

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

A Picture Of A Good Church: Part 1

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Acts 2:42-47

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 2:42-47. For the last couple of weeks we've been talking about the EVENT of Pentecost and the EXPLANATION provided for that event by the Apostle Peter. This week we are going to begin looking at the RESULT. When the Holy Spirit fell, and the people were filled and forever changed, they weren't simply released back into Judaism, rather they were gathered into a whole new community. There is a reason that we call the Day of Pentecost “the birthday of the New Testament church” – that's what it was. The Holy Spirit didn't come to ‘energize a cause’ he came to enliven a community – and so here in Acts 2:42-47 we get a snapshot of the church in her innocence and infancy. It is intended as a sort of plumbline.

Does that illustration still work?

Does anyone still hang wallpaper?

I suppose we use a plumbline for more than just hanging wallpaper, but that was my introduction to the concept. You use a plumbline – which is a weight on a string – to ensure that your first strip of wallpaper is hung up straight or “plumb” – so that each new strip that you line up with the first strip, will also be plumb. The first strip has to be laid straight because it serves as a reference for everything that follows – that's what this is. This is the first strip and it has been laid plumb and it remains in the

Bible as a guide, a reference and a standard and we will consult it together as such. We're going to do this in two parts. I've identified 7 aspects of this foundational depiction here in Acts 2. We'll look at the first 4 today and we'll come back and complete the study next Sunday morning. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Alright, so as mentioned, what we have here is a picture of a good church. This is the first strip of wallpaper. This is the ground floor of the spiritual house that is being built up on Jesus Christ as Cornerstone – so we are interested in this. We can use this as a guide and a reference across the ages and that is precisely what we are going to try to do this morning. So let's talk about that:

What Does A Good Church Look Like?

The first thing Luke says is the first thing I would want to say:

1. A good church has a healthy appetite for Apostolic teaching

You can see that there, right off the top, in verse 42:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching” (Acts 2:42 ESV)

Remember, the APOSTLES were the authorized interpreters of the person and work of Jesus. Jesus never wrote a book, have you ever thought about that? He did the ACTS: he LIVED A PERFECT LIFE, he DIED ON THE CROSS, HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD, he ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN,

he **POURED OUT THE HOLY SPIRIT** – so he did all **THE EVENTS** and then he authorized his Apostles to provide the interpretation of those events.

So how do we know that they got it right?

Well, for one thing, after his resurrection from the dead Jesus spent 40 days teaching the disciples how to understand everything he did in light of Old Testament prophecies and anticipations. Luke told us about that in his Gospel in Luke 24:44-49; he said:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49 ESV)

So Jesus **OPENED THEIR MINDS** to understand how his life, death and resurrection fulfilled everything written about the Messiah in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms – which is a way of saying: **IN THE WHOLE BIBLE**; in the **ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT**. Jesus **TAUGHT THE DISCIPLES** how to read the Old Testament such that it landed and made sense and came to a glorious and fitting conclusion **IN HIM**.

And then – in addition to that – he said, stay in Jerusalem until I send the Holy Spirit upon you. He will help you understand this message, he will help you flesh it out.

That’s what Jesus did to ensure that the Apostles were preaching the Gospel that he wanted them to preach.

Now, you might say, “Well that’s all well and good, but where are the Apostles now? I’d sure go to church to hear one of them, but that opportunity no longer exists.”

You might say that, but you would be incorrect. R.C. Sproul says helpfully here:

“Today that apostolic doctrine is in the Scriptures. The early church was a Bible-studying church, steadfastly, continually devoted to devouring the Word of God that came from the Apostles.”¹

The Apostolic teaching was written down! We have it now in the Letters of Paul and Peter and John and James and Jude. We have their help to understand how everything written in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms LANDS CLIMACTICALLY on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

A good church is hungry for that!

A good church can't get enough of that!

I will tell you this: when I was on Sabbatical back in February/March I had a number of my friends who came to speak here say to me: “Paul your church is hungry for the Word of God. They are good and eager listeners.”

I was very happy to hear that – not that I didn't already know that – but I would argue that is the first and foundational characteristic of a good church.

