

Keynotes from Steven Driver's am Sermon on 20/2/2022

"Together for the Gospel" - Acts - Chapter 2 verses 42-47

Scripture references from ESV

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.

The church might seem to be a simple subject, but in our post-Christian culture it can be quite a controversial one, both in Christian and non-Christian circles. The big question is whether it has any relevance today. Incredibly, church is over 2000 years old! Many nations have risen and fallen in that time. New parts of the world have been discovered, and technological advancement has been astronomical, literally. The world has changed in almost every way since the time of the early church.

Many people, including professing Christians, ask whether the church is still relevant or whether it is just a relic from a bygone age. In the light of the pandemic, can we not find everything we need for spiritual nurture online? We can hear our favourite preacher on YouTube anytime, and if we want guidance on anything, we can google it! Getting to a physical church on a Sunday can be a hassle at times, if we're honest, and we might just be doing it simply because that's what we've always done. That is not a good enough reason, however, and we see from this passage the reasons why we are not together for tradition, or as a nice community group.

The Church is not just relevant today, it is essential.

We are together because of the Gospel.

What does together because of the Gospel mean for our local expression of church (BBC) in the 21st century?

1. **Together: united in the Gospel (v42 above).**

An attitude of devotion characterised the early church. They were devoted to the apostles' teaching, which gave them the Gospel. (**Acts 2: 22-36** see p4). They were captivated by:

- the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection
- the truth of how he has defeated death (the punishment for sin)
- the truth that he is now seated on high as Lord and Christ
- the truth that he is King of the kingdom that will last forever
- the truth that whoever puts their trust in him, repenting and turning away from their old life, becomes a citizen of that kingdom

It is the truth of the Gospel that brought these 3000 people together, convicted as they were by the Spirit of God who caused them to be born again, giving them new life. We see here the people of God united by the saving work of Christ. The apostles' teaching applied the gospel to their specific situation as 1st century Jews and the epistles helped people make better sense of the Gospel, applying it to their daily lives.

The Bible is God-breathed and not to be added to, but the principle of applying God's word to our own situation today is exactly what needs to be done. (**2 Tim 3:16** see p4). Timothy is instructed to preach, rebuke and correct – in **his local church**. Going on YouTube to listen to your favourite preacher, however good a Bible expositor he may be, is no substitute for teaching from those in your local church.

That person on YouTube does not know you. He does not know your situation or your struggles. He does not know what the body of this particular church struggles with. He will rightly be speaking into his own church.

When we are taught by the men that God has placed in our local church, we hear from people who know and love **this** church and speak the Gospel into the life of **this** church, empowered by the Spirit to do so. These men will teach to the heart, they will correct and rebuke, and, in doing so, **they unite us in the Gospel**.

2. Together: Living out the Gospel (v42 above).

Devotion to the Gospel and being united by its teaching overflows into a life defined by that uniting Gospel. The church were devoted to fellowship. They were **devoted to each other**.

Fellowship is **not** a nice community group. The Gospel creates a community like no other – **a new chosen people, bound together through Christ's blood spilt on the cross, his body broken for us.**

- We are bound together in a collective partnership with Jesus as we live out the mission set by him to go and make disciples, even in the face of overwhelming opposition.

That is fellowship. It is a bond that needs to be closer even than the bond with your own family! We are called **brothers and sisters** throughout the New Testament, and going back to using that language would help us see the depth of the bond we have in Christ. **vv44-45** (above) show us that in action. It does not mean that all the believers just liked doing the same thing or dressed the same!

Acts 4:32 (see p4) gives a fuller explanation and shows us a way of life that is very different from our culture. Our society is individualistic, promoting 'me' above 'you' but here we see the exact opposite.

