

Sermon on June 2 2013
We're in this Together
Acts 2:42-47
Scott Shelton

This is a new month, a new series.

Before we dive into the message I'd like to take a few minutes of pastoral privilege and tell you about what's happening in church right now.

Don Paterson's last day was Friday – our Executive Director of 3.5 years.

Outstanding in what he does. Three areas he's been an excellent leader. We are getting coverage in all those areas.

1. Stewarding the church's finances, strategy for the church along with pastors, and supporting the staff.

Excellent finance team – helping us – Marjie Breish as treasurer and Kevin Schmidt as finance team chair – Sarah Hallstedt and Michele Sutton in office PT.

2. Strategy – great session right now, deacons providing care, and Vision 2020 still underway to be implemented.

In Don's place stepping in on that team are 2 elders Clay Barnes and Jim Martin to help move our strategic plan along.

3. Staffing – more support from the elders, AND the staff is really pulling together to help each other – going well. Several advisory teams up and running to support ministries with staff.

People often ask me: Scott - How are you doing? What are you working on?
I'm doing fine and enjoying being part of a healthy church that is moving forward and excited about our future.

My goals in this time without a Sr. pastor are these four categories:

- Preaching and excellent worship
- Pastoral care
- Staff and session
- Being present where needed

1. Preaching and worship – providing excellence in that each Sunday with you – worship team led by Jon Graybeal and Betsy Howden and team to make a "family feel" to worship while giving glory and honor to God each week.

2. Pastoral care – making sure sacraments, weddings, funerals, calling on and visiting people in hospital or need are taken care of. Thanks to Quentin Small and our deacons who are stepping up.
3. Staff and session – Working well together. Your church has good leaders, self-starters, who love this church and are really engaged in lots of areas from adult ed., to children and youth, to choir and band, to mission commission and Vision 2020. They are a great group who is very focused on moving the church ahead.
4. Being present where needed - Whatever other ministries fill in the gaps – and answering questions which come my way. – jumping in where I can – and steering people to the right ministry if I can't do it.

I'm excited about where we are going and hope you are too. We are being the church together – and that's what we'll be talking about during this sermon series.

We're continuing on in the book of Acts.

Since Easter, so far we've been focused on the disciples from the time when Jesus was resurrected until ascension.

Today we stay in book of Acts and will be there for a while but begin looking at it from the perspective of the church. Now that Jesus has gone to heaven and the Holy Spirit is with the people, what does the early church look like?

What do the early Christians do?

How does it apply to us as a church?

Today's passage is:

Acts 2:42-47

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.

Let's pray – O Lord may you open our minds to understand your Word and apply it to our lives and to our church.

See NOTES in bulletin:

As we begin a new sermon series for summer looking at the early church, we realize that "we are in this together."

We must be in relationship with each other through repeated contact, investment of many hours and sharing deeply and richly together.

The early church was devoted to:

1. Apostles' teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of the bread
4. Prayer

The early Christians:

1. Were together, had everything in common
2. Sold possessions, gave to those in need
3. Met together, ate together – temple, homes
4. Had glad hearts, praised God, God added to their number

What does ZPC look like? How can we realistically look like the Acts 2 church?
How do I fit in the church?

You might say, well that's what church used to look like. It's not realistic today. If you live in the suburbs, especially in the winter, you can easily get caught in – opening your garage door, driving out in the morning to school, work, wherever, coming home late in the day, opening the garage door – driving in – immediately closing it – and not having deep, rich human contact.

In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam said, that more Americans are doing things alone and there is a decline in community.

He says:

Attending club meetings: down 58%

Family dinners: down 33%

Having friends over: down 45%

So it would be good to take a look at the early church, learn from them and to build community today as the church – here on this corner.

Here's what it looked like.

The early Christians the church did the following:

1. Devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching – empowered by the Spirit, taught by Jesus. Peter especially – as we saw in his speech the last 2 weeks. Really the apostles were doing what Jesus had commanded them in the Great Commission – teaching people to do what Jesus had taught them and commanded.

2. Devoted to fellowship. They spent lots of time together. I'm sure they built trust, friendship and camaraderie. For us to have that as a church, we need to spend time together as well.
3. Breaking of the bread – could be the Lord's Supper; or a feast/eating together. This phrase could mean either. The wording may mean Lord's Supper. But eating together is a communal activity. Years ago, our staff was at a small conference where we were taught to "eat a lot together a lot." Do you mean eat a lot of food, we asked? Yes. Do you mean eat together often? Yes. Both matter, people draw closer when they brunch, picnic, grill out, have pitch-ins and parties. Eat together.
4. Prayer – together deeply. They had seen Jesus die and rose again – the Holy Spirit come – I'm sure they depended on God in prayer.

Luke then says...

Everyone was in awe.

Apostles did miraculous signs and wonders – healed people, spoke boldly for Jesus – later miraculous escapes from jail.

