

I've been praying over the last few weeks about what I'd like to share as my 1<sup>st</sup> sermon, there have been a number of passages that I've considered. Sandra & I have only been here for 2 weeks and what I have observed so far really encourages me. This morning I'd like us to look at **Acts 2:42~47** because it appears to encapsulate what Cavy is about. These 5 verses not only give us a glimpse into what the early Church was like but what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

### Devoted Themselves

**v42** We read that these early believers *devoted themselves* to a number of activities. The expression *devoted themselves* has the idea of being persistent in, persevering in, having an ongoing devotion to. It has echoes of the unity they had when *They all joined together constantly in prayer* in Acts 1, same Greek word.

These activities were not a one off event or something that only lasted a few days. The early Church were really committed to them and I have that sense so is Cavy.

### The Apostles Teaching

The 1<sup>st</sup> activity listed in these verses is **the Apostles Teaching**. The Greek used here is Didache which literally means Teaching. We know that as early as 70 AD the church produced a document which was called "*The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles.*" We know it simply as The Didache. It's probably the oldest non canonized Christian book we have. It consists of 16 chapters that outlined the Teaching of the 12 Apostles.

Imagine for a moment that we had 3,000 new believers join our Church. I wonder what we'd consider to be the essentials of the Christian faith, what we'd want them to know as a follower of Jesus. We can glean some of the things that the Apostles taught them from the sermons in Acts. We read how they taught them about Jesus's life, his ministry, his death & of course his resurrection. Also picking up some of the topics from the *Didache*, there would've been instructions given on how to outlive the Christian faith. These people had been saved in the middle of a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit & yet the Apostles considered teaching them these things to be one of their main responsibilities.

We see this commitment to teaching reiterated in **Acts 6:2**. This is where there is a dispute between the Grecian & Hebraic Jews & the Apostles declared that *It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters*, so the Church appoints 7 people to deal with the situation. This indicates to me that it is important that we all have a really good biblical understanding of our faith & not one

that is based on experience alone. The early Church took seriously the command of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

In **Joshua 1:8** we read *Keep this Book...always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.* As Followers of Jesus, it's important that we know what's in this book. *The 2017 Bible Societies 'Bible engagement Survey' tells us that 37% of Christians only read their bibles once a week.* We should have a desire to study it, to read it, to meditate upon it & to apply it to our lives. Jesus states in **John 15.14**, *You are my friends if you do what I command.* How can we do that if we don't know what Jesus taught? It's important that we are people of the Book.

## Fellowship

The 2nd activity that these believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to was **the Fellowship**. The word fellowship here is *koinōnia* & it speaks of *communion* or *fellowship*, of *participation* & *sharing*. There are a couple of aspects to this. The 1<sup>st</sup> is that aspect of the things we share in common in Church, e.g. our shared experience of being born again. Paul states it like this in **Ephesians 4:4-6**. *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

It's not just about us physically coming together as a group but us being one body in Christ, the community of the redeemed. When we begin to comprehend this it helps us to understand passages like **1 Corinthians 12**.

Another aspect of *koinōnia* is that harmony we have together in a shared purpose. *We've seen an example of that this week with the apple picking project, people coming together for a shared purpose of blessing this community with free apples. There was a willingness to support one another, to help one another & to bless others.* In **v45** we see the early Church taking it a step further: some people sold their possessions & property & gave the proceeds away to others who were in need. This wasn't an enforced sharing, but rather as the Spirit directed: some people cashed up their resources to help those in need. This wasn't just a one off event either. It

carried on for some time in the Church *Acts 4.32-37, Acts 6* food distribution. There was a real sense of concern for others, of carrying one another's burdens.

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; 1 Corinthians 12:26*

This generosity was a real concrete, tangible manifestation of their fellowship.

