

What to focus on as a church * Acts 2:42-47

June 7, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

I want you to picture an average church. Now take away the pews, the stained glass, the pulpit, the offering plates, the PowerPoint projector, the sound system, the building and what have you got?

The Church.

The people of God working together to follow Jesus faithfully.

And that's what the book of Acts shows us - the church without years of church tradition piled on. Just a bunch of people working together to follow Jesus faithfully.

We're going to take the next few weeks to look together at the book of Acts to see the church in action.

Acts is a really great book with a lot of moving stories, but we're going to focus on the ones that show church being the church. We're going to look at stories that show us the church in action. And my goal with this series is that it would shift our thinking about church from what we do on Sunday mornings to who we are everyday of the week. And given that we're not actually meeting at the building right now, it's a great time to think about US as the church. So that's what we'll do for the rest of June and I look forward to exploring the book of Acts with you.

Now to begin, we really need to think about what the church valued as it did its work in the world. What was it that the first generation of believers focused on as they began this two thousand year journey that is the church? And what should WE focus on as a church? There are all sorts of things that we can invest our time on – what are the things that we need to major in in order to make our minors all the more effective?

To answer that question, we're going to look at a very famous passage in the Bible. Acts 2:42.

I mentioned this when we looked at Luke's Gospel a few years back; Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke to tell about Jesus' mission in the world and then he wrote Acts to pick up the story where the Gospel left off and to tell us all about Jesus' disciples carrying on His mission.

They saw Him ascend into Heaven, they gathered together to wait for Him in Jerusalem, they were praying together at Pentecost and the Holy Spirit descended upon them as tongues of fire (hence the flame in the logo) and moved by the Holy Spirit, they went to preach the good news of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, thousands of people were saved.

And then Acts 2:42 tells us what they did as the church. Acts 2:42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

There it is, right there. Priorities for the church. Things that we need to major in if we're going to be the church.

So let's just briefly unpack them. First they devoted themselves – literally, they pursued with intensity – the apostles' teaching. They weren't just there to pursue the majority opinion; they knew as followers of Jesus that they needed to become more like Him.

And since the apostles had walked with Him and learned from Him, they were ideally suited to teach them all about Him. And so the church devoted itself, organized itself, around the apostles' teaching. Now obviously, no apostle is still living, but we have the apostles' teaching recorded for us here (the Bible).

And so, we devote ourselves, we organize ourselves around the teaching of Word. It's where we get our values from. It's what we build our lives upon. I've said it before and I'll say it again – you don't need to hear from Graham Gladstone; you need to hear from God – and so I do my best at every turn to make sure that what I'm saying and teaching you is rooted in the Bible. Just like the first generation church, we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching.

Second, we devote ourselves to the fellowship - that is, we share life together and we share resources together. When God saves us, He doesn't simply save us as individuals, He saves us into community so that we will share life together – mourn with those who are mourning, rejoice with those who are rejoicing, we comfort one another with the comfort that Christ has given us. The language of fellowship or 'koinonia' is literally common association and partnership and so we share in the nitty-gritty of life together.

It also means that we share resources – we make sure there is equity – that everyone has enough. We give intentionally and proportionately and cheerful and confidently - I'll say more about that in a minute, but for now, let's just sum it up like this – we devote ourselves to the fellowship by sharing our lives and sharing resources.

Third, we devote ourselves to the breaking of bread. Now, there are a couple of ways to understand this and I suspect that Luke had both in mind. On one hand, 'breaking of bread' is really just the practical application of sharing resources. Often in the NT, 'breaking of bread' means 'eating together' and so in a sense, we as a church 'break bread together' in order to share resources.

On the other hand though, 'breaking bread' has a deeper meaning for us as Christians, doesn't it? It's shorthand for what Jesus did for us on the Cross; eating bread and wine becomes an act of worship and thanksgiving when we do it to remember Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf. And so I think that the third thing that the church devoted itself to was really worship – honouring God both informally – breaking bread and eating in each other's homes – and formally – through the Lord's Supper.

So teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and finally, the church devoted itself to prayer. The church devoted itself to doing God's will and so of course, they devoted themselves to seeking God's will. They valued talking to God just as much as they valued talking to each other. And that's an important priority for all churches to share.

So, the early church devoted itself to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. And what I think is really neat is that you see that illustrated in the very next verses –

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. (What's that? That's the fellowship – sharing life, sharing resources).

45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (Now, I don't think that that means that everybody just sold off their assets and put it into a big pile at Peter's house but I do think that it means that everybody held their possessions lightly – not as their things to guard but as

God's things to steward. Clearly they thought not just about how their stuff could benefit them, but how their stuff could benefit others and I think that we'd all do well to grow in that way of thinking).

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. (What do you think they were doing in the Temple courts? They're listening to the apostles' teaching. They're praying. These are all Jewish people that are gathering and to a Jew, you go to the temple to learn and to pray and so they just keep on doing it – but now, understanding that all they'd learned in the OT found its fulfillment in Jesus. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (again, the fellowship, breaking bread)

47 praising God (worship) and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

As the church devoted themselves to God and served one another, they were a witness to the world. The people watching were moved by their sincerity and satisfaction and GOD did the work of bringing new people into the flock. And I think that God continues to work like that when we focus on the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.

In light of this, I think that it's important to ask ourselves 'what am I looking for from our church?' 'What do I expect my church to value?' If it's just the social time or the building itself, then we've got a problem. But I think that we are devoted to more than that as a church.

Because think about what's happened in the last three months. Everything about church has been stripped away. We haven't even been able to meet in our building.

But what's continued?

Teaching - there are 33 videos up on Youtube right now unpacking 2 Corinthians and other verses relevant to COVID-19 – (and no one's ever said 'I wish you'd spend more time teaching from Chicken Soup for the Soul)

Fellowship – we've been gathering together online, sharing life together, talking on telephones, sharing resources with each other and with the community

Worship – we are working to honour God both through Zoom and our actual lives and

Prayer – a big chunk of our time together on Sundays is given over to prayer, isn't it? And I know that you've been holding each other up in prayer through the week.

Not even coronavirus can keep us from doing the things that matter most. I'll be absolutely delighted when we can do them in person again, but I am even more encouraged to know that these are the things that we are devoted to, as we honour the God who deserves our devotion. Let's pray.

BENEDICTION

6. 2 Cor. 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.