

**Martin White. 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2010. Acts 2:41-47**

**The New Church**

When a baby is born, it is a very emotional time – busyness, pain, mess, excitement; but once the baby is born, and the mother is being looked after, and the baby has taken its first few breaths, then you can stop and look at it and decide whether it has its mother's eyes or its father's nose.

As we're looking through the book of Acts, which is the story of how God births and expands His Church, we have got to the end of Chapter 2.

Up till now, there has been lots of drama – the Risen Jesus has appeared to, and has taught His disciples about the Kingdom of God; then He has told them to stay in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit; then He has ascended to Heaven – to His Place of Authority, and then the Holy Spirit has come, as we talked about over the last couple of weeks.

And last week, we looked at how, amidst lots of excitement and noise, the Church was born – about 3000 men and women, wonderfully forgiven for their sins and their part in crucifying Jesus; filled with the Holy Spirit; baptised, and now belonging to a new family.

And now here is Luke – taking a “photo” of the new baby – describing the newborn church.

Those who accepted his (Peter's) message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

If you could get in a time machine and travel back in time, what would have been the things that would have struck you most about the Church?

They were what Luke described.

**Diversity:**

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 1:9-11)

(Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Libya, other parts of Africa, Italy, Crete and Arabia)

I don't know if what we imagine when we think about this church is diversity, but presumably the nationalities that heard Peter's preach were also the ones who shouted out "What must we do to be saved?" and were then baptised and added.

Right back to the very first day of the Church, diversity has been at its heart – in the DNA.

I've talked before about why there are black and Asian churches in Birmingham – because the churches that were here before decided that they wanted to remain all-white. But that's not what the Church looked like the day it was born! Back then it was multicoloured – and as we've talked about before, Ephesians 2 says that this is how God displays His Wisdom.

**Devotion to God**

They devoted themselves to... the apostles' teaching and to...prayer

"Devoted" is a really strong word that Luke chose carefully to describe this scene.

It literally means "to give yourself to something; to care for; to stick to; to persevere with; to wait for"

But it's not a word that describes doing something out of duty; it is much more passionate and love-driven than that!

Devotion isn't about dutifully praying 5 times a day! Devotion is when you love someone so much you can't get enough of them!

When I met Louise, I didn't need to be reminded – “A good boyfriend will walk 3 miles to meet his girlfriend”; nothing could have stopped me!

I didn't need to be told “You should really think about her every day”; I couldn't stop thinking about her!

I was devoted!

The Early Church was devoted to Jesus!

I don't think they had invented the “Quiet Time” where they spent an hour each day praying, or a “Thought for the Day” slot.

They were devoted! They couldn't stop thinking about Him! They knew Jesus is alive, so their devotion to prayer wasn't a duty thing – they knew He was there and listening – and acting when they prayed.

And they didn't go to Bible studies to try to look good, or out of a sense of duty! They were devoted to Jesus – so they wanted to know everything they could about Him – to get the Disciples to tell and re-tell stories about Him; to remind them what He had said; to get their eyes opened so they could understand more about what He is like and what the Bible revealed about Him.

### **Devotion to each other/generosity**

I said that they hadn't invented Quiet Times yet – but they were quick to get the idea of Community Groups!

They loved spending time together, because from the very beginning, they understood that they had been brought into a new community – a new family; and that was where they belonged.

And so in a culture; Jewish culture, which was already fantastic at hospitality and very strong on eating together and feasting and being a community with

strong identity; the Church was something amazing. It stood out as being the new benchmark; the new model of how strong community could be.

Again, this didn't come from duty or obligation or what they ought to be doing – they loved it! And so they couldn't get enough of just being together. I guess that this was the kind of community where people queued outside the Temple Courts to get in, and had to be forcefully kicked out at closing time – and then went back to someone's house so they could carry on being together; and everyone was included

They devoted themselves to... the fellowship, to the breaking of bread... All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people

One writer defines "Fellowship" (Greek word Koinonia) as "The same bonds that join a Believer to Christ, also join them to other believers."

As much as they belonged to Jesus, they also belonged to each other; it wasn't that they thought one minute "I'll give myself to Jesus" and the next, "I'll give myself to the Church" It all came out of the same devotion.

And this devotion affected their actions and their priorities and their possessions and their money.

### **Power of the Spirit**

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles

I think this speaks for itself, and we will be looking later on in Acts at some of these "wonders and miraculous signs", but I just want to make a couple of quick points:

Firstly, it doesn't say "Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles and everyone was filled with awe"

The awe people are filled with wasn't a result of the miraculous signs – the miraculous signs were a result of the awe people had of God.

If we want to see wonders and miraculous signs, and we do; then we need to know God more – to see more of His Glory and Holiness and 'Bigness'; then we'll see more of His Wonders.

As one person put it; we need to seek His Face, not His Hand.

But as we see Him more – as our awe of Him grows, we shouldn't be surprised by the signs of His Presence.

Remember that Peter said on the Day of Pentecost – “What you're seeing here – these signs and wonders, are evidence that Jesus is God and that He is Risen and Ascended and Glorified.

Finally, the last thing you would have noticed from Luke's snapshot of the Church was:

### **Growth**

If you'd seen it one day, then gone back the next, it would have grown; and the next day it would have grown some more!

There would have always been new faces; the Welcome Team would have been really busy! There would always have been new people wanting to be baptised; always people gathering round the Apostles asking if they could be part of it too.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

Really we shouldn't be that surprised the Church was growing so fast – what Luke describes here is an amazing thing; who wouldn't have wanted to be part of it?

John Wimber – went in a taxi with a driver who was criticizing Christians → Wimber listened, then finally asked “What do you think they should be like?”

“They should feed the hungry, care for the poor and not charge you to read the Book!”

Everyone has an idea in them what the Church should be like, because it’s God’s Church, and He has designed everyone to be part of it.

Often the Church is criticized for being divided or out of touch or just wanting your money. The reason people criticise it is because everyone in their heart longs for the pure Church. So when the Church isn’t as it should be, it matters to people – they’re not just indifferent.

And when the World sees Churches or individuals acting like the Church should, then it resonates and the World notices – people devoting themselves, reconciling, caring for the poor.

I want to finish by saying this; **it’s not impossible to build a church like to one here.**

It’s not easy either.

Later in Acts, problems come into the Church that forces it to dig more into theology and sort out wrong attitudes – that’s all part of the Church maturing.

But Acts 2:41-47 is not an impossibility; I want to give the rest of my life to building something that looks like this glorious picture – to the Glory of God.

And everyone here has a decision to make – do you want to devote yourself to the same thing?

Until Jesus comes again, there will always be problems in the church because we’re humans and God’s Kingdom has not yet fully come; but that doesn’t mean that God can’t make His Church – His Bride, shine and be ‘the joy of the whole Earth’ and a glorious City on a hill;

My question is this – are you going to say “Why don’t they sort it out?” or are you going to say “What can we do to help build it?”

There is always room for people who say the second one!