

Acts 2:42-46

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Date: 09 October 2011

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[0 : 00] 47. You can turn there with me. It's actually page 772 in the Pew Bible in front of you. You'll remember if you were with us last week that in the beginning of Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples gathered at Pentecost.

Then Peter, in the power of the Spirit, preaches a sermon explaining that the crucified Jesus is the risen Messiah and Lord, and as such, he is the one who has sent the Spirit upon them.

Luke then tells us that 3,000 people responded to Peter's sermon, receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name.

And all that leads up to our passage today. Here we have Luke's description of the dynamics of that Spirit-filled community, that Spirit-filled church.

What happens when the slingshot is finally released? What happens when the firework finally ignites in the sky?

[1 : 04] What do they do? What were they like? This is what Luke is going to show us. In other words, this text is going to show us a snapshot of a healthy, vibrant church. It's not some nostalgic glimpse of an idealized past.

Rather, it gives us a clear image or pattern of what our church can look like today. It can encourage us, correct us, show us, we're to thank God for his work in our midst. And moreover, it shows us what happens when Christ gets a hold of a community by his Spirit.

So even if you're here investigating Christianity this morning, this sermon is important for you as well. This passage is important for you. If you want to get to know an artist, you need to look at his work.

And today we get to look at Jesus' work through his Spirit in the New Testament church. So with those words of introduction, Acts chapter 2, verses 42 through 47, page 772 in the Pew Bibles, let's pray before we read God's Word together.

Father, we indeed pray that your Holy Spirit would come upon us in this place. Lord, that we would leave today revived as we catch a glimpse of what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does through his gospel in the midst of his church.

[2 : 28] God, guide our thoughts, our minds, and our words this morning as we consider this passage. In Christ's name, amen. Acts 2, 42 through 47, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he 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. Well, I don't know what immediately strikes you about this passage as you've read it along with me, but one of the things that strikes me is the simplicity of it all.

Look again at verse 42. Here's what they did. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. It's a very short list, isn't it?

[3 : 48] Very straightforward. In verses 43 through 47, Luke fleshes us out a bit, and we're going to spend some time fleshing them out as well, but first, just consider the simplicity of it. There's no elaborate scheme.

There's no intricate programmatic endeavor. Just teaching and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Now, there are many things about Christianity that are deep and that are profound.

This past Friday morning, the Men at Work small group discussed the Trinity. You haven't lived until you've fired up a discussion at 7 a.m. on the mystery of the triune God over pancakes and bacon.

Trust me. We needed a lot of coffee last Friday morning to get our brains working to grapple with the Trinity. That's certainly profound and deep, isn't it? But at the same time, God's triune nature has an elegant simplicity to it.

Three in one. One in three. It's like that with a spirit-filled church. Each element in verse 42 is profound, is deep.

[4 : 57] We'll only touch the surface this morning. But in all, as we see them together, there's an elegant simplicity to it. And I don't know about you, but I find that very refreshing.

We live in a culture of busyness where importance is marked by how cluttered your calendar becomes. But when God enters the equation, and when we as a church are recalibrated through his spirit and through the word, it's not busyness that reigns, but a profound simplicity.

And why is that? Because ultimately of what the gospel says. You see, friends, the message of Christianity is that Christ has done it all.

In his life, death, and resurrection, he's performed all that's required for you and I to be right with God. In Genesis 1 and 2, when God speaks in creation, he brings order to material chaos.

And when God speaks again in redemption, he brings order to our spiritual chaos. At one time, we tried frantically to order our spiritual life, to say the right prayers, to perform the right devotional acts, to try to build our religious CV, as it were.

[6 : 16] But now Christ comes with a word of peace. Rest in me, he says. And when we do, we find a two-fold gift.

Peter's sermon ended with it in verse 38. The forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. You see, our deepest need is not financial stability, or a meaningful career, or a loving family.

All the things that seem to clutter our minds and our days and our hearts. Our deepest need is to have our relationship restored with our holy creator God.

And in Christ, that reconciliation has been made. And that makes all the difference. Imagine, if you will, two travelers, both headed to Rome, say, for a month.

Neither have been there before, and one traveler, not knowing anyone there, what does he do? He packs all sorts of gear for the trip, doesn't he? His guidebooks, the Rick Steves, the so on and so forth.

[7 : 20] Actually, if you travel to Rome, you really only need Rick Steves, but that's just an aside. He packs his guidebooks, he packs his clothes, he packs his plug adapters, he packs his walking shoes, his dress shoes, his outfit to go to, you know, the museums and the outfits to go out to eat, and on and on and on.

