

June 6, 2010 Communion Acts 2:41-42

THE NEW CHURCH

Sometimes I think about what the church was like many years ago. I think how those disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit driven into the streets to proclaim the message of salvation through Jesus Christ with enthusiasm. I think how the people thought the disciples were nuts because they all spoke in other languages that they could understand. I think about the new Peter's first sermon. I think how he opened his mouth and out came words of hope and conviction as the Holy Spirit took over as he told the people what they needed to hear about the Jesus who had been crucified, died, was buried, rose again in 3 days and lives today. The Holy Spirit was flowing freely falling not only on the disciples but those who heard Peter's word. They were amazed. They were awe struck for they never heard such powerful preaching. They heard about their sinful nature and how God sent his Son to release them from their bondage to sin. They heard Peter say that they could do something by turning toward God and be baptized into a new relationship with the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus the Christ.

It was such an amazing sermon, and the Holy Spirit worked overtime as he began to breathe new life into those who were convicted as the tongues of fire fell upon them and the mighty wind breathed new life into hearts and tears began to flow as many asked what they could do to have this new life of freedom. You

remember what Peter said? “Repent!” Over 3,000 souls trusted in Jesus for salvation and freedom of their sinful nature. The church of Jesus Christ began. That was a hallelujah day. The angels in heaven were rejoicing, the harps were stringing joyful music, as one lost sheep after the other came home to the Shepherd’s fold.

But folks that was only the first step. There is more to it than just saying “Jesus come into my heart.” You got to live the life. And to live the life *you got to know how to live it.* Listen to what the new church did recorded in Acts 2:41-42. Luke records “*Then those who accepted what Peter said were baptized. (That’s number one. Identifying with Jesus through baptism.) About 3 thousand people were added to the numbers of believers that day. They spent their time learning the apostles’ teaching, (That’s number 2.) sharing, (That’s number three.) breaking of bread (Number four.) and praying together.*” (That’s number five.)

Being baptized to identify with Jesus, learning, sharing, communion, and praying are all part of the church. When you joined the United Methodist Church you either renewed your vows of baptism or if never baptized you were as you have promised to “uphold the United Methodist Church with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service” and a new one has been added, “Your witness.” Isn’t that what that first church was doing?

Following their baptism they assembled **to learn the teachings of Jesus** through the disciples. I try to remind you from time to time that my function as your pastor on Sunday morning is to let you see Jesus, not tell feel good stories. That's right! Trying to let you see how Jesus works today as he did yesterday. As he does today, as he will tomorrow. How his lessons for life are never outdated and fit anytime and anywhere. The principles are for all people in every generation. That's why the Bible is still relevant after all these years, from cover to cover. His teachings go on and on. They are never obsolete. Many a generation may have thought that God's word was obsolete but they found out differently. Read the Old Testament and you find king after king of Israel were not following God's word. But then out of nowhere there would be a rebirth, a turning back to God. God never gave up on them. And neither does he give up on us. Remember in the 70's and late 60's there was rebellion against the church and against God? I remember that time well. Some had promoted that God was dead. Some began to teach that God's love was such you could do whatever you wanted without paying the price. Love others was the motto, grab onto the brass ring, enjoy life because when this life is over, it's over. Some fell away. They turned their back on God. But God never left. He had tears in his eyes as people fled from his side, but he never gave up. He still reached some who would listen that he was still the same

God who they had heard about when they were kids. And later a revival came, though not great as a turning back to God began.

Sometimes we think we know it all because we have read his word or heard the famous stories like the Prodigal Son, or the Easter story, or Christmas story. But there is more to God's word than that. Read it and find what it says. But don't just read it do as James tells you and that is, apply it in your lives. Jesus said those who don't follow God's word are like people who build their homes along the seaside without any firm foundation so that when the storms of life come they have nothing to grasp on to and the next thing they know they are sinking fast, falling into the seaside and drowning. (You know people like that? I don't mean with real houses, but with their faith?) But those who pay attention and do God's word have built their homes in the same place on firm foundations so that when those same storms hit they can weather the storms, not on their own strength, but on Gods. They can ride out those storms in peace, relaxed knowing God is in charge. (I'm sure you know some of those type of people where they trust in our God in all things. They have a peaceful heart.)

