

## Life of the Church

Acts 2:43-47

It seems like forever, since we have last met. Three weeks. A lot of you spent some of that time as I did, snowbound, or ice-bound, in your own homes. It has been a hard month of winter weather to be sure, and some of our people aren't even able to get out today, able to hear these words only via our livestream. It's frustrating to be trapped at home, to be afraid of traveling because of the dangerous icy conditions of the roads. And I hope you have felt the frustration of not being able to be here, together, as well. That serves as a useful introduction to my sermon this morning, because that frustration is exactly what you ought to feel when you are kept apart from the fellowship of the whole church.

Because coming to church isn't just a good habit, it isn't just an act of obedience to God. It is not just a rule to be followed or one step in your discipleship as a Christian. It is all of those things, but it is also something much more. It is to be the expression of life itself. You see, the life of the church is expressed corporately, together as a body. The life of the church is expressed most fully and most faithfully when we are together. And that is borne out in our text this morning.

A brief reminder of where we were in our study three weeks ago. I ended with a focus upon verse 42, a list of four fundamental activities of normal, ordinary church life.

v.42 "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The apostles' doctrine refers to the full content of what the apostles taught. So whether you use the English word "doctrine" or "teaching," the meaning is the same—it is the body of content which was established by the apostles as the foundation of the

church. It is the objective content of what the apostles taught, what the Bible teaches. Thus Paul says this of those who would later become elders in the church, describing them as men...

Titus 1:9 "...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

The church was devoted, actively devoted to the that which was taught and established as the apostolic foundation of good doctrine. And to fellowship, the communion of fellowship. Communion means sharing our lives together. That's fellowship. It means we live together, and that will be a focus of our study today. The breaking of bread I believe is a reference to the blessing of the sacraments, the Lord's Supper and baptism, describing a commitment to those ordinances which the Lord has specifically established for the life of his church. And prayer, or the prayers...which is to say, the exercise of praying together. It is the element of our corporate worship in which we pray together. Together with one voice, either in unison or by a spoken representative, it is the activity of God's people together talking to their God.

We go on this morning with verse 43, focusing again upon the life of the church. The life of the church as it ought to be. The life experience of the church which we would do well to pursue. This is the goal. And I should note, this goal is too often far different than that which is sought after in many churches today, churches that seem to exist for their own benefit and identity as an institution. The life of the church as we see it defined in the book of Acts is not described by some sort of parameters of some organization. The life of the church isn't defined by its structure, but instead, by the lives of its people, together.

In the book of Acts, that begins with the apostolic foundation,

and I do want to emphasize that today as Luke sees fit to mention again that foundational, apostolic role in the church. So we read, v.43 “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

I don’t want to spend too much time on this idea, but I don’t want to skip it either. The apostles were foundational, and transitional. In other words, not permanent. The church is a building, a building built upon a unique and once-for-all foundation. The apostles are that foundation, those who had been with Jesus, who had seen Christ. They are those whose authority established the church in Jesus’ name, and whose authority attested to the place of Jesus as the head of his church. And so Luke here makes reference to,

### **I. THE PRESENCE OF APOSTOLIC SIGNS AND WONDERS.**

v.43 “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

Signs and wonders refer to miracles, acts of super nature power, divine power, acts only God can do. And so,

#### **A. Signs and wonders declare the supernatural power of God.**

Let me go back to what we studied in Acts 2 to make this point again, that these miraculous signs were given by God to attest to the power of Jesus himself!

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not

possible that He should be held by it.”

Jesus was attested by miracles, wonders and signs. Jesus was shown to be God, demonstrated to be God, by the miracles performed by the apostles in his name. Thus, the supernatural power necessary to perform those miracles demonstrates the same supernatural power by which the gospel saves a person dead in his sin and makes him alive as a Christian. Do you remember Jesus’ words in the performance of such a miracle, when he healed a man paralyzed,

Luke 5:20 “When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

So when God built his church upon the foundation of the apostles, supernatural power was displayed. And those,

#### **B. Signs and wonders were a testimony of the supernatural power of the gospel.**

That, again, is the whole point! “...that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

The writer of the book of Hebrews says this about the great salvation of which Jesus spoke,

Heb. 2:3 “...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a

salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

So the apostolic miracles were given by God to bear witness of the power of the gospel to save sinners, the supernatural power of the gospel. And those signs were obvious!

v.43 “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

Don’t take fear there as a bad thing, but rather as an expression of loving and devotion, the fear of reverence and honor. The power of God was at work in their midst, and the people stood in awe of him. Then notice what Luke emphasizes about this early church. Note the first thing he identifies to describe the life of the church.

v.44 “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

I am labeling that as,

## **II. THE PRESENCE OF DEEP-ROOTED FELLOWSHIP.**

I want to look at that in two parts, the first part simply expressed by the words, “Now all who believed were together.” They were together. The expression in the Greek is built upon the preposition for “upon”. It’s word of relationship, indicating direction toward one another. Literally, they were upon one another. They were connected to one another. They existed in relationship to one another. Or more simply,

### **A. Life was shared together.**

We’ll get to the second half of verse 44 in a moment, with

reference to things, but this first phrase describes the situation more subjectively, more intimately. They belonged together. They shared life together. Or, to use the common image Paul would later use, they were a body.