Starting in vs. 44 Luke says,

All the people were:

1. Together
2. Had everything in common
3. Sold possessions, gave to those in need.

Scholars believe that there was great poverty then in Palestine. Many more may have been poor as they may be staying in Jerusalem after converting to following Christ, and sharing food, places to stay, not just out of necessity but with joy in Christ.

Every day – meet together in large groups and in small.

In small groups in homes – ate together, had joy.

They praised God – and the Lord added to their number.

They grew because God added to their number, not the people. God added to them because people wanted to see what was up – people helping each other, caring, having joy, miracles, and having fun – who wouldn't want to join?

What can ZPC look like:

Large group, smaller groups - fellowship

We are in large groups here in worship at church building – not the temple, as those early followers did – who were still Jewish, but following Jesus. We follow Jesus and meet here to worship together on Sundays and special occasions.

We can meet in small groups – homes

– Neighborhood Groups – this summer through ZPC.

Worship God, apostle's teaching – preaching, adult ed, BSF, men's study, Lifechanges – apostle's teaching – through our study of the Word here on Sundays.

Breaking bread – in homes, cookouts, at brunches,
trip to Shepherd July 21 – worship, food, fellowship with other believers.

Deep prayer. On your own, praying as you feel led each day for ZPC and for your needs.

Also together - prayer before worship at about 8:20 in the chapel or for our session and leaders.

Sharing goods – what's that look like? Sharing a lawnmower, loaning a car when someone's car is under repair – doing handyman things for each other. Sharing food or meals when needed. You may not know but I know that 2 people donated cars to ZPC this past year, and those cars found a worthy home.

There are also more formal means of sharing our goods in ministry:
Community assistance – to pay a bill for someone who is in need. Food pantry. Local missions – like Shepherd tutoring or at Tabernacle Presbyterian Church. Or homeless young people through Outreach Inc.

11 years ago this spring – soon after Claire had given birth to twins, and we had a 4 year old, a 2 year old and twin babies, - the Youth Inquirers group – something like 40 6th graders and their parents mowed our grass, pulled weeds, moved mulch, planted flowers, trimmed bushes and basically cared for us. I was moved almost to tears – it was the body of Christ.

Challenge:

Although it was a unique time in Acts 2 – we can look more like the Acts 2 church than we do even though the situation is different.

We don't want to look like the churches called out by Paul or John for gossip, infighting, immorality, or being lukewarm.

We can look more like a youth caravan – going to Mexico in June, Shepherd in July. We share food, meals, work hard, sing and worship together inside and outside churches, praying for each other, occasionally need to cry or say I'm sorry – please forgive me. And see young people and strangers come to know Christ's love for the first time.

It's magical, miraculous, and it is the church. That has left the building!

Let's be the church – the unique church that God is calling ZPC at this season of our history together.

We can do it.
Here's how –

Vision 2020 goals:

1. Center our worship and study on Christ
2. Create a caring community
3. Encourage hands-on missions

1. Worship and study – doing that now – get involved on your own. You can grow.

Stay involved in worship – go deeper in study.

2. Community:

Neighborhood Fellowship Groups/small groups – smaller groups

We need to challenge ourselves to go deeper. Example of small group with my neighbors, or one2one closeness or youth closeness – real relationships.

3. Missions:

Find your place to serve, alongside others.

We'll be the church July 21 going to Shepherd for food, worship, fellowship, praise, prayer, and fun – the church has left the building!

We can also be the church by being part VBS and learning more about it. Let's do this:

Interview of VBS leaders: Jill Nash and Tom McCarthy

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Scott: Tell me about your roles in VBS last year?

Jill – what has been your role for the last few years?

Tom – tell us about driving around bringing neighborhood friends?

What do you want for VBS this year?

Scott: We've just been talking in the sermon about the Acts 2 church.

Let's see if VBS at ZPC matches some of the church in Acts 2:42-47?

Let's see – will there be:

Teaching in the Bible? (yes)

Fellowship? (yes)

Do you have prayer? (yes)

Eat together? (yes)

Do you share life together? (yes, people draw close)
Do you take offerings to give \$ away? (yes)
Do you have joy and praise God? (of course!)
Do kids come to know Christ? (yes)

Scott:

Sounds to me like...

VBS is functioning for 5 days as the church –let's get behind VBS!

End of interview

We need each other in the church. We need to be involved at church to draw closer to God and to find our way to God.

In her book *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott shares a story she once heard from her minister that illustrates well the necessary presence of others in our journey of faith:

"When [my minister] was about seven, her best friend got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, 'You could let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here.'"

Lamott further writes:

"And that is why I have stayed so close to [my church]—because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their voices, I can always find my way home."

Through teaching, fellowship, prayer, worship, sharing possessions, through sharing life, we can be the church – and find our way to God – together.

Close in prayer.

Help us to go and be the church – inside the walls and outside these walls.