

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"They Devoted Themselves To..."*

Go ahead and open your Bibles to **Acts 2**.

Just to give you a little direction for the following Sundays, this is our last sermon on the vision of the church. Next week I'm going to resume my verse-by-verse studies through Luke's gospel. If you want to read ahead, we will pick up where we left off at **Luke 12:35**...13 years ago.

For now, let's go ahead and read our verses this morning: **36 to 42**.

**Acts 2:36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

As you can tell we are looking at the early church. This is pretty much as early as you can get because it is Pentecost which we would consider the birth of the church.

Let me explain why I like this approach when considering the vision of our church...

You've probably heard many of the buzzwords in the church today: postmodern, relevant, contemporary.

Sometimes when people talk about vision for the church, they say things like:

- We need to reinvent ourselves
- We need to do something new and radical

I would actually say the opposite. We should be unoriginal.

- We should go back to the Word and look at what God already wrote and try to do that.
- We should see what He already said the church should do and focus on making that our vision.

When I was going over the sermon with Katie she said, "This would actually make us original."

Listen to what God said to the Jews through the prophet Jeremiah in his day when they started to depart from the foundation he gave them...

**Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ASK FOR THE ANCIENT PATHS, WHERE THE GOOD WAY IS; AND WALK IN IT, and find rest for your souls."**

I think we can look for the ancient paths, where the good way is, walk in it, and find rest for our souls.

I think one of the reasons it can be restful is:

- We don't have to worry about reinventing ourselves.
- We don't have to worry about trying to be original.

Trying to constantly reinvent ourselves can be exhausting.

Instead of trying to be original, we can try to be biblical.

And in our attempt to be biblical I don't think we can do much better than looking at the example of the early church...which brings us to lesson one...

**Lesson one: the early church sets a good example, because of what they didn't have.**

One of the reasons I REALLY like to look at the early church is because of what they did NOT have...

First, the early church didn't have books to read on church growth. I looked on Amazon and there were 28,000 books on church growth.

Last week I discussed the most well-known: *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren. I shared some of the concerns I had with this book.

The early church wouldn't have had any books like this to influence them.

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Second, the early church didn't have the example of other churches to follow.

During last week's sermon I also mentioned Willow Creek and how thousands of churches followed them to hopefully experience the same numerical growth.

But the early church also didn't have other churches to follow. So what we see them do would be uninfluenced by others.

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This sermon flows well from last Sunday's sermon, so let me briefly remind you of something...

The title of the sermon was, "*Equip the saints Versus Being Seeker Sensitive.*"

I had a lengthy discussion about why we don't want to be seeker sensitive. Instead, we want to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We see clearly in the following verses that this was the case with the early church: they were not seeker sensitive, and they sought to equip the saints.

Look with me at **verse 23** to see what I mean...

**Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, YOU CRUCIFIED AND KILLED by the hands of lawless men.**

Peter accused them of crucifying Jesus.

Skip to **verse 36**...

**Acts 2:36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED."**

Again, Peter told them they crucified Jesus.

Does this sound seeker sensitive?

Definitely not!

If you remember last week's sermon, lesson two was...

**We don't want to be seeker sensitive because (lesson two) we want unbelievers to be convicted.**

And why do we want unbelievers convicted?

Because they will hopefully repent and become believers.

This is exactly what happened in the early church. Look at **verse 37**...

**Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”**

Whenever I read this account I always think about the Jews FINALLY receiving the true and greater circumcision God wanted for them, which was not physical, but spiritual: a circumcision of the heart.

**Deuteronomy 30:6 God will CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART...so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.**

So there was this Old Testament practice which prefigured or foreshadowed a New Testament reality, and we finally see it fulfilled here.

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Let me ask you to think about something for a moment...

What if Peter had been seeker sensitive?

He would've thought:

- *What do these Jews want to hear?*
- *How can I make this crowd bigger?*
- *What can I say to make them want to come back?*
- *Maybe I can give them something entertaining?*

But when you have people feeling convicted, they're receptive to doing what Peter tells them to do in **verse 38**...

**Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

They were told that if they'd repent, believe, and be baptized, they'd receive the Holy Spirit, which is to say they'd be saved. I want to add that you don't have to be baptized to be saved, but it's a natural enough response to salvation that it's included here.

This should encourage us to view baptism as the next step after conversion. If you're saved, you should want to be identified with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and that happens through water baptism.

**Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”**

This means the promise of salvation, or the Gospel. Peter said it's for the Jews, their children, and all those who are far off, referring to the Gentiles.

Notice the words at the end of the verse: **everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself**.

This is how the church is built: God calls people to Himself...and it brings us to lesson two...

