

Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2: 42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

New International Version

Preaching notes: Six verses that illuminate to us what the church can be. No encumbrance of a structure or a hierarchy or tasks to do: just a delight of simple worship and being in the warm glow of the Lord's favour. For those who say that this is an idealistic or naive expression of church then I would say "I would rather be idealistic and naive in a rich and joyful relationship with God and other believers, than attending a formal and organised structure that is orderly and business-like but lacks love."

Just prior to hearing about this vital and growing church (which from the very beginning was about people and never supposed to be a building) we hear Peter saying "be saved from this perverse generation" (v40) and those who "gladly received his words" were immediately baptised and came steadfastly under the teaching of the apostles (v41,42). In going back to Matthew 3:7 before the ministry of Jesus we hear very similar words as Peter's spoken by John the Baptist to the priests and leaders of the Jews (the Pharisees and Sadducees), amazingly also in the same context - the importance of baptism: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

These were the same words/longing (Matthew 3:7 and Acts 2:40) that John Wesley used in the forming of the early societies - small groups of people (no more than 12) longing for a Spirit led revival in their lives and the land. In the same way as this early church in Jerusalem, the early Methodist societies devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship and prayer.

When we read the words "had everything in common" or in some versions "were of one accord" we have, I think, one of the essential keys to understanding what God was doing through these early believers. It was "the Lord" who was adding to their number, not a scheme or programme they have heard or read of or looked up but it was "the Lord".

In the same way; the "signs and wonders" being performed such as healings (Acts 3:7) are the Lord's blessing and spiritual outpouring resulting from the devotion, trust and faith, "praises ascend and blessings descend" in a virtuous cycle like the never-ending praise in the throne room of heaven (Revelation 4:8).

Belonging and being firmly rooted in a local church (meaning a group of fellow believers in Jesus Christ) is the first step to the blessings. I accept the word "membership" does not appear in our passage but many would agree that the "being of one accord", "meeting

together” in homes and temple courts, praying and breaking bread together represents the same belonging that is stressed in an active membership of the local church.

The use of the word “believer”, which is the most common description of the early church members, is a whole lot more than just “an assent of there being something greater than us, perhaps God...” You do not make the sacrifices that these early believers did without a conviction that it is all absolutely true. Peter, who is the chief character in these early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, makes it very clear that to be a believer is to accept: “Jesus Christ whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead... salvation is not found in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”. (paraphrase of Acts 4:10-12).

In closing, I am not saying that we must sell our buildings and our possessions, what I am saying is that we must “hold them lightly”, always being open to what the Lord is saying to us. How will we know God’s purpose and plan for us unless we are of one accord, praying, worshipping, and breaking bread together, in harmony and love?

Division only brings deficiency, despair and decline. The rich and joyful relationship with God and each other is a choice that we make; it is an attitude of heart and mind, an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and nothing to do with a building or a structure. Let us break bread with one another, pray and meet together (even virtually) as the basis of our fellowship and faith and just like the first Christian church and the early Methodist societies, the Lord will “add to our number daily those who are being saved”.

Amen