

**The Rock: 07-04--2021**

**Community series**

**First reading: None**

**Title: Unity**

**Scripture: Acts 2:42-47**

**Theme:**

Luke gives us the early formula for success as a church community, family gatherings and why it's so important to gather together.

**Introduction:**

In starting a new series it's always hard, for me anyway, to figure out what to tackle, how to do it, and what is important for us to learn as a community.

In what became a forced separation this past year, and a bunch of change in the midst of that, we learned the value of coming together, helping one another, and understanding that we had actually grown to take a lot of things for granted.

I think in looking at the books of Acts, at least in some key places, as all of it has value, but seeing a shift in world view of the early church, how they saw the temple, God's promises and probably

most importantly how they gathered together and why.

We learned at Easter that because of the resurrection of Jesus, the world from that point forward would and actually hasn't been the same.

In the middle of history heaven broke in upon the world just as God promised. Although, Jesus followers didn't really understand that He wasn't the Messiah they wanted.

IE: Military and political leader who would destroy Rome and all other parties who didn't think like they did. Not much has changed, has it?

No, that long-awaited hope is still in the future. Jesus was the Messiah they and the world needed. The whole creation was delivered from that death grip of sin.

In Jesus, because of his death and resurrection, we have forgiveness, we are set right before God once again. Able to live out that genuine human life which flourishes under His Holy Spirit and care.

We learned on Pentecost Sunday that because the risen Jesus ascended back to heaven, the same Holy Spirit who lived in Him, lives in us.

Not only that, but He empowers us to witness about Jesus and all He did. The healing for the nations has happened and we are sent out to share the good news.

That in Jesus there is salvation, forgiveness, life, freedom! Go into all the world they were told, and 2,000 years on and some 5,500 miles away on our Independence Day (July 4<sup>th</sup>) here we are celebrating our spiritual independence. Both coming to us at the expense of others.

### **The Story:**

That begs the question: How did we get here? How did anyone come to Christ, and how do they still? Small beginnings, long-term faithfulness in one direction, that's how.

Every journey starts with a first step, a starting point, a place of formation and understanding that God's plan of fixing humanity and this world will be helped along and moved forward by, guess who?

Human beings, men and women who joined together as a community..

But it didn't happen in some sort of haphazard way, scattered and sporadic. As crazy as it may seem to us today to us, it has never been accomplished in an independent, lone-ranger way.

Although, as with any healthy endeavor, there are always people who stand out. Yet, it seems to me that there is a healthy inter-dependance: The community of believers united in a way that gives us today a good pattern to grow in.

So, as we look at the next five weeks, one of the main goals is to learn how to come back together as a community, on mission in this world and growing together.

Here in Acts 2, Luke gives us the seeds of success, even in the hard times. Actually, when we think about it, most especially in the hard times.

Growing together in "easy times" will insure we continue to grow together in the hard times. So, we see five things in Acts 2:42-47 that we are going to look at as foundational pieces for our journey in Acts.

1-The Apostle's teaching (the word)

2-People brought themselves under the Apostles authority

3-They gathered together regularly

4-They broke bread in their homes (communion) Basis for small groups which are critical

5-they were in constant prayer.

#1-Apostles teaching:

The most important thing everyone recognized was that God had called the Apostles to be the teachers of God's word and the ones who would lead and carry authority.

**-Acts 2:42a ESV**

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"

God has always called certain people to speak on His behalf. From Moses before Pharaoh, to the prophets in the Old Testament, and right up to John the Baptist. We see it here in Acts as well with Peter in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost. We talked on Pentecost Sunday that it is clear he isn't the same guy as the day before.

He speaks with boldness, confidence and authority. From verse 14 all the way through verse 35 in chapter 2, he unpacks the Old Testament. Circling it around and pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Bringing it and the crowd to the place of application, conviction and finally repentance.

**-Acts 2:36 ESV**

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

Peter, as every preacher should, applied this to himself first. HE knew that he had rejected Jesus in his denial, that he had to come to repentance, and on the shores of Galilee, Jesus forgave and restored him.

Peter isn't preaching something he doesn't get. No, he is under the authority of the Scriptures. It's what makes him so powerful in his preaching. Also, it is what makes him compassionate and passionate in his pleading.

Remember, these are the people who had Jesus killed, and wanted to do the same to his followers. We are going to see that in a few weeks with Saul of Tarsus.

Peter here doesn't want to destroy or eliminate them. They are not "the other" who in today's terms our culture wants to cancel. No...

