what I want you to know is that they had a joy that was not dependent on or determined by their circumstances. Paul later will sit in another prison cell and he'll be chained to two Roman guards and he writes this letter to the Philippians, he says Philippians 4, rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again, rejoice. In Romans 5 he says we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and we rejoice in our sufferings. Peter writes these suffering Christians and he says you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

[30 : 01] Their joy, it wasn't a superficial or shallow joy because verse 43 says everyone was filled with awe. It was an awesome joy. It was a reverent joy.

It was a deep and holy and wonderful joy because they realized we are here in the presence of almighty God and he is so great and we are so small but he and his greatness became small and had his body broken and his blood poured out and when they broke that bread and they poured out that wine their hearts were filled with joy and with praise and with gladness because God loved me and he gave himself for me.

They were a learning church, a caring church, a worshiping church and at this point you're like he has two more points but he only has a few more minutes. Watch this. They were also a praying church.

They were a praying church. The apostles teaching defined and directed their fellowship and their bread breaking and their singing but also their prayers. You got to remember that these are Jewish people. The people of God, they would pray two times a day they would pray the Shema from Deuteronomy 6.

Every night when they would go lay down for bed and every morning they get up from their bed they would pray Shema O Israel. Hear O Israel. The Lord our God.

[31 : 29] The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. That's the praying life of the people of God from Moses forward.

All the way back to Abraham. All the way back probably to Adam. Right? And then we get this great prayer book called the Psalms. And King David writes in Psalm 55 he says morning, noon, and evening I will cry out to you three times a day.

And so there's this prayer pattern where the prophet Daniel he's told by the king of Persia you know he's living as an exile very far away from the presence of God the temple of God.

He's living out in the empire of Persia and the king of Persia says Daniel you're not supposed to pray to the living God. In fact the only person you're supposed to pray to is me the king of Persia. And what does Daniel do? He says nope. Daniel 6 three times a day he got down on his knees he prayed giving thanks to his God just as he had done before this habit of morning, noon, and evening prayer.

[32 : 38] These first Christians this early church they devoted themselves to the habit of praying this pattern from Moses to David to Daniel to Jesus and Jesus said I want you to have private times alone of praying before God.

He says in Matthew 6 the heart of the Sermon on the Mount he says when you pray go into your inner room, go into your closet, close the door and pray to your father who is unseen. And that was the power of the early church.

But they also came together in corporate prayer meetings and they were in the middle of a prayer meeting when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. They're in the middle of a prayer meeting in Acts chapter 4 when it says the place where they were meeting was shaken and all the people were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

The Holy Spirit devotes his people to prayer. And when we pray we say Lord give us more of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit intensifies our praying. This is one of the great tests for people who say I have Christian beliefs is to say well how do you live out those beliefs in your practices of prayer?

Do you have a set time and place every day where you meet with God? Do you have a set time and place every week where you meet and pray with other Christians? Have you learned how to pray by the Holy Spirit?

[34 : 00] Have you learned how to pray willingly and pray freely and pray with power? I want to urge you to put this on the top of your summer must do list. So learn how to pray.

Learning church, caring church, worshiping church, praying church, finally all this has to flow outward somewhere. Right?

It needs to move out like a river to the ocean. And so the church began to be an evangelizing church. And it says in verse 47 that the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

And because I'm out of time I just have to ask is that our expectation? Or do we think oh we're that was Jerusalem but we live in Berkeley and God doesn't work that way anymore.

You see the church they were praying that the power of the gospel would go out from the church. And they were prioritizing outreach because the Holy Spirit was filling the church with love and joy and peace.

[35 : 15] And because of that people were looking around at the family members they had and the friends and the co-workers and the neighbors that they had and saying Lord before we were just kind of annoyed with them because they weren't parking their car correctly or they weren't turning in their reports at work on time but now what I'm really concerned about is where are they going ultimately?

what's going to happen to them eternally? And they began to pray Lord let your kingdom come in his life. Lord let heaven come down into her heart.

Lord open up their hearts so that they might be dissatisfied and say there's got to be more to life than this. Lord open up a door of opportunity when I when I invite them over to my table would you please would you please let them feel the warm welcome of the father?

Lord open my lips so that I can ask better questions. Open my ears so that I can be a curious listener. Give me courage.

Open my heart so that I can have a simple conversation that become a serious conversation that becomes a spiritual conversation because what we're expecting as a church Lord is that you want to add to your number those who are being saved.

[36 : 31] ignored. And so the question is is that what we pray for? Is that our priority? And is that our expectation? To be a learning church, a caring church, a worshiping church, a praying church that is ultimately an evangelizing church.

It may be so in the name of the father, son, and holy spirit. Amen.