He packs it all in his cumbersome backpack and lumbers his way to the airport, a bit nervous about what he's going to find once he reaches his destination. But now imagine the other traveler.

Unlike the first, this one knows that when he arrives in Rome, he won't be alone. In fact, his own brother will be there to greet him.

The spare bedroom is all set for him. The closet is full of clothes. The plans have all been arranged. So he brings a toothbrush, maybe some underwear, his laptop perhaps, but not much else.

It's all taken care of. Friends, this is the gospel. Jesus Christ has become our brother and has made all the provision we need so that when we arrive, the room will be ready.

[8 : 31] And that means our journey can be light. Do you see now why the church in Acts 2 is marked by such a profound simplicity?

They've been reconciled to God. The deepest longing of their heart has been met. The core problem of their existence has finally been solved.

And when this grace of God hits home, verse 42 tells us that they devoted themselves to four things, beautiful in their simplicity.

Here are the marks of a living church, of a community of people that Jesus has set free and filled with his spirit. Now, before we flesh this out, I want to just quickly say that there are really two ways we can approach a passage like this.

The first is to approach it like a giant to-do list. This way of looking at the passage says, if you really want to be a successful church, if you really want to be a healthy Christian, you have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this.

[9 : 31] And you have to do it with the same intensity and persistence as they did. Well, of course, if that's our approach, the passage quickly becomes a burden, doesn't it? It's like the parent who tells their child, why can't you be more like your sister?

Here's Luke telling us, why can't you be more like your mother? We quickly become discouraged. We realize how far we fall short. We start brooding over our own inadequacies and failures.

We start to despair over whether we can ever measure up. But there's another way to approach this passage. The other way of looking at this passage says, here's an invitation to enter into all the good things that Jesus has won for you.

Here's an invitation, an opportunity to recognize all the Spirit is already doing in your midst and to be thankful. Here's a good reminder to clear away all the things you don't have to be doing so you can truly devote yourself to the things that matter most.

Well, that's the approach I'm going to take this morning because ultimately, I think that's what Luke is doing. I want us to be encouraged by this passage because I think that's why Luke added it at all.

[10 : 52] You know, he's not unrealistic about the church. In fact, in the coming weeks, we're going to see these very upfront about the problems in the early church. He knows that the church of every age is always going to be a body of sinners, wholly dependent on grace.

But in the church, God's grace is at work. And this passage can help us see that in our own midst and remind us of what the most important things are.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this in his book, Life Together. Christian community is like the Christian sanctification. It's a gift of God which we cannot claim.

Only God knows the real state of our fellowship and of our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God.

And so the more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.

[12 : 01] So let's look at these marks of the spirit-filled church with an eye towards thanking God for what he is doing in our midst and praying that God will grant us the grace to continually grow in them.

So what does this text tell us about our life as a church? The first thing is that we are to be devoted to Bible teaching. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, Luke writes.

The apostles had spent three years with Jesus during his earthly ministry, listening and learning his teaching. And after his resurrection, Jesus had instructed them for 40 more days. During that time, no doubt, showing them how all of the Old Testament pointed to him as Jesus himself said in Luke 24.

So what were the apostles teaching here in Acts? They were teaching all that Jesus had instructed them during his ministry. And they were teaching the Old Testament scriptures from the standpoint of their fulfillment in Jesus.

And now, of course, today, we don't have the apostles around to teach us, but we have the definitive form of their teaching preserved for us in the New Testament.

[13 : 07] And so just as the first Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, so we too devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching by submitting to the authority of scripture.

So this is the first sign, as it were, of a church that is aflame with the spirit, a deep hunger for biblical teaching. Why is that the first sign of a fierce-billed church?

Well, we might say that it's because the Bible is the Spirit's book. Paul writes in Ephesians 6, 17, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. And in 2 Timothy, he writes that all of scripture is God-breathed, inspired, pointing again to the Holy Spirit.

And James tells us that God chose to give us birth through the Word of Truth. So we can put these things together like this.

When the Spirit gives us life through his Word, the Word of the Bible comes alive to us. There is a deep spiritual resonance between a Spirit-born believer and the Spirit-breathed scriptures.

[14 : 17] There's like calling to like. There is deep calling to deep. I'm not a pianist, but someone told me once that if you press the sustain pedal on a piano and open up the lid and sing really loudly a note into the top, that the strings will start to vibrate.