1 Cor. 12:15 “If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased...26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

According to Ephesians 4:25, “we are members of one another.” And so we read things like,

Eph. 2:19 “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

We are members of a household. A family. That is much deeper than what I’ll mention in a moment, sharing the things of life together. This goes all the way back to our identity, our existence, our definition. The church is to live together, lives shared together. God’s people are to live together in just that way. And that produces very practical evidence, for we see here that,

### **B. The things of life were shared together.**

v.44-45

We ought to be careful not to impose some sort of communal identity to the church. This is not a description nor a defense of

any political theory of communism, but rather it is the natural outworking of that delightful expression, “What’s mine is yours.” It wasn’t enforced. Private ownership, or personal stewardship, was not denied or eliminated. There was no sense of entitlement by those who had less nor any sense of external obligation by those who had more, but simply the free expression of family identity. What’s mine is yours...

No selfishness is attached. No sense of being beholden to others, no sense of any obligation of debts. Just a genuine, loving, personal commitment of those within the body of the church to attend to the needs of others around them, such that the things of life were shared together.

I’ve certainly known people who exemplify that sort of attitude, as we all should. We all have different things. For some, that relates to money and material goods. For some it is time. For others, maybe skill or wisdom. Just put that whole ball of wax together so that you get this conclusion,

v.44 “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Clearly that includes the giving of money, and in an obviously tangible way, that is often where it begins. Even in such a relatively small things such as our deacon’s fund offering that we collect each month, month that is used for the benefit of others. And it is used! Money is given. It is distributed. As are any number of other things among you, and I could identify ways in which this is taking place among us, for which I am very grateful and appreciative.

The point is that this goal should always be before you. This idea should always be in your mind, and in your heart, in your

soul, that you belong to one another. Your life is to be shared with one another. And sometimes, perhaps I should say often, that means something very tangible. Both giving as you have ability, and receiving as you have need. That’s how the church is supposed to work. That is how we are supposed to relate to each other. And I should note as I will again at the conclusion of the sermon,

v.47 “...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

The Lord blessed it. The Lord blessed the church because people shared their lives with one another. And I can look out at this congregation and identify specific people who are here, vital members here, because of that that dynamic. I hope you are here because of faithful biblical teaching. I hope you are here because of a commitment to faithful biblical worship. But I also know that you are here because of deep-rooted fellowship.

Related to that, notice how Luke continues in,

v.46 “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.”

Here we see,

### **III. THE PRESENCE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMUNITY.**

It is a further description of this deep-rooted fellowship. Notice the words,

v.46 “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house...”

I want to focus on that phrase,

#### **A. With one accord.**

I preached a whole sermon with that title back in November, as we looked at,

Acts 1:14 “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”

That Greek word for “with one accord” is used only 12 times in the whole of the New Testament, and 10 of those occurrences are here in the book of Acts. Here are some of the other references...

Acts 2:1 “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”

Acts 4:24 “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.”

Acts 5:12 “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.”

Acts 8:6 “And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”

Acts 15:25 “...it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And our text today, verse 46. That’s the church as it ought to be, “continuing daily with one accord.” They “continued daily.” I’ll make reference to the actual Greek word here, because it is quite significant. The word means to persevere or to be constantly

diligent, continually. It is a word of great intensity, perhaps more fully translated, “they persevered diligently and continuously.” There is reference to great effort, great commitment, great intention. It didn’t “just happen.” They worked on it. They focused on it. They were devoted to begin “of one accord.”

Another interesting Greek word there. One accord has reference to passion, one passion, a shared passion. The word also can imply a fierceness or indignation. The focus here is not at all wrath or anger, but still the passion implied by those words is applicable. They were passionate about sharing together their purpose and their function. They were passionate about preserving the unity or oneness of mind, hence the translation, “of one accord.”

One dictionary comments that this word “is a compound of two words meaning to “rush along” and “in unison”. The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ’s church.”

That’s one accord. That’s what is to be of one mind, not necessarily that everyone agreed about every detail of thought, but together they harmonized into a great symphony of music. I read at the beginning of the sermon the many uses of this word in the book of Acts. This was a big deal! This was a central focus and characteristic of the church as a whole. And it took effort, to which they were wholeheartedly devoted.

I say all of that to make a very obvious point. That is always how the church is supposed to function. They continued daily with one accord. Then notice a second reference to their attitude toward one another.

v.46 "...they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart."

### **B. Gladness and simplicity.**

Gladness is also a very intense word in the Greek, which could be translated to exult, or rejoice greatly. We read this in, 1 Peter 4:13 "but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

"Glad with exceeding joy." That's the idea! It's not just a simple sense of happiness, but something far deeper in the soul. The people simply delighted to share their lives together, such is the true nature of genuine Christian fellowship. It's the hand being delighted to be part of the body with the leg, the ear delighted to be in fellowship with the eye. That's how the people related to one another. And they also did so with "simplicity of heart," verse 46. The idea of that word is "singleness." We could understand that to mean sincere. A singleness of heart, no mixed motives, no ulterior motives. No strings attached, no hypocrisy, no selfishness, no pride. Nothing of the sort. Just a simple-minded commitment that looked upon everyone equally.

They weren't trying to outdo one another. They weren't beset with insecurities and fears about one another. They weren't competing, nor trying to advance themselves at the expense of others. They simply "ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart."

Isn't that a great goal to pursue? Isn't that the right standard to hold out as the goal? That is how Luke describes their community as a church. And he ends by noting,

### **C. The evident blessing of God.**

v.47 "...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

I emphasize all of this so that we might all have the same objective before us, for the life and well-being of our own church. We have much of this, for which I am very thankful, praising God as did the church in Acts 2. The Lord does continue to add to our number, not daily, but at least annually, and we can rejoice to note those whom the Lord has added. With that sense of God's blessings, let this model be ever before your eyes as you take your place within this church. May this model be the model to which we aspire more and more. May the description of this sort of community be something to which aspire with all of our hearts, this sort of community and deep-rooted fellowship be of greatest priority. And in just such a place, may the Lord add to the church those who are being saved.