

October 4, 2020

Acts 2:42-47

Signs of a Healthy Church

Introduction:

On behalf of FEB Central ministries let me offer congratulations to Calvary on their 105th anniversary (presentation of commemorative anniversary gift). It is a great honor to be here with you this morning as Regional Director of FEB Central representing our 277 churches across our region. We are grateful for your continued prayers and support as we serve our region through church planting, leadership development and church health.

Church anniversaries are a great time **to stop, give thanks and reflect on what it means to thrive as Christ's church**. What does it look like to be a healthy, God honoring church? If you could dream a little bit, what kinds of qualities would mark your church more deeply? Let me put it another way. **What are the signs of an outstanding church?** Is it great programs, a beautiful building, a solid doctrinal statement, a concise constitution, or a thorough policies and procedures manual? Or is it outstanding worship and preaching? These things certainly have value and a healthy church is marked by solid methods, systems and structures but of course the church is way more than an organization. According to Scripture it is first and foremost a living spiritual organism, the very dwelling place of the living God.

The central mark then of a truly God honoring church is the unmistakable presence and power of the living Christ revealed by the Spirit of God. It has been said that, **"The church is not an enterprise for Christ but an experience of Christ."** It is the Spirit working in us and through us so that we are a witness to our world of the beauty and treasure of Christ. The early church was certainly not apathetic or distracted about their mission; they had a clear focus on glorifying God by sharing the good news of Jesus with their world. This small band of

It is about knowing Christ and making Him

believers were accused of turning the world upside down through their witness for Christ (Acts 17:6). Think about it! Lacking almost every advantage that we enjoy today; they were identified as **“WORLD CHANGERS”**. How did it happen? What did it look like? God gives us a little snapshot of the things that marked this thriving church; really, they are evidences of God’s power and presence. **TEXT: Acts 2:42-47.**

Development:

Cf. Context: 2:37-41. The gift of the Spirit had been given at Pentecost. Peter had just preached a message focused on Jesus Christ; thousands professed faith and turned to Christ; the infant church was born (v.41). A new movement/work of God’s Spirit had started. **What made it so impacting? It can be summed up in the phrase “the presence and power of God.” The Spirit’s authentic, transforming presence and power created a new community of people that were hungry to live on mission. This passage shows us what this looks like for us.**

It looks like being committed to God’s Voice above all others (v. 42). In the sheer mass of voices shouting out at them in their culture and world, the early church wanted more than anything to listen to and obey God’s voice. The term **“apostles’ teaching,”** included the passing on of all that Jesus taught them as well as the teaching attached to the mission and life of the church taught by the apostles. Jesus had promised them that the Spirit would guide them into all truth and bring glory to Christ (cf. Jn. 16:12-14). The result is the body of truth we now call the NT (included the OT as authoritative). The verb here translated **“devoted”** has the idea of **continual and single-minded faithfulness to a particular task** (in other words, with priority and passion). It wasn’t about checking a box, but about encountering the very presence and power of the living God. As Jesus said, we humans can’t live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus is saying the Bible is **spiritual food from God. It is a spiritual weapon** to fight with, a **light** to guide us, and a **medicine** to heal us. We

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 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. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

need the Scriptures like we need air to breath, food and water to live. Why, because it is the primary tool by which God imparts His presence and power to us and shapes us into the likeness of His Son. **Cf. 1Thess. 2:13.**

Howard Hendricks writes, “**Shortly after I became a Christian someone wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible these words: ‘This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.’ That was true then, and it’s still true today. Dusty Bibles always lead to dirty lives. In fact, you are either in the Word and the Word is conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ, or you are in the world and the world is squeezing you into its mold.**” Most of us have more Bibles than we can possibly read, and yet it easy to take for granted what we have. **Illustration – Robert Sumner. We need to be under the Word publicly and in the Word privately.** On this anniversary Sunday may God give you all a renewed passion and priority, personally and together, to pursue a greater experience His presence and power through His Word.

Second, **it looks like being committed to a Christlike love for one another (2:42b, 44-46).** Notice the obvious sense of oneness, care, and sharing that marked the early believers. They knew what it was to have **genuine fellowship in Christ.** They looked to the needs of others rather than just to their own needs. They spent quality and quantity time with one another. They ate together in friendship and they liquidated their assets in order to make sure everyone had their needs met.

Some have suggested that the early church practiced a kind of communism or common ownership. But that actually isn’t accurate. If you look closely, they still possessed their own homes (**v. 46; also see 5:4**). There was no external pressure to make a vow of poverty or give everything to the church. There was just a very generous spirit and eternal perspective. Here is the thing. **No program in the church can do this!** This was a work of the Holy Spirit. It was God’s love working in them and then through them to each other. No methodology or technique

Robert Sumner tells the true story of a man in Kansas City was severely injured in an explosion. He lost his eyesight, as well as both hands. He was just a new Christian, and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. He heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in Braille. But he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been damaged by the explosion. One day, as he brought one of the Braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters, and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, I can read the Bible using my tongue. At the time Robert Sumner wrote his book, the man had "read" through the **entire Bible four times.**

SOURCE:
Fredericksburg Bible
Illustrator

It looks like being committed to God’s voice about all others, but it also looks like . . .

will create such God sized love. This happens only when God shows up. This happens when Christians passionately pursue being like Jesus. Jesus said, **“They will know that you are my disciples by the love you have for each other” (Jn. 13:35)**. How desperately our world needs to see this kind of authentic, selfless love. On this anniversary Sunday may God give you all a renewed passion and priority, personally and together, to pursue a greater experience His presence and power through seeing, savoring and sharing His Love.