**Lesson two: Jesus builds the church.**

In **Matthew 16:18** Jesus said, **“I will build My church.”**

I heard John MacArthur say one time, *“Jesus said he would build his church. Why would I want to compete with him?”*

**Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.**

This means we can try as hard as we want, but if God isn't growing the church, it isn't going to grow.

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The New Testament is our instruction manual, and there are no verses about growing the church.

The reason is we're not supposed to focus on growing the church. We leave that to God.

This isn't to minimize evangelism or outreach. You've heard me say many times that I'd like to see us grow in these areas.

My point is we focus on being faithful and sharing the gospel and God does the growing...

**1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.**

I don't think anyone worked harder than Paul or Apollos to share the gospel, but they recognized that God had to provide the growth.

Mark Dever said, *“We acknowledge, in humility, that any growth that comes does not ultimately come from us.”*

There are several problems associated with focusing on numbers:

- I hope I made it clear last week that we don't want to be seeker sensitive, and if you're going to focus on numbers, you're going to be tempted to become seeker sensitive.
- You're going to be afraid to talk about certain things, deal with certain things, practice church discipline...even though it's spelled out clearly in Scripture.

A simple way to think of it this: focusing on church numbers can lead to an emphasis on pleasing man, instead of pleasing God.

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Peter didn't try to please man and look what happened...

**Acts 2:40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”**

It says **with many other words he testified**, because Peter said more than what's recorded here, but these are the highlights.

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

3,000 people **received his word**, which implies there were some who didn't.

But those who did, believed, repented, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit. The early church was filled with saved people.

Let me tell you a story from the Old Testament that illustrates a point I'd like to make...

In Judges 7, Gideon was famously called to lead his men against 125,000 Midianites. He started with 32,000 men, which means he was outnumbered 4-to-1.

Then it got much worse. God said everyone who was afraid should go home, and 22,000 men left. That left Gideon with only 10,000 men against 125,000 men...which means he was outnumbered over 12-to-1.

Then God told Gideon to take the men to get a drink. 9,700 men got on all fours and drank like dogs, and 300 men stayed upright.

God said, "*I'm going to use those 300 men to defeat the Midianites.*" Gideon was outnumbered over 400-to-1.

But here's the thing...

Even when there were 32,000 men, there were always only 300 soldiers:

- 22,000 of them were terrified and wanted to go home
- 9,700 of them thought it was okay to get on all fours and set their weapons and equipment on the ground.

Gideon didn't lose any soldiers. God just revealed what was there all along.

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This can illustrate the case with churches...

There could be churches with thousands of people in them, but there might only be a few hundred Christians. In the future God will reveal what's there.

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Let me make this a little clearer...

The church is only the believers who make up the body of Christ. So just because people go to church doesn't mean they're Christians. You've probably heard the saying that being in a church doesn't make you a believer any more than being in a garage makes you a car.

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You could even wonder in some of the liberal churches – and I'm using the term *church* loosely – if the percentage of Christians is LESS than the percentage of soldiers in Gideon's day.

Our vision is that the people attending WCC be regenerate, saved individuals. They're people who have embraced the Gospel and surrendered their lives to Christ.

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Now after Peter preached and these 3,000 people joined the church, there was a HUGE number of new believers who couldn't be sidetracked by any books, programs, or other churches. So, I really believe what we see them focusing on is what we should focus on as a church...and it's recorded for us in **verse 42**...

**Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

If you remember last week's sermon, lesson three was...

**We don't want to be seeker sensitive because (lesson three) we want believers equipped and sanctified.**

The early church equipped and sanctified believers by focusing on the four spiritual disciplines in verse 42.

Earlier I said we don't focus on numbers, which begs the question, what do we focus on?

Notice the words **they devoted themselves**. This is what they focused on, and it's what we should focus on...and this brings us to lesson 3...

### Lesson 3: we want to equip the saints by devoting ourselves to the Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer.

Jesus says He'll build the church, but that doesn't mean we don't have anything to do. There's plenty to keep us busy. Our responsibility is being faithful to the spiritual activities the Lord wants us engaged in.

**Acts 2:42** is a special verse in my opinion: I think it describes the foundation of the early church and I believe it can serve as a foundation for us. It's like a nice little blueprint.

I like the verse so much I asked the leadership almost 10 years ago if we could put it on our logo and have it serve as the foundational verse for our church.

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Last week I shared a quote from Bill Hybels, the pastor of Willow Creek. He said...

*“Some of the stuff we put MILLIONS OF DOLLARS INTO, thinking it would help our people grow and develop spiritually...the data said it wasn't helping people that much. We made a mistake. When people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started teaching them to take responsibility and become self-feeders. We should have taught people how to read their bibles between services and do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.”*

We want to make sure we don't make the same mistake and invest lots of time, energy, or money into activities that don't lead to spiritual growth.

