

Message Date: 06-07-20

Sermon Series: To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 1: What Happens Next

Message Title: Week 7, Devoted

SCENE 1

- *In recent years many people have observed how the modern evangelical church possess lots of skill at getting a response... we can be really good at generating a powerful emotional environment that can result in a large response... BUT, we are really not good at retention.*
- *If you read people who have critically studied the phenomenon of large scale evangelical events, you will often see that the number of people responding in faith in these events... who then go on to becoming a practicing disciple of Christ, incorporated into a church community, is a very small percentage.*
- *CONTRASTED with this is what happened on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Peter ends his first sermon, and Luke records that “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

- *These were 3000 genuine conversions- 3000 people who were brought from death to life, through a powerful combination of two things:*
 - *FIRST, the message of the Gospel. REPENTANCE/ FORGIVENESS/ HOLY SPIRIT.... The invitation to TURN TO GOD, BE SET FREE BY GOD, and receive the LIFE OF GOD.*
 - *The Second thing is that this was a WORK OF GOD.*
- *In our desire to bring about change in our own churches- and culture- it is easy and tempting to settle for the very best that MAN CAN DO. But the hope of this world, what happened in Jerusalem that day, and what we will see unfold today... was- and remains - what only GOD CAN DO.*

- *GOD ADD’S 3000 people to His new community of faith. What we now see is a birds eye view of what this community of newly transformed Christ followers LOOKED LIKE.*

- *AND SO we have arrived at the end of Acts Chapter 2, and as incredible is what we have seen so far, this passage is what the second chapter of Acts is famous for. And it’s no exaggeration to say that this is one of the most argued about, passages in the NT.*

SCENE 2

- *So, a few initial things:*

- *First, It’s key to understand that what we see here is a DESCRIPTION of this first community of Christ Followers, and parts of this dynamic were both UNIQUE and LIMITED... Some of what we see here did not continue to be a practice for the church outside of this unique early Jerusalem experience.*

- *Over the centuries, people have looked at this story and argued that the church needs to return to these roots. Every now and then a speaker or author may proclaim that we need to be a “2nd chapter of Acts church”. The question is, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?*

- *You see at this point, the church as we understand it didn’t yet exist, and wouldn’t for some time. EVEN THE CONCEPT of the church as the body of Christ- that includes all believers, both Jews and Gentiles- this wasn’t on anyone’s mind. These first believers were all still Jewish, and they fully retained their Jewish identity.*

- *It would be through the ministry and writing of PAUL that God would reveal the full reality of His grace and the concept of the body of Christ. AT THIS POINT, Paul was still an angry young man formulating his plans to destroy the church, not be its preeminent missionary.*
- *In this dynamic we will see the first instances of signs and wonders- miracles- done by God through the Apostles. This will become a common theme through Acts, and like other aspects of the initial Jerusalem community, these miracles are unique, limited, and used by God for a very specific purpose- Not a picture of what scripture teaches should be expected as normative for the body of Christ.*
- *NOW, THAT SAID, WHAT WILL WE SEE HERE?? What we will see is the SPIRIT at work in the midst of these believers, leading them to be DEVOTED- as a community of faith- in FOUR ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES*
- *These Activities were also marked by attitudes of JOY- genuine expressions of the disciples hearts- that stood in contrast to the culture around them, that Glorified God, and filled their community with sincerity, Gladness, and Worship. AND FRIENDS, these activities, and the accompanying genuine expressions of the Spirits work in their lives, are STILL ESSENTIAL FOR US AS THE BODY OF CHRIST TODAY.*
- *SO, THAT SAID, LET’S read the story. READ ACTS 2:42-47*

