

Sunday Morning, 20th June, 2021
‘Biblical Church’
Giving and sharing with others
Acts 2:45-47

READ Acts 2:37-47

Last week we concentrated on signs and wonders
This week we concentrate on the sharing of the early church. They are not two separate ideas, in fact, as Darren made the point last week, signs and wonders are for sharing.

So our attention this morning is drawn to the sharing nature of the church.

Before we get to deeply into what was happening, I want to point out that this church plant was exploding in numbers because of the work of the Holy Spirit. It was meeting in the temple which was the only large space they could have met. Jerusalem was like a holiday resort. Its population fluctuated from relatively small to vast for the festivals of Passover - Pesach, Pentecost - Shavuot and Tabernacles - Sukkot . So many of these people were staying in Jerusalem on a temporary basis. Their home was elsewhere. The fact is that the church was in Jerusalem until Stephen was executed and that broke up this fellowship and scattered it into the surrounding areas beginning the missionary movement to the utmost parts of the earth. They had to learn to do church outside of Jerusalem without the temple to meet in.

This passage, however is about exciting times. The church was very new and developing rapidly. In these early weeks we see a relatively simple open group of people . Later they were infiltrated by people who wanted to subvert the Good News to suit their own ends. It is good to look at this passage because the checks and balances that came later are not there and we can see what the heart of Biblical Church is. And it is summed up in our reading. Here are the headlines.

they repented. They were sinners saved by grace and they knew it. They had turned from the life and behaviour they had lived to this point and embraced the salvation God gave.

They accepted the message. They believed in Jesus. They probably only knew the basics of the story – That Jesus was the Messiah of God and had sacrificed himself on the cross for the sins of the world and risen again , returned to heaven and sent his Holy Spirit to empower them to proclaim him as Saviour and Lord.

They were baptised. They made public their change of faith. They identified themselves as being with Jesus, they were buried in immersion with water and raised as he was to resurrection life.

They were added to the church. There is no other condition for church membership other than God has given you new life in Jesus. So it remains our practice to welcome all who are baptised into fellowship.

⁴² **They devoted themselves
to the apostles' teaching**

Lets be clear, they had no New Testament in fact they probably did not have any books at all. They would listen and remember what the apostles said, memorising it, just as the apostles had in the three years they followed Jesus. The New Testament , as we know it, is a collection of the written recording of what was taught. We believe, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church later established the Bible as we know it as the authoritative Apostles teaching or God's word.

to the fellowship,

they got involved in the new community, meeting in Solomon's colonnade in the temple as a distinct group at all times the temple was open.

to the breaking of bread

They eat together not in the temple as it would not be practical but in their homes, sharing meals which was and still is the core of getting to know one another and sharing. It would have included communion as part of the eating together although later that was separated out 0 you read about that in 1 Corinthians 11.

to prayer.

This is not a new social grouping, this is a Christ-centred community so the essence of its meeting is prayer. These were Jews so their prayers would have been formal, Psalms were part of it and probably became less formal as they engaged with God who loved them and listened to them.

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Chapter 3 of Acts gives an example of this.

Then we are told

⁴⁴ **All the believers were together and had everything in common.**

This is the central verse for today.

That togetherness expresses itself in a number of ways.

They shared their wealth.

They met together in the temple.

They shared meals in their homes

They rejoiced and were sincere

They praised God, and enjoyed the favour of the people.

The Lord added to their number and gave signs and wonders.

So what do we mean by being together? Some have argued that it means everybody in one place but these were human beings. They had families and businesses to attend to. But clearly they got together with other Christians as possible. Why? Because they were enthralled by grace. They had discovered Jesus and they wanted to share their joy and gladness with others who shared their faith. It wasn't that they felt it a spiritual requirement. It was what you do. Football enthusiasts, for example, will meet up with other supporters of the same team, to share their joy and

disappointment in equal measure. We saw that with the Scotland England match.

But **we have Jesus**, so much more than a football Team or sewing Club or a book reading club or whatever your interest is. So they met together. In varying size groups. But we must not stretch this too far. Before long they were scattered and spread out North, south east and West. We know the church met from then on in synagogues and in houses. They did not have their own buildings until much later. But that is irrelevant. The church today meets where it can. We are fortunate to have a purpose built building but much of the church has to make do with what they can. Schools, homes, sports halls, cinemas, warehouses, you name it, there is probably a church, somewhere in the world meeting in a building like that. What matters is that we meet. And that we meet with Jesus. Which is why when we were thrust into lockdown, we made rapid changes and made use of the internet so we could continue to meet together. That is why we are keen for house groups to restart. Because meeting together is what you do.

What is different about church, compared with other social groupings? Well obviously, Jesus, he is the reason we get together, the person we meet to pray to, the one we want to express our enthusiasm for his salvation.