And then secondly:

2. A good church is a family, a tribe and an identity

That's the second thing that Luke tells us. In verse 42 he says:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching **and the fellowship**” (Acts 2:42 ESV)

Now, I think most of us hear that as though it says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship” – as in, “they spent a great deal of time hanging out with each other” – and that may be true, but that's not what it says. There is an article before the noun in the Greek – so this is THE

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 47.

FELLOWSHIP. The *KOINONIA*. What does that mean? I went and looked it up in my Greek Dictionary and it says that it means:

“close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.”²

So they were not just “hanging out”; they were committed to this close association. They were committed to their mutual interests. They were committed to THEIR FELLOWSHIP.

They were “US” people, not “THEM” people – do you know what I mean by that?

I wish more modern-day evangelicals were “US” people – because it seems that most evangelicals now are “THEM” people. They say that they love Jesus but they’ve got problems with “the church”; “those people over there”. I love Jesus but I’ve got concerns about “THEM”.

What does that even mean?

If I’m reading my Bible right then there is no “THEM”. If you believe, then you belong. If you LOVE JESUS, then YOU LOVE US – am I missing something?

Didn’t Jesus say that those of us gathered HERE, around HIM, ARE HIS MOTHER AND HIS BROTHER AND HIS SISTER?

Didn’t Jesus say that?

When his biological family came to get him back in Mark 3 – do you remember what Jesus said?

“Who are my mother and my brothers?”³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” (Mark 3:33–34 ESV)

I don’t have to GO TO MY FAMILY, Jesus says, THIS IS MY FAMILY RIGHT HERE. Those who are gathered in faith and fellowship around me.

² BDAG, 552.

Can I tell you something that will rub you the wrong way? We North Americans are STEEPED in the idolatry of biological family. Biological idolatry is the most common idolatry in the evangelical church – followed closely by economic and material idolatry.

Now listen, the Bible is clear that biological family matters. In fact in 1 Timothy 5 the Apostle Paul says:

“if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8 ESV)

So biological family still matters – but it is not ULTIMATE. It is not PRIMARY. As soon as you become a Christian, the family of Jesus is primary, and who you are toward THEM is who you are toward Jesus. That’s the punchline of the story of the sheep and the goats, do you remember that?

People were surprised to discover why they were counted among those privileged to enter into the eternal Kingdom of God and Jesus said:

‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of **the least of these my brothers**, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:40 ESV)

Do you see that? Who you are toward the family of Jesus is who you are to Jesus. Are you a friend or an enemy? A brother or an opposer? Because who you are to us is who you are to him - Jesus said that:

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. . . . And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:40–42 ESV)

The followers of Jesus are the family of Jesus – and a good church understands that. A good church is filled with US people and WE people. It is filled with the brothers, sisters and mothers of Jesus Christ – thanks be to God!

The third thing we can say is that:

3. A good church is devoted to the ordinances and to prayer

I thought about just saying: A good church is devoted to the Lord's Supper and to prayer – because that's what we see at the end of verse 42:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42 ESV)

The “breaking of bread” was an early way of referring to communion – the Tyndale New Testament Commentary says here:

“This is Luke's term for what Paul calls the Lord's Supper.”³

So I thought about just saying that a good church is devoted to the Lord's Supper and to prayer – but look at the verse that comes right before this. Verse 41 says:

“So those who received his word were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 ESV)

I think what Luke is trying to do here is give us a snapshot of what is going on “in the house” – in the house people are gathered around the table - but every good house has a door too – and BAPTISM is like the door. Now is the DOOR part of the INSIDE or the OUTSIDE of the house – well of course, it's both/and so I'm including it here. I think what Luke is saying is that in a good church they are devoted to the ordinances and to prayer.

Now, you may come from a tradition where it is more common to refer to Baptism and the Lord's Supper as “sacraments” – that's fine too. Baptists tend to prefer the term “ordinance” because it reminds us that these are not optional elements in our worship – these are things that Jesus commanded. He TOLD US to baptize. He said:

³I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 88.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19 ESV)

That's a command!

We didn't do a baptism last Sunday because we thought it would be cool, we did it because Jesus ordered us to do it.