Is that true? Has anyone here ever tried that? It's true. It's true. It's true. It's true. It's true. Yeah, it's true. You've heard it here. It happens. When you sing into the top of the piano, the strings that are tuned to the same notes will start to vibrate and resonate.

You see, friends, for the church, the Bible is the voice of God singing into our hearts. And the more of the Bible that we hear, the more the Spirit's work will begin to resonate and reverberate in our midst.

All the strings that God has placed there through your birth in the gospel are being set alive as the Spirit speaks into your heart through the Word of God.

That's why as a church we're committed to preaching and teaching the Bible when we gather on Sundays and in small groups. We want to devote ourselves to the Apostles' teaching because in it, the Word of Christ comes to us and makes us truly and finally alive.

[15 : 45] I don't need to tell you that many people today are looking for significance. Everyone's trying to construct and fashion their personal identity. Who am I? Where do I come from?

Where am I going? What's it all about? We want to be part of something bigger, something worthwhile, something that's even maybe a little dangerous and risky, something that's going to last. Why as a culture do we play hours upon hours of video games like Call of Duty and World of Warcraft?

Come on, students. You know what I'm talking about. I think that it's because in these digital worlds you can be someone the world is saying you could never be. In these games you can be a key player in a narrative where there's victory and there's glory at stake.

But these virtual narratives that we spin for ourselves are just dim reminders of our deep longing to be a part of the great drama that God is unfolding in history.

The great narrative of glory and victory that God is inviting each one of us to enter into through faith in his son. And it is the Bible where we hear and find this narrative recounted for each of us to hear.

[17 : 09] You see, in the Bible we find out who we truly are. Humans created in the image of God. A part of the grand narrative God is telling. Fallen because of sin but redeemed and restored through faith in Christ and called to live for his glory and his cause in light of his victory.

Do you fear that devoting yourself to the biblical teaching will make you a prude or a bore or what's worse a conservative? Do you fear that it will make you close-minded irrelevant?

But friends, don't you see if the Bible is God's word then it's the only thing that can finally shake us free from our prudishness and our boredom.

It's the only thing that can really open our minds so that we're neither conservative nor liberal but we're radical all the way down. It's the only thing that can free us from our enslavement to the passing whims of intellectual fads because the Bible is God's word.

It has the power to wake us up to who we really are and above all to who God truly is because most of all it's in the Bible that we hear something that we'll never hear anywhere else.

[18 : 36] It's only in Scripture that we hear the good news that God has not left us to our own devices but has entered the fray himself in flesh and blood.

In the midst of our rebellion and apathy God has come to be our victor and to set the captives free. Is that a message that sounds boring or conservative or irrelevant?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, Luke says and in 30 years they had turned the world upside down. Let's move to the second point.

They devoted themselves, Luke says, to the fellowship. A spirit-filled church is not just a learning church but a sharing church. That's what fellowship means after all, sharing in common.

The same root is behind the word common in verse 44 and behind the word generous that we find elsewhere in the New Testament. The picture that Luke paints here is of a group of men and women who are willing to share not just a couple of hours together on Sunday as great as that is and a couple cookies after the service or a pot of chili today whatever it happens to be.

[19 : 48] They're willing to share not just a couple hours but they're willing to share their very lives together. You see, this church is not just a gathering where teaching happens. It's a family where genuine love is expressed.

There is truth, oh yes, but there is also love. Not one without the other but both. Fully and at the same time. Now as we think about this fellowship here in Acts chapter 2 we should remember at this point how diverse this group of early believers was.

It's easy to share your life with people who are just like you after all but if you go back at the beginning of chapter 2 and look through verses 9 through 11 in particular you see all the various regions where these people came from.

Now it's true that at this stage in Acts these first Christians are all Jewish or converts to Judaism but the stunning diversity of their regional backgrounds is enough to make us pause.

What is it that binds the Christian community together in such fellowship in such deep sharing together? Is it race or class or background? Is it a common political party?

[21 : 01] Is it a set of hobbies or special interests? Look around this morning. Gathered here at Trinity are men and women from literally all across the globe.

Canada Brazil Germany Ghana India Australia That's all six inhabitable continents.

Is anyone here from Antarctica? What could possibly bind us together? not just for a meeting on Sunday but bind us together in the very fabric of our lives.

That we'd be willing to spend our time and our hospitality and our comfort and yes even our money in such generous ways as Luke describes here.