SCENE 3

- *THIS IS A COMPELLING SCENE! Set the stage...*
- *Estimated that 1st century Jerusalem had between 40-100k residents, could swell to over 200k during the festivals such as Pentecost.*
- *SO, at this time, immediate aftermath of Pentecost, the 3000 believers could have been around 3% of the population. This doesn’t sound like a lot, but if 3% of the greater Denver metroplex came to Christ in one day, that would be around 85,000 people!*
- *THIS WAS HUGE! Then, consider that the old city of Jerusalem is not that big, and imagine a daily movement of 3000 people gathering in the city center and the outer temple courts, and it’s easy to see how the religious rulers were currently beginning to freak out.*
- *As this vibrant community exploded into being- and then continued to grow daily, Luke tells us that their lives as a community focused on FOUR CORE ACTIVITIES.*
 - *The Apostles Teaching*
 - *The Fellowship*
 - *The Breaking of Bread*
 - *The Prayers*
- *Most English translations read “The apostles teaching and fellowship, THE breaking of bread and prayer. BUT in the Greek, the article THE appears before each idea..... THE...*
- *This emphasizes the importance of each of these as individual intentional activities, even though they would have overlapped in how they happened.*
- *ONE COMMENTATOR argues that the Greek indicates two groupings*
 - *THE teaching and fellowship, within which happened the breaking of bread and prayer.*
- *THIS is subtle, but the overall picture is of a community sharing life together at every level. This is a major characteristic of the Spirits work in the early church.*

- **BUT, BEFORE LUKE MENTIONS ANY OF THIS, he uses what may be the most important word in the whole passage.**

SCENE 4

- **This word is DEVOTED. THESE were NOT secondary, optional activities and practices! Rather, they were central, and essential (use that word a lot today) to their very identity as followers of Christ.**
- **DEVOTED- it is a picture of persistence, perseverance, of an ongoing devotion for which nothing would get in the way. This wasn't just a high priority, it was WHO THEY WERE.**
- **First, they were devoted to the apostles teaching.**
- **The KJV translates this best with the phrases "The apostles Doctrine". OOF. DOCTRINE... its not a popular word... might bring to mind images of stuffy professors, rigid teaching, and the shocking concept that there may be such a thing as TRUTH.**
- **You may have heard a person say something like "I don't need doctrine... I just need Jesus".**
- **Reminds me of a YOUNG COUPLE who visited the BC service a number of years ago. I was meeting with them talking about the church, and they said "You know, we love Jesus and God, we just don't think we need such an emphasis on scripture. We want to come to church to be uplifted and encouraged".**
- **My thought – that I didn't say- was... well, just stay home and watch a Hallmark Movie!**
- **CHURCH! When we truly seek after God's word, we WILL be encouraged! Challenged, yes! Taught, you bet! Rebuked and convicted? At times, yes. BUT IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE, if we come to in with open hearts and honest minds yielded to God, we will be strengthened and overwhelmed with the magnitude of HOPE, JOY, and LIFE this gift contains.**
- **YOU SEE, DOCTRINE is really a wonderful word. It simply means what we believe. What we HOLD TO BE TRUE, and the conviction that this truth has a SOURCE, and it is GOD, not us.**
- **FOR THIS FIRST COMMUNITY, this was the apostles teaching, and they hungered after it. For us, this teaching, this revelation of God's truth, is SCRIPTURE. It is scripture rooted in the rich foundation of the OT, and fully revealed in the NEW WAY of the NEW COVENANT of the NEW TESTAMENT.**
- **THIS IS WHY, here at Trinity, we treasure and dive deeply into the scriptures. Because it is GOOD, it is ESSENTIAL, and there is no such thing as a healthy disciple of Jesus who doesn't engage with God through His Word.**
- **THIS FIRST COMMUNITY OF CHRIST FOLLOWERS devoted themselves to God's Word that was unfolding before them. MAY THIS ALSO BE TRUE OF US.**

SCENE 5

- **NEXT, THE FELLOWSHIP. This is the amazing- miraculous really- Concept of KOINONIA.**
- **Root word here is Greek KOINA, which means "in common". Words often used to describe the kind of sharing of life found in a marriage.**

- *It's a powerful concept of sharing life together... In a very practical, profound, way most importantly a sharing of life enabled by the SPIRIT.*
- *A community of Koinonia is a people who- because of the common experience of their faith in Christ- KNOW EACH OTHER, LOVE EACH OTHER, care deeply for each other, and DO LIFE TOGETHER.*
- *AND, as the rest of this passage indicates, to experience together the JOY, gladness of heart that comes from knowing and experiencing God's grace and goodness.*
- *In Paul's short letter to his friend Philemon, we see a glimpse of just how important is this idea of divine fellowship. Paul is encouraging Philemon, he prays...*

I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.