And we don't do communion here because we know some people are visual learners – no, we do it because Jesus said:

“Do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:24 ESV)

That's not a suggestion, that's an order. So in a good church, we take those commands seriously. We baptize. We don't just let people ease their way in. We make them stand in the waters and DECLARE.

That's what baptism is. It is AN ACTION that communicates a SETTLED CONVICTION. That's a substantial thing and that's why we care MORE about baptisms than hands in the air.

Now listen – I'm not opposed to hands in the air. Lots of bodies in the water started as hands in the air – but Jesus did not command us to ask people to raise their hands. He commanded us to call on people to pass through the waters.

There is some good psychology behind that.

Have you ever had a feeling for a moment that 5 minutes later was gone?

Yah, me too. Feelings are like that.

But, stepping into the waters? Being asked a clear question? Providing a clear answer? Facing your fears? Being held accountable by witnesses? Friend, that's a whole other thing – and that is the thing that Jesus commanded us to do.

So in a good church they do that. In a good church baptism is not something people are confused about. It is not treated as an optional add on. It is the thing. It is the essential declaration of faith.

And in a good church they are committed to the Lord's Supper. They fence the table – which simply means, they demand you come in through the front door. They make it clear that this is not just a religious experience that all are welcome to sample – they make it clear that this is a family meal. It is for baptized followers of Jesus Christ.

Now I don't care whether you were baptized here or somewhere else – we're not closed communion in that sense – and I don't care about the volume of water used, when it comes to communion – I have my beliefs, we have our agreed upon practices – but I do care about whether or not you came in through the front door, and so we always say that this table is for followers of Jesus Christ. It is a memorial and a means of grace. It helps us remember the holy centre of our faith, which is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. And when we partake of it in faith, God meets us in it in a special way. I can't explain that – I don't feel the need to explain that – but I know it's true and in a good church, everyone knows it's true and they are eager for it. They prepare for it. They search their hearts, remove offense, settle differences and extend mercy in order to be ready for it.

And they're committed to prayer – to 'THE PRAYERS', literally. It seems like in the very early days of the church they did their prayer meetings in the temple at the set hours for gathering. The very next story in Acts takes place when Peter and John are going up to the temple at 'the hour of prayer.'

Now obviously, there was some necessity about that. The church didn't have a building that could accommodate 3000 people, so they made use of what space was available. The temple was destroyed in AD 70 so that option is no longer on the table – just like it would not have been on the table for churches in Antioch or Rome. They would have had to make other arrangements – but the point is that they were committed to prayer. They would have said their own private prayers, but in a good church people get together on some kind of regular basis to pray. This is the lifeblood of the church. This is when we are who we were created and intended by God to be. This is when we function as a Kingdom

of Priests – reaching up into heaven for blessings that are needed by friends, neighbours and loved ones down here on earth.

In a good church they are doing that.

They are committed to the ordinances and to prayer.

Then fourthly – and lastly for today, we see here in this picture that:

4. A good church experiences the presence and help of the Holy Spirit

Look at verse 43:

“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” (Acts 2:43 ESV)

Remember, Luke’s goal here is to give us a snapshot of a healthy church. He’s providing us with a set of principles and a general standard. I think the principle is that in a good church they are going to be experiencing the presence and the help of the Holy Spirit – even if that looks slightly different than it did in the first generation – and I think it will.

Listen, there was something special – something SPECTACULAR - about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the first generation of the church. Later in Acts we’re going to be told that people were trying to have Peter’s shadow fall on them so that they could be healed by it – that’s in Acts 5:15 – and it worked! Peter’s shadow was healing people! And then in Acts 19:12 it says that Paul’s handkerchief was being used to heal people. People were taking his handkerchief and rubbing it on sick folks – and they were getting healed!

That’s incredible!

Now, let me ask you: are we a bad church because no one is hoisting James Housser up on a crane so that wherever his shadow falls in Orillia people will be healed?

Are we a bad church because no one is taking Brent Thomas' handkerchief and rubbing it on people with cancer down at Soldier's Memorial Hospital?

