

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The book of Acts is all about the birth of church. It is a story of what happens after Jesus ascends into heaven. The disciples were on the Mount of Olives when they watched Jesus ascend and he gave his disciples final instructions to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. So, they went to Jerusalem and waited for the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, on the day of Pentecost, it filled them with the courage and the ability to spread their knowledge of Jesus to the world. Acts chapter two shows a clear picture of the church that Jesus turned over to his disciples. The new born church is made up of people that are passionately devoted to Jesus. They are not distracted by the whims of society. Their faith is demonstrated by four main pillars of expression: teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer.

Everything is going according to God's plan. Jesus died and was resurrected, and then he encountered his disciples. The disciples were transformed from fear to boldness with the help of the Holy Spirit and are then able to carry out the legacy of Christ. At this point in the scriptures, everyone is in awe due to the wonders and signs of the disciples who are now classified as apostles. Everyone not only believed but they also shared their resources to help those in need. Daily the apostles went to the temple. They were generous, full of joy, constantly praised God and as a consequence the church grew. There are four characteristics of devotion that are emphasized: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. They were devoted to God and their devotion is expressed in these four areas of faith formation. Exciting things happened in Jerusalem after the Holy Spirit came on the disciples. People shared what they had and talked about what Jesus did for them. The church grew because it was being the actual church that Christ commissioned with voluntary sharing possessions, almsgiving, unity, hospitality, stewardship, togetherness, and love.

The church is born in front of the Jewish leaders that conspired to kill Jesus. The men that were leading the movement were the very same disciples that scattered when the temple police arrested Jesus and hid while the Roman soldiers crucified him. Courage is now shown by the fact that they began preaching in the very location where Jesus was tortured and killed. Seeing the resurrected Jesus is the key pivotal point that resulted in their fearlessness. As eye witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, they no longer feared death. Therefore, they are now able to be bold and testify in the very same place where Jesus was tortured and crucified.

A lesson for us is the change that occurs within each of us. You are different person due to your faith. If we were simply commanded to be devoted then we would

lack motivation because it would be perceived as a duty. However, devotion is not a commandment of authoritarianism; devotion is a matter of joy. People are in awe, they are excited, united together, caring for one another, and praising God.

What was unique, different, and special is that this is the Jesus experience. What forges the appeal of a church is not the programs but the Jesus experience. This is realized when you walk in the door of a church for the first time and you experience the love of the Lord through the response of the people. The New Testament church had this experience. They felt the love. They broke bread together and prayed for one another. They were united and enjoyed the fellowship. They praised God and loved every minute of it. When church is done right, it is intoxicating. This is the Jesus experience.

To feel the love of Jesus as it is expressed from yourself to others and as it is expressed from others to you. It is the Jesus experience that gives us great joy, a sense of belonging in a community that cares and shares. There is great joy when you are in a community that is centered on Jesus. Church is a community where lonely people find friends. I remember a story about a woman that had her first child and she was thrilled to be a stay-at-home mother to take care of her newborn child. She entered into a happy new stage of life. However, she soon became lonely and depressed due to the isolation. One day she decided to visit a church and she joined the church because the people welcomed her. They became good friends and throughout the years they laughed and prayed for each other and ended up becoming the closest of friends. The church is also a community where the repentant sinner finds understanding and forgiveness instead of condemnation. What we can do as a church today in this complicated society is to stay true and stay focused through teaching correct doctrine over popular rhetoric, pray for one another, worship in spirit and truth, and be there to support one another in communion with the Lord where everyone is welcome and accepted as they are.