I have said before we are works in process. No one that I know of knows everything about God. You see his word teaches us what it was like back then and there are principles to be applied to our everyday lives. And each day things change, so does God's application of his mighty word. So we need to be a learning

church. A church that learns what Jesus says, what Jesus expects, what Jesus wants for our lives. His words are wonderful words of life. Isn't that what our first hymn said? *"Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life, let me more of their beauty see... teach me faith and duty..."* Right on the next page in our hymnal is the hymn that says, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."*

The other morning the storms kept me from being able to play golf before I went to conference. I was up early so I turned on the TV while I had breakfast. I didn't watch the whole program but I think it was Beth Moore and she read this Scripture I think fits today. Proverbs 4:20-22 is God speaking saying, *"My children, pay attention to my words; listen closely to what I say. Don't ever forget my words, keep them always in mind. They are the key to life for those who find them..."*

Friends, God's words are transforming. Through the Holy Spirit when you read them or search for help he will light up those words that will change your life and meet your needs.

Next those people sold things in order **to share with others**. Remember there were people from all over the area that stayed longer than normal because of listening to the disciples. Isn't that what God asks us to do? Even our weekly offering, isn't it sharing with others out of what we have? The church depends on your giving in order to do what God has called this church to do. Hasn't God

blessed us with much? Doesn't everything belong to God? Aren't we just his stewards? Did he not bless us so we can share with the less fortunate? In Lima Ohio there was a man who was a Christian business man. He had a couple of business failures, but God led him into another one. This time he promised God that if he blessed him he would give one million dollars to missions. In fact, he went to the bank and made God the primary owner of his company. God owned 51% and he 49. I heard this from the owner himself as he said that year he had already given over \$250,000. He was working on the rest. He was sharing out of what God blessed him with knowing God would not only bless his business he would bless him and he could never out give God. And by the way, he had a chapel in that business and people came to him for prayer. No wonder God blessed him. He took care of all their needs.

Thirdly we learn that **we share in the table of grace.** John Wesley was a firm believer in the breaking of bread remembering what Jesus did for us. Isn't the breaking of bread not only remembering, but it's giving thanks for what he did for us? Didn't those who walked the road that day become alive when Jesus took the bread, broke it and gave it to them? Weren't their eyes opened? We know communion is a very important function of the worship service. Somehow, somehow, through faith God's grace is extended to those who come to receive. Paul addressed the church at Corinth for misusing the Lord's Supper. They had

forgotten what it was all about. It had become a time of filling their stomachs rather than remembering what Christ had done. Paul reminds them and us that *“Jesus took the bread, blessed it, gave it to the disciples and said, ‘This is my body; it is for you. Do this to remember me.’ After they ate Jesus took the cup and said. ‘This cup is the new agreement that is sealed with the blood of my death. When you drink it, remember me.’”* Paul goes on to say, *“Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you are telling others about the Lord’s death until he comes.”*

So when you come to the table of grace this morning remember what Jesus has done for you and give him thanks, and be his witnesses wherever you go today.

Finally, **pray**. They came together to pray. Prayer is the backbone of any church that is why we need to pray more at home and pray more together. There is power in prayer. Our little prayer group has dwindled down to a “precious few” but I invite you to come to the next one to pray for just a half hour. Remember Jesus’ word in the garden when he rebuked the disciples for not praying but falling asleep? Come join the few, the faithful, the prayers.

We don’t know what these people prayed about back then, but perhaps they prayed for those who were ill. Maybe they anointed with oil asking God’s healing touch on the sick. Maybe they prayed for courage to be bold witnesses of this new

found faith in Jesus Christ. Maybe they prayed for the power of the Holy Spirit to be unleashed among those who had received Christ lately. Maybe they prayed the prayer of Jabez to increase their numbers through their bold witnessing. Maybe they remembered “how Jabez called upon the God of Israel saying, *“Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”* And maybe those who knew their Hebrew Bible remembered the final line in that prayer....” *So God granted him what he requested.*” 1 Chronicles 4:10

Do you see any difference in what the early church did and what we as a church could be doing? And the results were, “God added daily to their numbers.” They learned God’s word so they would know how to apply it in everyday life. They shared what they had with others. If they had 2 cookies and the other person had none, instead of eating the other one they gave it to the person who had none. They came together at the table of grace to remember that God gave them Jesus so that they could find peace, forgiveness, love, faith, hope. Then they prayed for one another, for their future...for their new struggles... and much more. The church was filled with Pentecostal power that challenged them to witness to their faith and because they did God kept adding daily to their numbers.

May we become his witnesses as we celebrate the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup as we let others know of God’s love that was willing to send us

his son so that we could have life eternal, and be able to live today knowing he is right here with us. If we apply the principles of that early church, learning what God's word says, sharing what we have, be in communion with others, and pray, yes pray, maybe, yes just maybe God might add to our numbers. Wouldn't that be nice!