The answer can only be our common sharing in Jesus Christ. Christ we belong to the Son. His Spirit dwells within us.

[22 : 15] His Father is now our Father. And because we share in Christ together we can share out with one another. This is the two-fold significance of fellowship in the New Testament in God and out to our fellow believers.

And this sharing as we've seen includes spending time together eating meals together getting to know one another's needs. and sacrificially giving so that those needs can be met.

Now as a side note we should be clear here as we read this passage that the early church didn't abandon private property. Verse 46 tells us after all that some of them still owned homes, right? And in chapter 5 in the episode of Ananias and Sapphira we see quite clearly that no one was forced to sell their goods in the early church.

Peter tells Ananias flat out that your house was yours before you sold it and your money was yours after you sold it. The problem with Ananias and Sapphira was that they lied to God. Not that they only gave a part of their money to the church but we'll get to that juicy scene in a few weeks.

The thing to notice here in chapter 2 is that the sharing of goods was voluntary. It's not proto-communism it's actually something much, much more radical.

[23 : 28] It's a community of men and women who are so certain of the love of God and his ultimate provision and who are so eager to sacrifice for one another they willingly sell their possessions and goods to help a sister or a brother in need.

And in fact this radical generosity Luke seems to imply overflows to those outside the Christian community as well. No wonder they had favor with all the people in Jerusalem.

Isn't this the kind of human community that so many of us are longing for today? The end of verse 46 continues to strike me.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. It's a simple picture isn't it? But I'm convinced that if by God's grace that simple reality took hold of us it would be nothing short of revolutionary.

The word sincere here means something like single-minded or genuine. The idea is one of having zero pretensions.

[24 : 43] No one pretending. No one posturing. No one worried about image management. Here's an image of people who are so rooted in their identity in Christ that they can be finally free to be who they are without any fear of rejection.

How much of our time is spent in image management? Is one of the reasons we're so afraid to sit around a table with someone even a fellow Christian is because we feel like we don't have the strength to put forward the best version of ourselves?

Are we worried what others might think or say if they caught us at our worst? If we turned out not to be as smart or as good or as funny or as wise as they thought we would be?

And in the midst of all that the gospel comes and says your sins are forgiven and you are a child of God.

and it's that freedom that makes real fellowship possible. We're free to share to give free to be glad and sincere.

[26 : 03] This freedom makes the fellowship but it's also the fellowship that continually reminds us of our identity as children of God. We need our brother or sister to remind us again and again that we belong to Christ that our sins are forgiven that the spirit is at work in us.

And so we see that a spirit-filled church is devoted to the fellowship. Let's look at the third sign and we'll move quickly. Verse 42 continues they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to the prayer.

Now the commentators are split here as to whether the breaking of bread refers specifically to the Lord's Supper or more generally to just eating meals together. We can talk about that after the service if you want.

If it refers to just eating together then Luke is probably emphasizing one aspect of this fellowship that we just spoke of. But if it refers to the Lord's Supper then it's a natural pair with what Luke lists next which is literally the prayers.

Here the scholars are pretty much in agreement that the expression the prayers refers to more than the act of prayer in general but to set prayers to organized prayer. In other words what Luke seems to have in mind here are what we today call corporate worship gatherings.

[27 : 27] So the third mark of a spirit filled church is that it is a worshiping church. It gathers together to praise God and to pray to God.

And this happens as we see both in large contexts and in smaller ones. Verse 46 says that they met together in the temple courts and that they met in one another's homes as well. There isn't one form that's somehow apparently better.

The early church sought both kinds of gatherings. And it's good for us today too to have large and small gatherings. But what's most striking is verse 43. everyone was filled with awe.

In this community there's intimacy with God. True spirituality. God is real here. He's palpable.

Here the deeper springs of transcendence have finally burst through the concrete that we've plowed over our lives. The two-dimensional has suddenly become three-dimensional.

[28 : 34] The black and white and gray has finally been overtaken by a flood of color. Their lives have all of a sudden been opened up to the reality of God.

The literal word in verse 43 is fear. Fear came upon every soul.

Do you know what it is to fear God? Not frightened in a cowering sort of way but maybe a little more like that than we'd care to admit.

But to be so in awe before the reality of Him that everything else our own selves included fall away. It's like when you stand before the immensity of the ocean.

When the waves are crashing against the shore. When all you can see in the distance is the seemingly infinite expanse of water and it strikes you with a sense of awe.

[29 : 48] The bigness of it. The uncontainability of it. The power and the serenity. No photograph can do it justice.

