Acts 2:42–47

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 October 2017

Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Today's scripture reading comes from Acts chapter 2, verses 42 through 47, and may be found on page 1008 of the White Bibles. At this time, the children from age 3 through 2nd grade may walk quietly through these back doors and meet their teachers for the Kids City program.

They can be picked up down the hall after the service. Again, the passage is Acts 2, 42 through 47, page 1008. Would you please stand with me for the reading of God's word?
And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.
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.
And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.
[1:09] And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you.

Thank you, Drayton. And good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church. I want to bring my special greetings to those of you who are back, having been away for a while, seeing some old friends this morning, as well as have had the chance to meet some folks who are here for the first time.
And we'd like to welcome you to Hyde Park and to our congregation. And we hope that this will be a place where you find the love of God and your own soul be nourished in faith.
We are spending our year in the book of Acts. So if you have walked in today, you have arrived at the moment of our journey.
To this point, Acts has taken us from Olivet, the place of Christ's ascension, to the upper room. Where we saw the arrival of the Holy Spirit.
[2:16] And from the arrival of the Holy Spirit out into the streets of Jerusalem, where Peter made his bold announcement. Let me get it to you as simply as I can then.

The ascension of Christ gave way, gave way to the arrival of the Spirit. The arrival of the Spirit gives way to the announcement concerning the Christ.
And the announcement of the Christ gives way today to the attachments of the early community.
Let me put it to you this way. The Spirit of God, through the power of the Word of God, created the people of God, who now reorder their lives to reflect the love of God and their neighbor as themselves.
Now my friend, 107th of Michigan, would say, I like the way that sounds. The Spirit of the living God takes the Word of God to create the people of God, which reorders their lives to His love and to the welfare of all who are there.
And so today, this simple, brief text allows you to peer into the window of the early church and to see what life looked like among them.
[3:46] What do we see? Well, there is that wonderful opening phrase, their devotions. They devoted themselves. We've seen it earlier when they were devoting themselves to prayer.

The early church had particular attachments. Truth be told, we can probably count on one hand the things which we in life are truly devoted to.
Read an obituary. Devoted husband and father. What are you devoted to? Well, he's devoted to his work.
She's devoted to her studies. Wow, they're really devoted to their kids. They're devoted to staying fit. Devotions.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43

What are your affections? What are your attachments? Believe me, you can put them all on one hand. The early church gives us four.
[4:50] And they're not the four that would arrive any other way than by the Spirit of the living God. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The language of the text is as simple as they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.
These are strange attachments which come with those who have recently walked into a relationship with God. Let me give you the text this way.
In verse 42, there's simply a list. But in 43 to 47, it gives way to a way of life.
In other words, the attachments of their soul, verse 42, are animated in verses 43 to 47. The four words unfold away among themselves.
[5:59] The devotions are now seen, pictured day by day. And so, you and I have the privilege today of looking through the window pane of the early church's home.

Some of the homes in Hyde Park are best seen after the light has faded from sight and you're strolling down the sidewalk and all that's illuminated within finally gives way to those of us who are never able to get behind that door.
Built-in bookshelves, chandeliers of glory, wallpaper that we wish we might have had, the evidence of art and fireplaces and warmth.
Well, here it is. Here's your look along the sidewalk into the life of the early church. They gave themselves to the teaching.
What might that have been? Well, it says here, to the apostles' teaching. Now, you and I, living as we do and having the full record of the New Testament, easily extrapolate this out into all of the New Testament teachings.
[7:23] But this is brand new. Nothing's been written yet. No story's been told. No gospel of Mark written. No Paul yet converted. Paul himself and all his teachings not included in the summary of this statement.

What you have here is the teaching of Peter and the eleven, including Matthias, that most recently appointed one, back in chapter one.
We know that before Jesus arose into heaven, he told the twelve at that time to teach all that I commanded you.
And so what you're hearing in the living room of the early church is nothing less than the very words of Christ through the lips of those twelve.
They are witnessing, they are proclaiming, they are speaking of his death in accordance with the scriptures, of his resurrection in accordance with the scriptures, of his way of life for those who would walk with him in this world.
[8:31] They are laying it down for them, clean and clear, probably repeating stories that he had told. But now they come with all the moral force and obligations of the king who is ascended into heaven and now at the right hand of God.

