

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 6/09/2020

Mini Series – “God's new community”

Part 1 “Rethinking church”

Acts 2:42-47 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 favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Imagine belonging to a community who are so committed to each other that:

- Every day they look for opportunities to eat meals and share life together
- They are not selfish with their possessions, but use what they have to meet the needs of the community
- Meet, eat and serve one another with gladness even if it means sacrifice

Imagine belonging to a community who are so committed to each other that they:

- Have about them a sense of living for something greater than just this world
- Have authentic relationships, opening their hearts to one another and speaking into each other's lives
- Are envied by other groups because of their unity, servant-heartedness and openness

This community is not insular but is always reaching out to those outside, and looking for ways to serve them. The result is that they are growing, because people are drawn to them.

If you are a Christian, and you belong to a local church, then the good news is that you are part of a community like that – this is a description of church as it ought to be, and what we find described in **Acts 2:42-47**. You may feel that your local church

is nothing like this, but the early church wasn't perfect either, with its own tensions and issues described for us in the Bible. However, it was a place where the people were:

- United around Christ and the gospel, experiencing the presence of God
- Committed to one another, gladly meeting together as often as they could, and serving one another as well as those outside.

Many of us have a view that church is a place we go to on Sunday morning for an hour or so. If we're very keen, we may go to the evening service and the midweek prayer meeting as well. It is an activity, in the list of our other activities. It is what we've made church into because of 2000 years of church tradition, and generally we just DO church the way we do because that's what we're used to. This year, God has forced us to rethink church, by taking away what we usually do through Covid 19. We can react by grieving the loss of what we had, vainly hoping to get back to it eventually, or instead we can use this time to challenge our traditions and go back to scripture to realign our view of church with what the Bible describes for us.

Rather than thinking how to DO church post Covid 19, let us think instead how to BE church.

In the lead up to the Gift Day on September 29th, we need a clear view of what church really is so we see that our giving on that day, and indeed our ongoing giving, is about serving something far more precious than just a building.

The goal is to ensure Broadstone Baptist Church becomes the church it is meant to be, cutting through long-standing traditions and getting back to what scripture tells us. To do this, we need to carefully:

- examine the text, taking care to avoid interpreting it according to our traditions but instead allowing it to inform our practice
- apply the text, avoiding the danger of making it prescriptive and thinking we have to behave in exactly the same way, without giving thought to cultural differences.

Based on **Acts 2:42-47**, church would be defined like this:

A people united around the Gospel, by Christ Jesus, through the power of the Spirit and the Word of God, enjoying all the blessings of the Gospel and fulfilling the responsibilities of the Gospel.

We become this by being devoted to one person and the four activities listed in v42. These four activities are the foundation out of which all other church activity grows and must be the priority and in evidence amongst us, as they were for the early believers.

1. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

- Christ unites us, through or by the power of the Spirit of God and the Word of God

Instead of just doing our own thing, we need to have a common standard of belief and church practice. Since Christ is uniting us, it needs to be what he commands and teaches, though he is no longer physically here. This happens as the church listens to the teaching of the apostles, as it is taught by those who are called, gifted and set apart to teach it. We don't have apostles today but we do have their message written down for us in the 27 books that make up the New Testament. This is Christ's message to the church, telling us who Jesus is and why he came to die. It shows us how he fulfils the Old Testament and tell us what he requires of us as New Covenant believers.

Being united around Christ means his words need to be central to our community life. We want to know what Jesus Christ has to say to us as his people:

- To hear from our King how we are meant to live as his subjects
- To hear from our Saviour about his love for us and the difference it makes to our life together
- To hear from our Shepherd about the plans he has for us as **his people** – not just for us as individuals

We are to make the teaching of the Bible a priority in our community life together

2. They devoted themselves tothe fellowship (Christ's body)

As these believers came to know and love Jesus, they became committed to him, trusting him to make them right with God, and living for his honour and glory. Coming into this personal relationship with Jesus, they were also united to other Christians. Church isn't a religious club but a body united together in Christ under his leadership. These believers were not just devoted to Christ, they were also devoted to his body, the church. For them, church was precious.

- It was a priority - meeting, serving, loving and seeking the welfare of the church overruled everything else
- Church was a daily activity, not a once a week for an hour activity

Church was the community to which they were committed.

How do we view church? Do we grieve that it has been taken away from us? Do we have the same priorities of meeting, serving, loving and seeking the welfare of the church? In an increasingly individualistic society, often what I want as an individual is seen to be more important than what is good for the community, and sadly this culture has infiltrated the church too, causing many of us to think wrongly. So we think that the church is good if it meets our needs, but if it doesn't, then we'll find another one or abandon it altogether.

Yet this is the body of Christ, the temple of the living God. It is not possible to be devoted to Jesus and not be devoted to his people.

We need to rekindle our love for the body of Christ and fight the sin of individualism if we are going to make church our priority.

3. They devoted themselves to..... the breaking of bread (Table fellowship)

This simply means having people round for a meal. In this context, it did not refer to the Lord's Supper (that usage started 200 years later). These believers met together in the temple as a big group and they also met together in homes for meals. For us, our big gathering has been taken away at the moment, but we can meet together in homes.

Your home is a precious gift from God where you can serve the church and enjoy fellowship, not just with your close friends, but with any believers.

4. They devoted themselves to... the prayers (Regular prayer)

This is the Jewish set times of prayer. The believers made the regular prayer times a priority that overruled everything else. As a church, we have a set time of prayer too – on a Tuesday evening. It may be hard, with the current hybrid in person/Zoom meeting, but we are doing the best we can with what we have. You can be part of this on Zoom or in person, even if you only pray silently.

If we are going to be the church Christ wants us to be, we need to make the time of prayer a priority.

As we are united to Christ and devoted to him, so we will become devoted to apostolic teaching, to Christ's body, to table fellowship and to regular prayer.

Christ is the person we are devoted to and he is at the centre of all these activities - it is his word that is taught, he unites us in fellowship, he is the unseen guest at our meals and it is in his name we pray.

As we come to love Jesus Christ, we will love his word and his people, spending time with them and praying with them.

In fact, you can't truly be in this community if you don't know and love Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

You might come to gatherings but you won't be part of this community called church unless you have been born again by the Spirit of Christ, repented of your sin and come to put your trust in Jesus to save you.

When that happens, you automatically become a member of his body with the responsibility to be devoted to a local assembly who are:

- Devoted to apostolic teaching
- Devoted to Christ's body
- Devoted to table fellowship
- Devoted to regular prayer

This is a local assembly who are:

A people united around the Gospel, by Christ Jesus, through the power of the Spirit
and the Word of God, enjoying all the blessings of the Gospel and fulfilling the
responsibilities of the Gospel