Compassion -We are all broken people, sinners in need of Jesus. A pastor (this is really the office today of teaching:

**-Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV**

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..."

A pastor who doesn't preach in this way: compassionate conviction -first to themselves and then to those under his care -should examine themselves.

#2 The people brought themselves under the authority of the Apostles:

They understood that God had given them, as Paul tells us, as gifts to the church, given in order to help His people grow.

Being under the authority of someone who preachers and teaches the Scriptures faithfully, helps us all to be disciplined.

We all need to take personal responsibility for our daily devotional times, and part of that is to bring ourselves and our families to the weekly gathering of God's people. What we call Church.

I will say again, to think you never have to gather together in Church because you can get God "in communing with nature and enjoying His creation" is wrong.

You can do that, yes, but it is only part of what it means to be a healthy

disciple. Now that there is no reason why we can't gather, every believer should do their best to do so.

**-Hebrews 10:23-25 ESV**

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

It's not a guilt thing, it's a health thing. If they hadn't learned to do this at the very beginning (good habit formation), they never would have been able to grow in long-term faithfulness needed to reach the world.

Good teaching, good discipleship grown by being in good community together.

#3 Daily they met:

Now I have no idea if they gathered as a complete group, that 3,000 plus listed here. But Luke is careful to tell us that daily they were in the Temple and breaking bread in their homes.

That's

#4: Breaking bread



You see, whether in temple or church or at home, they were gathering. Large group or small groups, something we will be focusing on as we grow forward, are essential.

The breaking of bread, that's communion. Something we will do in a few moments -is how they remembered and honored the Lord Jesus, whenever they met.

It's a healthy pattern to have. Growing friendships, getting together to talk, to pray, to encourage each other, to listen to one another's struggles.

There is 168 hours in a given week -yes, the genius I am, I figured that one out. Of that, 1 hour 15 minutes is spent together here as a community of believers.

While that gives us encouragement in worship, prayer, and the word, that is not all we need. Wednesday may be a bit hard for someone and to have a friend or a small group in your house, well, that is critical.

They met in the temple, they broke bread in their homes, they grew together. They trusted one another and their leaders.

They wanted to be together in their small group communities and then with the entire body.

Let's be honest, for so many throughout the pandemic, the isolation and inability to gather together was one of the hardest things to deal with, wasn't it?

We aren't wired to go at this thing alone. It is God who has created us for community! When we are all going about doing our own thing, focusing on just our own things, we lose that sense of belonging, that spirit of unity.

The fiercely independent American mindset is what makes us a great nation. However, it also can and does all too often, makes us "second rate" Christians.

Now, before you crucify me and get angry (this is not my intent), please listen to me:

When we look at the early church, they were primarily made up of Jewish believers. Fiercely proud of being Jewish and that is one of the biggest issues they faced.

Far too often division was caused because of the "Jewish first, Jesus second" mentality of many. Gentiles had to be Jews first-then Jesus would accept them.

It's a mentality we are struggling with today, and we all need to be reminded that we are citizens of heaven first-strangers and aliens in this world-FIRST.

THEN citizens of whatever nation God has set us down in. We are blessed to be American's, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else; BUT:

As I have said before, I can only be the best American citizen I can be, if I can remember that I am a Christian first, American second.

The Church is around that truth -that the community of believers transcends country and location. It is about Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

A church united, gathering together around that truth will be the best citizens of any country they are set down in. Why?

Because we are united in and around, and for Jesus. We have such opportunity in our country to share Jesus and His kingdom message of salvation -and I fear at times, that is lost because of disunity, fierce independent mind-set, and an unhealthy focus on power in the here and now.

The unifying factor, and with this I close, is:

#5: Constant prayer:

**-Acts 2:42 ESV**

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

**-Acts 2:47 ESV**

"praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

We learned last week from King David that the meek will inherit the land -Jesus made that global when He said the meek will inherit the Earth.

We are called to the Nations- locally and globally. Sometimes God brings the nations to us, and we should celebrate the opportunity to have the chance to reach these people we perhaps otherwise couldn't.

Then sometimes we go to them, as the early church did. Not everyone went to Jerusalem. No, they were sent ones and we are here because they went.

United in prayer and common mission, we should make the most of every opportunity, for the days are evil.

Our founding fathers gave us the beautiful freedoms we have, founded on Judeo-Christian principles and by God's grace.

Perhaps the Church, in her thankfulness,  
can continue to use those freedoms for  
the glory of her King -Jesus.