Our Western culture works against this biblical concept of fellowship. Our culture is so individualistic, so this biblical idea of *koinōnia* is quite foreign to us. It challenges our western world view. As the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the struggles we have is not only identifying who we are but what we are called to be & how we outlive that. I believe that *koinōnia* is part of the answer as people search for meaningful relationships. It's something that the Church can offer society, that sense of belonging, of being accepted, of having a sense of purpose.

### The Breaking of Bread

The 3rd activity that the early Church was devoted to was *the Breaking of Bread*.

This refers to some form of communal meal which is also picked up in *v46b* where we read that *They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.*

They were a generous people. They not only shared their possessions but they also shared their food with one another. While they were eating together in their homes or at the Temple, they would remember Jesus's death on the cross. Over time this developed into a separate meal, that we've come to know as communion: an important sacrament in our Christian life together, as we remember the Lord's atoning sacrifice for our sins & the establishment of the new covenant in his blood.

### Prayer

The final activity that the early Church was devoted to was **Prayer**.

The Greek here is in the plural. It may refer to the set times of prayer that a pious Jew would pray. They prayed at sunrise, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon & finally at sunset. These early Christians still saw themselves as part of the Children of Israel & they were still very much attached to the temple. Even as late as 5.12 they continued to meet in Solomon's Colonnade. The Didache taught that Christians were to say the Lord's prayer 3x a day so it may refer to that. It may also refer to the times when the Church came together to pray- like in *Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in*

*prayer*- or when the Church gathered to discern the election of Matthias in *Acts 1.24-25*- or how the Church prayed in *Acts 4* when Peter & John were imprisoned.

Prayer was instrumental with the appointment of the 7 in *Acts 6* and the mission into Samaria & the coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by prayer, *Acts 8*.

Luke is wanting us to know that prayer was a significant component of the early Church, just as it should be for us. Prayer should be a fundamental component of who we are & what we do, as we seek to be obedient to the Lord.

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But this isn't all that is going on in this Church is it, there are other things happening here as well. Luke draws our attention to the effect that the life of the believers & the ministry of the apostles had on the people living in Jerusalem. In *v43* he states that *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles*. It wasn't just the church that was in 'awe', it was everyone in & around Jerusalem, believers & non-believers alike. People had heard what was happening within the Church & they recognised that God was at work. It appears that the kind of miracles that Jesus had done, were now being done by the apostles. God was revealing himself in miraculous ways & the people recognised this as a God thing, this wasn't something that man was instigating. Just as throughout the life & ministry of Jesus, the miracles he did showed that God was with Him. Luke is wanting us to know that God was with His people, confirming that what was happening here was a continuation of the ministry of Christ. It does make me pause & ask how do we, the church in the 21st Century, show the world that God is with us? Especially since a lot of people have lost that sense of awe or respect for the Church. Sure some of it is our own doing but maybe if we ministered more in the power of the Holy Spirit & saw the miraculous, people would once again have that sense of the awe of God.

Like Cavy, the New Testament Church was a very relational Church. They were in *koinōnia* with the apostles via their teaching and they were in *koinōnia* with the Father via worship. They worshiped God in their homes, at the temple with communion & prayer & this was happening every day. They had *koinōnia* with the community via their Christian witness & lifestyle, supported by their practical love for others, with the result being they enjoyed the *favour of all the people*. You can see why *the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*. [v47]

## Conclusion

Their lifestyle was so counter cultural. They got that being a disciple of Jesus was something radically different to what society propagated. Their faith permeated every aspect of their life & it was infectious. Isn't that what being a disciple of Jesus should be like: a people who are blessed to be a blessing to others, a people characterised by grace & compassion, who have generous hearts towards others, who are filled with joy & thanksgiving for what God has done in our lives, a people who are filled with an awe of God & desire to worship him with all their hearts. No wonder people were being saved.

As we live out our faith, may it also be a dramatic witness to the people round about us & as we go from this place today may we go in the strength & power of the Holy Spirit, to be God's witnesses, wherever He may send us, for His Kingdom's sake.