Is that stuff supposed to be happening right now in this generation of the church or was that something special?

I think it was something special – and so did the author of the Book of Hebrews. Speaking about the Gospel that he and the other Apostles were preaching he said:

“It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” (Hebrews 2:3–4 ESV)

So according to Hebrews God gave special signs, wonders and various miracles SO AS TO WITNESS to the accuracy of the Gospel being preached by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. Those special miracles were like RUNWAY FLARES! God was lighting up the way of salvation so that no one could miss it! That's what the Holy Spirit was doing in the foundational generation.

So I don't expect that – exactly – in this generation. But I do expect the Holy Spirit to be doing signs in the heavens above and wonders on the earth beneath. I expect great acts of political and personal providence to optimize the conditions for conversion – we talked about that last week. So YES – I pray for people to get healed – particularly people I'm about to share the Gospel with. I expect God to move! I believe that still happens! Not in exactly the same way it did in the first generation, but I still believe that in a good church we will experience the PRESENCE and the HELP of the Holy Spirit – can you say amen to that?

We experienced a bit of that presence and help last Sunday didn't we?

Friends, anytime a young adult is found in church in this day and age – you are witnessing a miracle of Almighty God, do you understand that? Last Sunday a young man got baptized, and I was embarrassed because I didn't know who he was. What kind of pastor am I that I didn't even know this brother's

name? So I went up to him afterwards and I said: “I’m sorry, I don’t know your name” and he said, “no problem. It’s my first Sunday here at the church. I’m a student from Lakehead University.” Brothers and sisters – there’s your miracle right there.

When University Students – in this secular, God-hating age – are being led to come to church and being helped to hear the Gospel and being dragged by the hand through the waters of baptism in front of 400 people they’ve never seen before then surely the LORD IS IN THIS PLACE helping and empowering his people – can you say amen to that?

That’s going to happen in a healthy church – thanks be to God!

Now as I said, we’re going to come back and finish this list next Sunday; I didn’t want to move so quickly that we wouldn’t have time to do a little reflection. Remember, this picture is intended to function as a plumbline. We are supposed to assess ourselves against its trueness and straightness.

So how we doing? How are YOU doing? Because WE are YOU; YOU are US. This HOUSE is made up of living stones – Peter says that in 1 Peter 2:4 – so how does YOUR LIFE and YOUR attitude toward church line up with this depiction? That’s what I’m asking.

How is your appetite for God’s Word? Do you start getting fidgety at the 15 minute mark of the sermon? Are you already thinking about this afternoon’s football game? Then you have some work to do. Maybe you need to join a small group. Maybe you need to exercise your attention span.

How are you doing when it comes to your commitment to THIS FELLOWSHIP? Do you think of us – do your kids think of us as family? Why or why not? Are you too busy for your kids to think of us as family? Listen, I think it’s great that Johnny is playing hockey or baseball or soccer or whatever – kids should be healthy and active and eating Doritos in the basement while they play Call of Duty is not God’s will for anyone – so YES to Johnny or Susy being active – but if they are SO active that they can’t come to youth group and make friends with other kids here at the church – will this EVER be their family? Will this ever be their identity? Will they ever think of themselves as sons and daughters

of God – brothers and sisters of Jesus? You need to think about that and if necessary make some changes.

And how are you doing with the ordinances? Were you one of the people who was supposed to get baptized last Sunday – but when the Holy Spirit knocked you pretended no one was home? Don't do that again because next time he might not knock and then maybe you will be outside for the rest of your life looking in.

Or what about communion? Are you taking the time to prepare? Are you doing what you need to do to be ready? Communion is next week – it's a good time to start thinking about that.

What about prayer? Are you making the time for that? Is there a group you could join so that you could pray down the blessings of heaven for men, women, boys and girls here on earth?

And what about the Holy Spirit? Are you experiencing his presence? Are you experiencing his help? Are you praying for Divine appointments? Are you asking him to go with you and to go before you and to speak through you as you reach out to friends and loved ones with the Gospel?

How are you doing with that? How does your stone sit against the standard of this picture? Have you got some business to do? Me too. Oh God, help. Let's pray together.