This was not merely some academic enterprise. This was not introduction to the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus. This was a life that was to be ordered under the word of Christ.
And that's what he began to lay out. And all of them were giving themselves to the apostolic teaching and to the fellowship.
The fellowship here is an interesting phrase, standing alone as it does, but then being rolled out and animated in the coming verses, particularly the verses of 43 through 46.
The fellowship was simply a voluntary, joyful commitment to one another. Having given themselves to Christ, they pledged their hearts to one another.
[9:37] This is what happens in the early community of Christian followers. They had nothing in common with one another, but now having been made one in Christ, they give themselves to one another.

This is a strange truth that I've seen worked out at Holy Trinity over the 19 and a half years here. In my own living room, an assemblage of people that you would never have put together on one invitation list, suddenly gravitating to one another, knowing one another, doing life with one another. Why? Because we are in common with Christ. Christ is what pulls us together. People have often questioned me, how is it that you begin to grow a multi-ethnic, socioeconomically diverse

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43

congregation?
Do you get up and talk about race every week? No, we don't. Do you get up and talk about the needs of Chicago every week? No, we don't. We begin to talk about Jesus, and they come from all over.
This is the fellowship. This is what we have in common. We have very little in common with one another, truth be told. But in Christ, we have all we need.
[10:54] And He holds us together. Jesus began to hold this disparate people together in common fellowship. Now look, the logic of what that fellowship looked like is straightforward.

Verses 44 and following, And they 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.
For you and me, fellowship is a couch, probably for some of us, with only one or two other people around because we don't want a lot of people for fellowship.
Just give me a couch and relationships where there are no commitments. I can have a great Sunday afternoon. Just me and TJ watching the cowboys.
Don't bring all those other people in here because we're going to have some good fellowship. But notice what fellowship is here. Notice what it means to give yourself to that which is in common.
[12:03] It's to sell, to distribute, as any had need. It's not an easy chair without commitments. It's not a cup of coffee.

It's keeping the covenantal obligations that you owe to others that come with a cost. Your fellowship in Christ obligates you to the welfare of those who know Him.
And they actually began to live that out. Don't get it wrong. This is the gospel at work and generosity is the consequence.
This isn't the doing away of private property. This isn't the sense that what you have really isn't yours. We know from Acts chapter 5 that when Ananias and Sapphira sold their land, he said, well, wasn't that yours to do with whatever you wanted to begin with?
And after you sold it, weren't the proceeds yours to do with what you wanted? But when you began to deceive yourself and deceive the body by keeping for yourself that which you claim to give to others, well, you lie to the Holy Spirit and all that we have in common.
[13:20] So the text cannot be used with some underpinnings of philosophical materialism or some biblical notion that equates what's going on here with the complete loss of that which is yours.

But what it does do is say for the Christian, all that is yours is held with an open hand and at the disposal of the living God for the welfare of those who love Him.
Now imagine, when that begins to happen, something really happens. The poor begin to get taken care of. Those who are under find their way up top.
We're no longer independent. No longer independent, but interdependent. No longer individualistic, but communal.
Let me put it this way. Christianity is by nature a social enterprise. So this is what they began to give themselves to. Questions like, what did the apostles have to say today?
[14:35] And secondly, who among us has any needs that need to be put in play? That's what it said. This had to be the most unique, unique living room ever.

Everyone willing to sell their possessions, belongings, and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. When the gospel is at work, generosity is a given.
So what are you giving yourself to? I told you you could count your devotions on one hand. Do you give yourself to the teaching of the apostles? In today's parlance, I would simply say, do you make it a covenantal obligation to get out of your bed on Sunday morning, set your paper aside for the afternoon, and find your way to a place where someone will tell you what the scriptures say?
And do you do it at home? And do you do it week by week? And do you do it on vacation?
Someone will say, well, now I'm on vacation. Now I'm not going to church today because I'm on vacation.
These devotions are the things which you attach yourself to. These are like barnacles that stay on the side of the boat no matter where that ship sails.
[16:00] This is a way of life that says, my reordering of my life, given what I know Jesus has done for me, is I am suddenly finding myself, not of my own accord, interested in the apostolic teaching.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43

I find myself not self-serving, but sacrificially figuring out how I can meet the needs of others who are likewise following Christ. This is stunning.
Yet this was indeed what's happening. Some people look at this little summary and they go, that's kind of an idealistic sense, you know, celestial idealism in play. Well, you can call it that if you want. But I've become convinced that this paragraph actually presents our lives together as they ought to be. And where we are not like this, then our lives ought to be altered to become.
The fellowship. What does your work week look like? What are your devotions? What are you going to do this week? Well, I'm going to work.
[17:10] Oh, I'm going to work. I'm going to do a lot of work. Boy, work is killing me. I'm doing a lot of work. I'm going to do a lot of running around because, man, you just can't believe my schedule. I might be in the car three hours some days, hauling kids to and fro for some of them.