- *When I grew up this was taught to us out of the first edition of the NIV, which read "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith"... We were taught that this refers to EVANGELISM... that is was through sharing our faith with others... that we came to understand every good thing we have in Christ.*
- *NOW, sharing our faith in terms of evangelism is biblical and important! BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT TEXT SAYS. The word here for 'sharing your faith' is KOINONIA! FELLOWSHIP! As the NIV corrected, "a partnership in our faith"... and it is through this fellowship, this KOINONIA, that we may deepen in our understanding of every good things we share for the sake of Christ.*

SCENE 6

- *Okay, moving on! THE BREAKING OF BREAD- to what does this refer?*
- *Is this the powerful intimacy of preparing and share a meal together, OR*
- *Does Luke refer to the specific observance of what we now call the Lords' Supper, or communion, or the Eucharist?*
- *A lot of tradition holds that this is about the Lords Supper. That part of this first community's daily practice- whenever they met- was to celebrate communion, purposely remembering and reflecting on what Christ accomplished on the cross. Therefore, as a model for the church, this should also be part of every worship gathering of Christians. BUT, is this what the text actually says?*
- *The specific phrase "break the bread" occurs twice in the NT, both by Luke, here and in Luke 24:35. THAT is the story of Jesus meeting the two men on the road to Emmaeus, on the day of His resurrection. If you remember the story, these men didn't recognize Jesus until he broke the bread with them.*
- *Catholic tradition holds that this was the first Eucharist after Jesus' resurrection. But that is wholly reading a traditional practice back into the text. The clear language is that they shared a meal together. In fact, the idea of 'breaking bread together' was a common Jewish phrase referring to sharing a daily meal. THEN, in the sacred and intimate environment of that shared experience, the mens eyes were open and they recognized Jesus for who he was.*

- **LIKEWISE**, this text in Acts does not specifically refer to observance of communion, and the assumption that this is Luke's meaning is to read into the text.
- **NOW**, this does NOT take away from the importance of communion! Based on what we know of the early church, it is possible, and possibly quite likely, that communion in a simple form was part of the larger shared meal of these regular gatherings.
- But whether or not Luke was specifically referring to communion by "BOB", what IS clear is that these first believers- intentionally and regularly- met together in the intimate and personal interaction of a shared meal among people who deeply loved and cared for each other. **THIS WAS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THEIR LIVES AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.**
- **HAVE TO GIVE A NOTE:** In this time of COVID, I've heard some people say "Maybe potlucks or fellowship meals are a thing of the past" **FRIENDS! WE CANNOT SAY THIS. YES**, we need to be cautious as we learn more about this current situation. But to give up on the shared joy- the sacred experience- of shared meals as a community of faith is to surrender one of the essential attributes of being a follower of Christ.

SCENE 7

– THE PRAYERS

- The key thing here is that the disciples weren't just a community that prayed. They were a **COMMUNITY OF PRAYER**. In other words, prayer was a central and essential part of who they were. This was a community that actively sought and surrendered themselves to God's direction in everything they did.
- We will talk about prayer much more as we move through Acts, but one interesting note here. The term 'THE PRAYERS' may indicate that part of their prayer life was 'common' or 'set' prayer. Prayers from old testament scripture- such as the psalms- or prayers of the apostles that were learned and prayed by the people.
- For whatever reason, my bent is for prayer to be unique and personal- what is on a person's heart before God at the time they pray. **BUT**, I am learning that coming to God with the wonderful and powerful prayers of scripture and believers who have gone before us, this can be a very personal and biblical practice of prayer.

SCENE 8

- **SO!! THAT'S VERSE 42! WHOO!** So much there.
- **NOW...** because of these core practices- that were expression of their DNA as a new community of believers- Luke describes what naturally happened as a result.

VERSE 43: Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

- Everyone who witnessed these things was filled with **AWE**. Root word here is **FEAR...** conveys sense of amazement, awe, even nervousness. Idea that the people you are watching are participating in a **DIVINE** activity- that what you are seeing is a **WORK OF GOD**.
- Luke tells us this awe and fear focused on what God was doing through the Apostles- signs- wonders- miracles. And mostly- as we are going to see as they story unfolds- these involved healings.