Third, ***it looks like being committed to a passionate worship of God’s greatness and goodness (vv. 42b, 43a, 46-47a)***. There was no going through the motions of worship with this group. They weren’t playing Sunday Christianity; this was 24/7 relationship with God. Whether they were meeting formally or informally (in the Temple or in their homes), there was no feigning religion. Their approach to God was real, deep, and joyful. ***They engaged together in a worshipful dialogue with God constantly.*** Their life of worship erupted from the fullness of God’s reality in them. Have you ever noticed that when you really see something good you spontaneously respond? In fact, the way we respond tells the story of what really is going on deep inside us. It tells the story of whether we really get it. When you understand what God has done in Jesus in the cross and resurrection, in the sending of His Spirit, there is ample reason to respond with awe and joy. **In Scripture, people are changed when they encounter God in Jesus Christ.** One of the key evidences of the filling of the Spirit in our lives is an authentic and joyful adoration of God. **Cf. Eph. 5:18-20.**
Illustration – worship (cf. David - 2 Sam. 6). When is the last time you experienced that kind of encounter with God? On this anniversary Sunday may God give you all a renewed passion and priority, personally and together, to pursue a greater experience His presence and power through responding to His greatness and goodness in grateful worship.

Finally, the evidence of God’s presence and power ***looks like being committed to reaching out to the world in witness (v.***

A number of years ago, a woman in Kansas City walked into an ice cream shop and while waiting, she turned to find the actor Paul Newman standing behind her! He was in town filming a movie. He smiled at her and said “hello.” She took one look at his legendary blue eyes and her knees almost buckled. She tried to speak, but not a sound came out. She paid for her ice cream, then quickly walked out of the store. As she calmed down, she realized she didn’t have her ice cream cone. She was debating walking back in to get it when Paul Newman walked out. **“You looking for your ice cream cone?”** he asked. Speechless again, she nodded. **“You put it in your purse with your change.”**

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus

47b). Jesus had commanded his followers in **Acts 1:8** to go to the ends of the earth and be his witnesses. **This was happening.** They didn't go promoting their own agendas, causes, labels, or preferences. They were not lobbying for a denominational loyalty or a political agenda. More than anything else they were pointing people to Jesus and his eternal, life changing forgiveness and salvation. Their job wasn't to create the harvest; God would take care of that. Their calling was to faithfully plant the seeds of the truth of the reality, reliability and relevance of Jesus to this life and the next. The evidence that God's Spirit was in their midst was that every day people could **see and hear the living Christ** through their lives. By the power of God's Spirit they responded and embraced Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Notice who it is that adds to the church ("the Lord"). While we are involved, we are only channels of God's power and presence. It must be about Him in and through us. On this anniversary Sunday may God give you all a renewed passion and priority, personally and together, to pursue a greater experience God's presence and power through sharing Christ with your community and world.

Conclusion/Application:

The key ingredient and marks of a thriving church are revealed by God himself in this little snapshot of the early Church. **When God's presence and power manifests itself in a local church, God's people are committed to 1) knowing and living out the Word of God; 2) an authentic love for each other; 3) a passionate worship of God, and 4) an intentional witness to and for the living Christ.** The early church had none of the secrets of success that seem to be so important to our culture today—yet they turned the world upside down! **They were distributors of the Spirit's power and presence. They saw, savored and shared the greatness and goodness of God in Jesus Christ.** They owned no property, they had no influence or power in government, they had little in terms of wealth (most of their people were of a humble social class), their leaders were ordinary people without special education, they had few people

Zech. 4:6: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty."
Prov. 21:31: "The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but victory rests

Calvary, Ottawa 105th Anniversary

of social influence, they didn't have mass media, or modern technology (Live streaming/Zoom), they didn't even seem to have a clearly spelled out strategic plan, and yet their ministry spread throughout the known world in a deep and transforming way. **How? Why? One phrase: God's presence and power!** They drank deeply of the living Christ and shared Him with others. **Quote from Chuck Swindoll. The early church understood that it was not about working for God but God working for them, first in them and then through them.** Cf. **Zech. 4:6b; Prov. 21:31; Ps. 127:1.** God is looking for people who will as the missionary **William Carey** put it, **“Expect great things *from God* . . . and then attempt great things *for God.*”** My prayer for you on this anniversary Sunday is that this more and more would be both your prayer and experience in a greater way in the coming days.