I'm going to work. I'm going to run around. And, man, I'm going to wait on the weekend where I can get to myself and do what I want. Those are the devotions. Those are the attachments.
Those are the affections of the culture in which we live. And too often, they're actually the affections of the church. The church says, well, what are you devoted to? What do you attach? What barnacles are going along the hull of your ship?
Work. Running around. And when it comes to rest, that means getting away from everyone else. And the church actually says, well, the early church, we look through their window.
They're finding ways to come under the hearing of the word. They're finding ways to meet the needs of the people. They're finding ways, it says here, thirdly, the breaking of bread.
[18:19] It's a technical term for Luke, I think. When you see the breaking of bread, you just think dinner. I think it's a little more than that here. I think Luke is trying to recall the most memorable meal that they shared, the last supper, where Christ took bread and wine and made an evening to say, you're now going to relate to God through my work.

I believe this is the case. When you look back, the exact use of this phrase, turn over, you'll find the exact use of this phrase, the breaking of bread, in Luke 24, and in verse 35 and verse 30.
Let me see if I can find it. Verse 30, when he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave them to them. But in verse 35, the exact use of our language here, then when they told what had happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.
In other words, when he broke the bread to those on the road to Emmaus, they recognized it in conjunction with his last supper.
And so when they were giving themselves now to the breaking of the bread, it almost made every meal something special. Don't think of this yet as strictly what you and I know as communion come the first Sunday of the month.
[19:52] Because Paul's going to lay out later this directive that he receives from the Lord as often as you eat it and drink it. But when you read the synoptic gospels, when you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, none of those instructions are given.

He just does this event. And so what happened was when he did that, they could not sit down at a table without realizing as we eat this bread, we know we have life.
We give ourselves in celebration around the table to life. The bread of life. They devoted themselves to celebratory meals where their speech was of his death and his resurrection and his provision for them.
All of this is what began to happen in the early church. Think of it. Think of what would begin to happen if every one of your meals was an opportunity to bear witness to the goodness of God in the death of Christ.
I don't even know how often we sit down together, let alone sit together with such intentionality. Notice what the text says later on as it animates that opening phrase, verse 46, day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.
[21:17] They receive their food with glad and generous hearts. Glad and generous hearts are the consequence of someone who's come into a relationship with God through Christ.

You can't help but be glad and generous. I sat down in a restaurant some years ago now with an Asian American friend of mine who trusted Christ over a meal.
And when we got done, he said, can I do something after this meal? And I said, sure. What? He goes, I want to go down to that corner store and I want to buy us some ice cream.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43

I said, well, let's do it. Why? Because when Jesus came in, his gladness, his generosity began to come out. He said, well, we got to celebrate this.
Now, do you have something to celebrate this morning? Do I need to be my own witness? Let me tell you about myself. If you're not going to say amen, I'm going to say it. I was a 17-year-old boy.
[22:26] I was belligerent. I was hard-hearted. I sat in church and tried not to pay attention to anything. I was lust-filled, unloving.

I was hateful. I was unhappy. I was oppositional. I was arrogant. I was self-serving. I was sanctimonious. And Jesus put me on my knees in gratitude for his own blood shed for me.
We sang of it today. What an amazing mystery. What an amazing mystery. You almost begin to back away from the words in quietness. What an amazing mystery that the grace of God would come to me.
That Jesus' blood would be shed for me. I tell you, I am glad. And I have a generous heart because of the work of Christ.
If that's not you, it's because your affections have been displaced. You're carrying other things.
[23:29] Believe me. Jesus' heart aches for me and aches for you. Jesus cleaned me.

Jesus can clean you. Jesus loved me. Jesus can love you. Jesus put a song in my heart. He can put a song in yours. Jesus softened me and continues to do so.
Jesus set me free from selfishness and put me on to a life of serving others. And he can do that for you. And when you begin to have that actually emerge within your soul, every meal becomes a celebration.
You don't bless the food. You thank God. Not only for that food, but the one who is your food. And that's what began to happen.
So what we're beginning to see as you peer into the window of the early church, you're seeing hospitality begin to emerge.
[24:28] You're seeing gatherings in homes begin to occur. Now remember, most of these homes were small. small. I like that.