Have you tried? You're at the shore and you take a picture and you show it to your friend and they think it's a picture of water. But when we're standing before it in person it's just a small hint of what it's like to be in awe of God.

The creator and ruler of all the earth. Now in thinking about worship we must remember that God is omnipresent. He's everywhere at once. He's not limited to one day of the week or one specific time.

We can worship God anywhere and at any time. But with that being said God has promised to be with his people in a special way when they gather for prayer and praise.

For preaching and the celebration of the ordinances of the sacraments. And looking again at our text certainly part of what struck all in the hearts of those first Christians was what Luke describes in the rest of verse 43.

[30 : 59] Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Now Christians differ over how to apply this verse. Some say that these wonders and signs are meant to be a part of the pattern for the church today.

That we should expect that God can and will do such things in our midst. On the other hand others say that these wonders and signs were a special thing that God did at that time to authenticate the ministry and message of the apostles.

Well as we think about this for us and all I don't think we should get too worked up over the issue. It's certainly one of those things where Christians can have differing views and still maintain fellowship. But as I think about it I think two things really.

First we need to maintain that the ministry of the apostles was unique. So it makes sense that God would work in an especially powerful way through them and in a way that we might not expect today.

We have after all now their God authenticated message in scripture and that is the most important thing. But I think we also need to realize that God can still do powerful even miraculous things today.

[32 : 07] After all God is God. Why couldn't he do such things? But when we think about worship about fearing God about being in awe of him we really don't have to have miraculous signs and wonders performed in our midst to do so.

After all God is God. God and his greatest work the most amazing thing of all God has already done for us in Jesus Christ.

God took on flesh died on the cross rose again and that is the foundation of our worship. That is what formed the core of the apostles teaching and that is what formed the basis of their fellowship.

And that is what the sacraments or the ordinances are meant to demonstrate visibly Jesus Christ crucified risen and coming again and even now at work in our midst through his spirit impressing upon us his majesty and his mercy and driving us to pray thy kingdom come thy will be done.

In a culture longing for transcendence the Christian church ought to be the place where people can find a true sense of the reality and the fear of God where his majesty and mercy are on display and where everything rightly fades in comparison to knowing him to loving him to worshiping him where everything finds its rightful place then in relationship to him.

[33 : 51] they devoted themselves to the prayers. A spirit filled church is a worshiping church. Lastly then we find that all this leads us to witness.

To see the fourth aspect of a spirit filled church we have to look at the last verse and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. It's clear from this verse that the early church fool as it was with the apostles teaching and the fellowship with the breaking of bread and the prayers couldn't keep the message of Christ to themselves.

They had come to know Christ crucified for their sins and risen as their Lord. They had received the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in his name and they spread this good news throughout the entire city.

A spirit filled church is a witnessing church an evangelistic church. As we come to the end of the passage we see that there's great comfort in verse 47 when all is said and done it is the Lord who adds new women and men to his church.

Our part is to speak the message of Christ truthfully and lovingly with our words and to reflect that message authentically in our lives but in no way are we called to manipulate others. It's not our job to convert other people we ultimately leave it in the hands of God.

[35 : 10] But what confidence it brings to know that it is ultimately the Lord who's building his church. what confidence it brings to know that when you speak about who Jesus is and what he's done to your neighbor or your friend or your co-worker that the Lord himself is at work to bring that person to himself should he so choose.

So here's the vision the New Testament vision of a spirit filled church. It's a learning church it's a loving church a worshiping church and a witnessing church.

church. And at the center as we've seen of each of these activities is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one we learn in the Bible. He is the one we love in our brother and sister.

He's the one we worship in our large and small gatherings. He is the one we witness to before the world. Let me end with another quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize. It is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

[36 : 23] The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.

Well with that in mind let's pray and thank God for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the reality that he has created and continues to create here in our church. Let's pray.

Lord God thank you for setting us free from our sin. God thank you for setting us free to love you, to know you.

God thank you for setting us free to be known and to be loved by others. God we thank you for the church. Lord often times we experience hurt and disappointment and frustration.

God it never lives up to our expectations. God forgive us and teach us to see how your spirit is at work in our midst.

[37 : 43] God make us more by your grace like this church that we see in Acts. God beautiful in its simplicity, powerful in its profundity, devoted to your word, to worshipping you, to truly caring for one another and God flowing out in gladness.

serenity and serenity in awe with that gospel for all the nations. God we pray this in Christ's name, amen. Amen.