Basically, Bill said they should've focused on the spiritual disciplines, such as those listed in verse 42. This is a much better approach, because it works and it's cheaper. It doesn't cost much to study the word, pray, have fellowship, and practice the ordinances.

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David Guzik said...

*“Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer.”*

There are plenty of opinions about how to be healthy, but I don't think there should be controversy about what makes churches healthy. Acts 2:42 is like a recipe for healthy churches. They're strong in these four areas.

Let's briefly look at each of them...

#### First, the apostles' doctrine...

The apostles' doctrine is another name for the Word of God, because the apostles taught the word of God.

Terry L. Johnson said...

*“We've watched the biblical content of services shrink beyond visibility. But doesn't faith come by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17)? Aren't the spiritually dead born again by the living and abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23)? Don't the people of God grow by the pure milk of God's Word (1 Peter 2:2)? Then doesn't it matter what we read, preach, and sing in our services, and in what quantities? Shouldn't we be alarmed when we see self-centered sermons replace biblical exposition, repetitious choruses replace biblical songs...and Scripture reading disappear altogether?”*

I love our church logo. It has a Bible open right in the middle of it. Each week my desire is that you come with your Bible and have it open on your lap like it's pictured. The Bible is what we want to teach, follow, and build our church on.

## Second, fellowship...

The Greek word for **fellowship** is *koinonia*, which is also translated as *distribution* or *contribution* because it has the idea of sharing our lives with others.

I want to show you what the early church's *koinonia* was like. If you look at **verse 44** it says...

**Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common** (this is *koinos*, the root word in fellowship or *koinonia*), **45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.**

Sometimes people wonder if we should do what we see the early church doing. We don't have to because it's descriptive versus prescriptive:

- There's no record of any other churches doing it
- It's never commanded in any of the New Testament letters

But what they did with their possessions is a great picture of what we should do with our lives as we share our lives with each other.

*Koinonia* refers to the mutual responsibilities we have to each other like:

- Exhorting each other
- Helping each other when there's a need
- Encouraging each other when there are struggles
- Praying for each other
- Caring enough to rebuke each other
- Sharing our time, energy, and homes with each other

When I was in the military, I engaged in some water survival training. I remember one time a group of us were in a raft. They were showing us how we would survive if we were stuck at sea. I can tell you whatever one person in that raft experienced, we all experienced:

- Remember the men in the boat with Jonah?
- Remember when the disciples were in the boat with Jesus?

Whatever one man went through, they all went through.

That IS fellowship: it's fellows in a ship:

- You experience the same fair weather together.
- You experience the same storms together

## Third, breaking of bread...

This isn't talking about having meals together as that would be under "**fellowship**." This is talking about the Lord's Supper.

The other reason I love our logo is right behind the open Bible is a picture of the cross reminding us of what Christ did for us.

Jesus' sacrifice is the basis of our faith, and we're reminded of it each week through communion.

## Fourth, prayers...

The context of this word is the prayer time of the church; therefore, I'm going to talk about our corporate prayer time versus our private prayer lives.

Corporate prayer is one of the areas our church could grow. Of these four activities, I would say this is probably the weakest.

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Let me share something with you...

**Romans 12:7** says **if your gift is teaching, then teach.**

This is why I want to provide teaching opportunities, but I don't want to push anyone into teaching if they don't feel gifted to teach.

But there's no verse saying **if your gift is praying, then pray**, because prayer isn't a gift. Everyone should pray.

The joke is that if you want to have a poorly attended church event, have a prayer meeting. The sad thing is it isn't really a joke because it's usually true!

Melvin Tinker said, *"Prayer is very hard work, why else is the prayer meeting the worst attended meeting in any church? For that is where the battle is."*

With us planning to reopen fully on July 4, the main opportunity for corporate prayer will be Sunday morning at 9AM with Sunday School following at 9:30.

I would love to see you attend. Our Sunday morning prayer time is in the conference room, and it would be great if we ran out of room and had to move to the fellowship hall.

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As we come to the end of these sermons on the vision for WCC, let me conclude by tying all this together...

We talked about vision and why we need it. Then we talked about what we don't want to be as a church: we don't want to be seeker sensitive. We want to focus on believers during our worship times, equipping them to go out and live for Christ and reach unbelievers.

We saw how Peter convicted his listeners on Pentecost – they were cut to the heart – leading to their salvation, looking to how we should want to see unbelievers who join us convicted as well.

We discussed how Jesus is building the church. It's not our responsibility. It's our responsibility to focus on being faithful to the activities Jesus wants the church engaged in. Acts 2:42 can serve as a nice blueprint identifying four areas we can focus on to be spiritually strong and healthy.

If we think about what people could say about WCC, my hope would be that they could look and say we're strong in these areas: **the Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer.**

Let's pray.