- **Financial giving** is good for our souls and stops us hoarding. We should all be giving for the benefit of the church. Our culture tells us to give only when you have extra and to do it to make you feel good about yourself not for the benefit of others.
- **Hospitality** – they shared their homes as they broke bread and ate together, reminding themselves of the unity they have found in Christ. They did this not just at home but as the church assembled at the Lord's supper, reminding themselves of what Jesus has done for them.
- **Prayer** – they prayed in keeping with the prayer Jesus taught us so it was to **our** Father, not just mine, and **our** daily bread, not just bread for themselves.
- **Time** – they held lightly to their own time. Their lives were undoubtedly as busy as ours, but they found time to meet together daily. They must have been doing something else before they became believers but now they gave their time to the building up of the fellowship. They encouraged one another and were

living out the Gospel

When you grow up in a church that is truly your family, particularly if you come from a non-Christian family yourself, you will experience people who:

- give their time helping in Sunday School to teach you the word of God
- invite you round to have dinner, so that you can see what Christian family life looks like
- sit with you at Communion so that you know your unity with them in Christ

- give financially to the work of the church, so that youth and other ministries are supported
- pray for you

No church is perfect, but we can aim to show something of this different life. It is simple on the face of it, but revolutionary in practice. The challenge for all of us is to think about our own role in this. Ask yourself if you are living out the Gospel in your local church? Are we truly being the church that God has brought together? Are we really living this out?

- Are we giving our time to the building up of the fellowship, not just attending but being actively involved in the life of the church?
- Are we opening up our home, and opening our lives to one another? Are we meeting and eating together?
- Are we sharing the messiness of our lives with one another? Pastoral ministry is not just for the pastor. It's a whole church ministry.
- Are we praying for one another?
- Are we giving financially?
- Are we holding lightly the things God has given us, using them for his glory in the building up of his church?

When we really live like this, utilising the means of grace that God has given, his Church, there is an outcome.

3. Together: proclaiming the Gospel (v47 above)

On the face of it, this passage seems to be very inward-looking. Yet what we find in this last verse is that the church is growing. It is a church that the Lord is adding to. Why and how is this happening?

When a church is united in the Gospel, living out the Gospel so that the church comes alive with the Gospel, and is delighting in God to the glory of God (our vision statement) the natural outcome is the joyful proclamation of that Gospel. The Lord was adding to those who were being saved as the people around saw this testimony of the Gospel.

- The Gospel bound fellowship should be **missional in its very nature**.

Jesus commissioned the church to go and make disciples. When our fellowship is genuine, the depth of love for each other proclaims the Gospel through him, as Jesus said it would. (John 13:35 see p4).

That is why it is so important for us in this local church to meet together physically, if we are able to. Livestream is just not good enough. We need to meet together in order to show love for one another, to encourage one another, to pray for one another and to share in the Lord's Supper together. Communion is designed for the body of the church, not for someone at home on their own.

Church is the foundational means by which Christ is proclaimed.

Then as we, the church, go out to our families, friends and neighbours who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, we are equipped to do so, spurred on and encouraged by our church family who are praying for us, teaching us and building us up. Our church family help us find our identity in Christ so that when we share with people we are not discouraged by a perceived negative outcome, and they help us to stay grounded in Christ when there is a positive outcome.

That is a true fellowship – on mission together, united in the Gospel, living the Gospel and proclaiming the gospel.

- Church is not just the period of time between the call to worship and the benediction. It is not something we consume or go along to when we can. It is not a set of traditions.
- Church is us, the people! We play an essential part for each other in the good work God has begun in all of us through Christ. We are a means of grace for one another.

Church is not just relevant for today, but essential because Christ and his Gospel are essential.

Acts 2: 22 - 36 ²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, ^[c] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him,

"I saw the Lord always before me,

for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;

²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;

my flesh also will dwell in hope.

²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,

or let your Holy One see corruption.

²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

²⁹ "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at my right hand,

³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool."

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

Acts 4:32 ^{Now} the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

John 13:35 By this all people will know that **you are my disciples**, if **you** have love for one another."