We need to pay attention to this. **We are a very diverse collection of people, drawn together with one common bond – Jesus.** If we pretend otherwise we are foolish and we need to understand that others have different life experiences, different interests. You are unique and God loves you for what you are. That means inevitably we have tensions over music, service style, and so on. There are plenty of excuses why we should not get on together. But we must centre on Jesus, then put up with those God has added to the church – including you and me. We are here by grace and so is everybody else. This is a community God has put together, and in the words of the marriage service. “Those who God has put together, let no man pull asunder.”

So we should celebrate our differences, enjoy the diversity of church.

Now we address the challenge of today’s word from the Lord:

⁴⁴ **All the believers were together and had everything in common.**

God has done miracles, Jesus has died on a cross and risen again so that each one of us can have eternal life if we, like the early Christians, repent and believe the Good News. And he is working an on-going miracle, bringing people of every different background together to have everything in common.

And that, over all, involves trust or at least risk.

And we begin with our wealth. If **we share our wealth** we have to trust that our trust will not be abused. But this is where we need to know where our trust lies, Our trust is in God, not each other, Trust of each other is something we build up over time and depends on a lot of factors. What matters is do we trust God? He calls us to follow Jesus who was not shy about talking about money and wealth.

Listen to some quotes of Jesus:

The love of money is the root of all evil.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

This women has given all of her living.

It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

You can read further about giving in 1 Corinthians 16; 2Corinthians 8 & 9. and elsewhere.

I am not going to set up any rules or guidelines because my Jesus never did. For many of us, we give at least a set portion to the Lord, but that can become a trap into thinking I have done my bit, when in actual fact to quote 1Chronicles 29:14 “*all things come from you , O Lord, and we only give you what is yours already.*” Further, what we retain to feed, house and clothe ourselves is to be spent before the Lord as a steward of what he has given us.

I would comment on our reasonable fear that we are being taken for a ride, easy pickings for the greedy or lazy. **Nothing in the teaching of Jesus says we are to check out the motive of the recipient or their lifestyle or their failure or success at managing money.** We give as to the Lord, and if we are ripped off, as I have been, that is not our problem but the problem of the recipient. Mostly, I find people struggling with money are doing their best to avoid receiving charity, your love expressed in support for them is appreciated even though you may not get the feedback you would like. Be generous, Remember being rich in this world's goods does not add to your joy in the Lord whereas helping others is following in the Masters footsteps.

We start with our wealth because it is the best measure of our joy and gladness that leads us to share with those in need. In this day and age we are bombarded with opportunities to give and we do have to be a bit responsible, but take stock of when you last responded to the call to help and maybe, find another opportunity to do so again today.

But there is more.

They met together in the temple.

We know they met in the temple for prayer. We assume there was also teaching going on as well.

They shared meals in their homes

They also met in homes to share meals. Hospitality is part of the business of being Christian and this last year has tried us as both aspects of church collective and in home have been restricted and even stopped. But I want to look forward and say that where we go from here is to meet together for prayer and teaching as a church and to meet together in our homes for food and prayer and teaching.

It is interesting to note that if you are Chinese, it appears that hospitality is done by taking friends to a restaurant. The average Chinese kitchen does not cater easily for numbers so they invite you to a local restaurant instead. When in Pompeii and Herculaneum I learnt that Roman culture in Jesus' day was very much buying take-away food from the corner shop. The point I am making is we must interpret these lines into our culture not slavishly carry out the literal words if it is impractical or use it as an excuse not to do what it says. **Be hospitable! Eat together! Somewhere!**

The point I am making is that if your love for Jesus does not bubble up into prayer and wanted to share God's word together, we are in trouble. At best we are a social club. In our planning for the future we must address the reason we meet together. It is not just to enjoy each others company but, more **importantly to enjoy the company of Jesus, together and to share the Good News with others.**

That is why we read **They rejoiced and were sincere.** Because they were meeting to celebrate Jesus, to share time together with him, to care for one another.

They praised God. Note it does not say how or where, but they did it. In the temple, probably, in their homes, probably, on the street, likely, as they worked, likely. The point is that the joy of our salvation should lead us to praise him all the time, some times more significantly than others. Praising God is something you can do anywhere and in any company but be warned, getting excited about Jesus with non-Christians might risk their friendship.

However, it might be the very thing that they need to direct them to Jesus. So get praising, in church and out of church, in your homes and wherever you go.

So what happened to the church?

It grew. Not because of an effective programme, that came later as they discovered needs that required practical organisation to fulfil. What caused the church to grow was their joy in their salvation and their Saviour. And the Holy Spirit worked with the church in signs and wonders.

In summary, then, The early church was marked out for its enthusiasm for Jesus. We can read about the traits that it had. What we need to do is not slavishly

follow the pattern but embrace the passion and develop the ideas here in our church for today,

We need to be full of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and ready to share with one another and the world around us the good News, our wealth, our food, prayer, Bible reading and be ready to welcome more people being captivated by, Jesus, saved by his power and transformed into followers of him by the power of the Holy Spirit.