That's the cricket one. I could use that one. I've been thinking about hospitality.
One of the two main things for me this year. To grow in hospitality and to grow in prayer. Jane Austen, I haven't read the book.
It's called The Persuasion. There's a character named Ann who recalls the kindness of certain people who had her into their home.
My wife gave this line to me and I love it. She says in the voice of Ann, we all went indoors with newfound friends and found rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many.
[25:44] Now that's good. I've got to say that again. We went indoors with newfound friends. People we didn't know before. I'm slowing it down.

We went indoors with newfound friends and found rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many.
Now this is really what ought to begin to emerge in our midst. You might have a very small place. You might have a really small place. It might be a studio place.
But I challenge you this morning out of the gladness and goodness and the generosity of your heart to invite a Christian brother or sister over for a meal.
And basically say, I don't have much. I might not have much. but my spirit is filled with gratitude to God.
[26:51] And I want someone to be behind my door in fellowship over the work of Christ.

Now in the early church there were probably some homes that were larger than others and therefore their living rooms accommodated more. My living room can accommodate a few folk and believe me it has and it will.
And there's some other families here who the Lord has blessed with larger living rooms and and people need to find their way behind your door. Let me let me ask you that. When is the last time you had someone at your table out of gratitude for what God has done for you in Christ?
That's what began to happen. And it just it just began to explode. Now here we live in a city where we are all isolated, where we all run back behind our own places, where nobody sees anyone, where we don't want to talk to anyone.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43

And I'm telling you again, Christianity is by nature a social enterprise. So get over it. If you've come to Christ, you now belong to others. And you just seek them out, look for their welfare and celebrate with them.
[28:09] Finally, the prayers. I love the definite article there. The prayers. They began to meet together regularly in the house of God for prayer.

This is something that we just did a couple weeks ago at the loft. We're going to do it every first Sunday of the month. We're going to meet for the prayers. We had over 70 last the first Sunday of October.
People on the floor. We were all over praise and prayer. Was it beautiful? It was beautiful. If you weren't there, you're going to want to be at the next one. We just gave ourselves to the prayers. To praising God and to praying. And you know what? It was transformative. Just yesterday, I was with elders and their spouses, community group leaders and their spouses, deacons and their spouses of this congregation.
And I asked them, point blank, if you could make one decision on behalf of this congregation that had the greatest effect for spiritual fruit over the next three years, what would it be?
[29:22] And you would not believe the repetition in the room of let's devote ourselves to prayer. That's never happened before. I didn't expect that to come out of them.

Of course, I didn't expect it to come out of me either. But what happens is these things begin to take root. Prayers. Is that one of your attachments? Is that an anchor of your week?
Is the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship of others, the assemblage at a table in a living room and the making of prayers, what you will be doing this week?
Listen to George Herbert. I love this prayer. He calls it the church's banquet. Prayer.
He calls it heart in pilgrimage. How about this? Prayer. Reversed thunder. Exalted manna.
[30:28] I love this one. Heaven. In ordinary. This one's particularly good. Man well-dressed. What is prayer? Man well-dressed.

It's all beautiful. Prayer. He says, church bells beyond the stars heard. How about this one? The soul's blood.
How about this? The land of spices. He's got even more. Something understood. Prayer. Prayer. The church's banquet. Do we have any experience of that being true? This is what the early church gave themselves to. And this is what we intend to be reordered by.
The local congregation should order its life around these four activities. The word. The welfare of others. The dinner table.
[31:37] And the prayer meeting. Those ought to be our devotions. We should be able to put them on one hand. What are you going to do this week? Well, I'm going to do a lot of things this week.

But I can tell you the four that are there every week. The word. The fellowship. The dinner table. And prayer.
The spirit of God. Took the word of God.
Gave birth to the people of God. Who as a consequence. Reordered their lives. To pursue the love of God. And the love of neighbor.
As himself. It was so for them. Fear. Fell on all of them. And the favor.
[32:38] Of all. Was with them. Well, maybe we know something of that fear. And by God's grace. Something of that.

Favor. Our heavenly father. We. Say thus far. God's word. In the book of acts. And we have to confess. That if we were to take.
Just the things that have been said. Over the last 30 minutes. And. Order our lives. Under them. It would. It would be. It would be disruptive. But we pray that our hearts.
Would be ready. To be disrupted. By love of you. and a love of those around us. Have your way with us in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:20:43