- **NOW.. LIKE BAPTISM, we are going to set this topic of miracles for a more in-depth discussion in the coming weeks- we'll need to do that because this is a major theme in Acts, and one that is easy to misinterpret into our own context today. MORE TO COME THERE!**

SCENE 9

- **NOW WE COME to verses 44-45.**

All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*

- **SO- what do we do with this? What Luke describes here has been debated for centuries, and used completely out of context by people advocating political socialism as a Christian value.**
- **The core value here is really quite simple. Because of their love for each other- love that flowed from their love and devotion to God- this community of believers naturally and voluntarily care for each other in every area of their lives. They did this sacrificially, including physical and material needs.**
- **Lets take CLOSER LOOK at the specific dynamic of holding all their possessions in common.**
 - **First, this is not taught anywhere else in scripture. Even here, it is a description of what happened at this time, not a doctrinal practice.**
 - **As far as we know, it didn't occur outside of Jerusalem, was not common practice as the Christian movement grew into the surrounding Roman world.**
 - **SECOND, this was a characteristic of the community of believers. It was an outpouring of the love of the Spirit at work in their midst, and no-where do we see any teaching that this practice should be expected of- much less imposed upon- society in general.**
 - **THIRD, quite obviously, this dynamic was voluntary and self-driven. There is no evidence of any coercion from any authority, including the apostles. NOW, if you know the story and are asking "What about Annanias and Sapphira".. that's a different matter, and we will get to that!**
 - **One theory about this spontaneous communal living is that the community of disciples expected that Christ would return at any moment- that the 'end times' were imminent, and therefore there was no need for possessions. But this is unsupported by the text. Luke says nothing about this, and the tense of the greek indicates their 'selling and giving' was an ongoing activity. In other words, they didn't sell everything at once, but rather responded to people's needs with deep personal generosity as time went by.**
- **BOTTOM LINE: Because of their common faith in Christ and love of God, these first disciples were a people who**
 - **KNEW EACH OTHER.**
 - **LOVED AND CARED FOR EACH OTHER**
 - **WERE SACRIFICALLY GENEROUS TOWARD ONE ANOTHER**
- **MAY THIS BE SAID OF US AS WELL.**

SCENE 10

- **Okay... onto verses 46- first half of 47 (47a)**

⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

- **HERE** we see how the life of this community naturally welled up into joy and worship of God.
- **“They met everyday in temple courts.”** This shows us that these first believers retained their Jewish identity and practice.
- **Going to the temple courts on a regular basis- even daily- was not uncommon for a devout Jew living in Jerusalem.**
- **WHAT WAS DIFFERENT** was the significance of the temple. **BEFORE**, the temple had been a sacred space- the dwelling place of God (holy of holies)- and accessed only by the priestly class- the human intermediary who connected the common people to God.
- **BUT NOW**, through Christ’s DBR, **GOD HAS LEFT THE TEMPLE.** The curtain containing the Holy of Holy’s – separating God’s presence from people- **IS TORN.** **NOW GOD HAS TAKEN UP** permanent residence in the lives of the disciples, through the work of Christ and by the Holy Spirit. **THIS IS WHAT PETERS MESSAGE WAS ABOUT!**
- **So**, for these first Jewish disciples, the Temple courts remained their traditional place of Gathering and worshipping God, but the **SACRED SPACE** was now their own hearts. **AND** the focus of their gathering was Christ and the gospel, **NOT** the old Covenant purpose of the temple.
- **Their gatherings didn’t just happen at the temple- they overflowed into their own homes- their normal, everyday context of life- where once again they broke bread and fellowshiped together. In the healthiest and most powerful sense of the word, they are a COMMUNITY- they are doing life together.**
- **WHAT MADE THEM SO DIFFERENT** from surrounding culture was their countenance- their spirit- love and generosity- the expression of their heart that was **JOY, SINCERITY, GLADNESS**, and in all of these things **PRAISING GOD.**

SCENE 11

- **And church, don’t miss this. PEOPLE NOTICED.** Luke says they were ‘enjoying the favor of all the people’
- **I want to be clear about something here. It’s easy to see Luke’s description here as some idealistic utopia, where everything was perfect and the disciples kind of floated around with their rainbows and unicorns.**
- **THAT IS NOT THE CASE!** This is **REAL LIFE-** the reason they shared their possessions was because so many people had great need! There was poverty, disease, and things are going to get difficult for the church very quickly as persecution begins, right here in Jerusalem.
- **What we see is a tenacious, strong as steel HOPE and FAITH, rooted in these peoples DEVOTION to God and each other. When Luke says they ate together with GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS, these are hardworking people, courageous, likely bearing the bruises of a difficult life, who had been MADE ALIVE INSIDE by the power of the Gospel...**

- *When they met, I can image the presence of sadness at times, stories of the day, jokes, laughter, and a marvel at this transforming experiencing they were sharing. AND LIKE A DEEP CURRENT connecting them together and to God, their souls welled up in a gladness that praised and gave thanks to God.*
- *WHEN THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM- whose lives also were likely not easy- WHEN THEY SAW THIS... it ATTRACTED THEM. They recognized that they were witnessing something beyond a normal human experience.*
- *A person shared an analogy with me... of walking down the downtown retail district in a city, years ago, to go WINDOW SHOPPING. This was when stores would have very large windows, right at street level, with elaborate displays showcasing WHAT COULD BE YOURS, if you just were to come inside.. and shell out a lot of money... and as a result, all many families could do was wistfully look at what was behind the glass, thinking... if only that life could be mine.*
- *HERE... the lives of these believers was on DISPLAY. But they weren't behind a glass barrier that could only be penetrated by money and social status. When the people of Jerusalem looked into the undeniable authenticity of these peoples new lives... the invitation was COME! JOIN US! THIS LIFE that we can't fully explain, it is FOR YOU. IT IS FOR ALL who will turn to God, through faith in Jesus Christ.*
- *AND PEOPLE DID. The last sentence of chapter two reads 'AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.'*

SCENE 12

- *THINK OF THAT! As church leaders, we can spend so much time and energy on the question of how we can get people to share their faith! How do we get the gospel to our community? How do we get people to RESPOND? If you look through Christian culture, you will see a myriad number of evangelism programs, books, strategies. We produce movies, throw concerts, engage in social programs, wear all sorts of Christian gear and stickers on our cars.*
- *When we don't do these things, there are all sorts of Christian authors, speakers, and conferences urging us to GET BUSY! GO DO IT!*
- *AND THESE CAN ALL BE GOOD. SOME ARE VERY GOOD, AND THOROUGHLY BIBLICAL!*
- *But in the midst of banging our heads against the wall and expending untold amounts of money, time, and honestly frustration.... GOD CALLS US TO LOOK AT THE SIMPLICITY AND POWER of what HE DID through His people in this earliest and most primitive Christian community.*
- *The believers, with ONE HEART, were devoted to God.*
 - *They learned together. Devoted to word.*
 - *Fellowshipped, broke bread together.*
 - *They were a people of prayer.*
- *OVERFLOWING from this foundation...*
 - *They KNEW each other, shared life together*
 - *They lived in a spirit of LOVE, compassion, care, and generosity toward others*
 - *They were filled with a sincere gladness of heart*
 - *IN EVERYTHING, they gave thanks and praise to God.*

- ***NOW- it is virtually certain that as they interacted with the community around them, that they shared their new faith in Christ with the people of Jerusalem.***
- ***BUT LUKES POINT- GOD’S POINT TO US THROUGH HIS WORD- is that as these believers expressed the HOPE, COMMUNITY, AND LIFE that flow from devotion to God... THAT PEOPLE NOTICED.... And THE LORD did the work of adding to their numbers. And he did it daily.***

SCENE 13

- ***SO- WHAT ARE OUR BIG TAKEAWAYS?***
- ***Everything we see here is a work of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. This is God at work.***
- ***Our hope is not in the best that man can do- it is in what GOD CAN DO.***
- ***These first disciples BELIEVED THIS, and they devoted themselves accordingly.***
- ***The life experience of these first followers of Christ existed wholly in the context of COMMUNITY. There is zero concept of a ‘standalone’ believer... not here, and not anywhere in the NT. There is no NT concept of being a spirit filled follower of Christ apart from participation in the community of faith- whatever that community may look like.***
- ***The devotion, radical generosity, and overflowing gladness of heart permeating this community was a SIGHT TO BEHOLD, and it drew people to God***
- ***As a consequence of all that was happening, the LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBERS, DAILY. THE KINGDOM GREW.***
- ***AND CHURCH!!! THIS IS STILL HOW GOD WILL GROW HIS KINGDOM TODAY.***
- ***SO...***
 - ***May we be people devoted to God’s Word***
 - ***May we be people devoted to fellowship, and breaking of bread***
 - ***May we be a people of prayer***
 - ***AND THEN, may we watch with glad and sincere hearts as God uses the testimony of our lives and our words to draw people to himself.***

AMEN.