

## Acts | The Incendiary Fellowship

### The Fellowship

Acts 2.36ff

5.8.16

*"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified." <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."*

*<sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.*

*<sup>42</sup> They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

We're looking at a part of the Bible that could be called The Acts of the Apostles, the first book of Church History for the first generation of Christians.

It's written by Luke... the sequel to the Gospel According to Luke. It documents the spread of Christianity in the first generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...even before this movement had a name.

TODAY'S passage is the end of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost...the decisive event that propels the disciples of Jesus forward and OUTWARD from Jerusalem OUTWARD... to the ends of the earth.

The Pentecost sermon ends with a pointed indictment ("this Jesus whom YOU crucified" – that's the BAD NEWS) and then a specific directive, an application, an INVITATION – "Repent and be

baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ – He died to atone for our sins, to gain forgiveness and NEW LIFE for everyone who believes” – THAT’S THE GOOD NEWS).

We said last week that this whole scene is a kind of pattern or model or paradigm for the worship of the church. It’s a liturgy or public form of worship that’s a prototype ...And today we look at a paradigm for church life. In other words, even though this is a UNIQUE, miraculous moment in history... there are elements of church life Luke wants us to see and to imitate...and to value for all Christians for all time.

That’s what I want to look at today...in one simple phrase: being a Christian means 1) Continuing 2) Together 3) In the Name of Jesus Christ

Continuing – that word is used in six significant places in the early part of this book. Luke draws our attention to it and wants us to see it as a NORM for the Christian life – a continuing life.

Verse 42, “They were continuing in the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (Luke uses the definite article “the” before each of these) Our translation PUTS IT as “continually devoting themselves to” is really only one word in Luke’s original Greek language.

It’s a word that implies intensity (that’s why the translators used the English words “continually DEVOTED”). And they passionately CONTINUED in these activities: the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread (COMMUNION) and the prayers.

Some see it as TWO activities – they continue to learn and listen to the Apostles’ message AND they continue to share/fellowship by breaking the bread and by praying....and they CONTINUE in these activities.

Peter’s sermon can be read in just three minutes but v.40 said that he actually had much more to say “with many other words”. The apostles kept showing how the Hebrew Bible was pointing to Jesus Christ and how all the ancient promises of God were fulfilled in Him. They CONTINUED to teach that.

Their teaching was “the Gospel” – the Good News of what God accomplished in Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection. They were always teaching how what Jesus Christ completed would change the way they looked at all the issues in their lives.

It will change our approach to work, to relationships, to marriage, to singleness, to parenting, to our understanding of ourselves and others, our identity, our past...it affects our understanding of art, of politics, of everything.... The Gospel changes everything. This is what the Apostle’s were teaching and the early believers (now about 3000 of them) were fervently continuing in this teaching. Continuing.

To be a Christian is to pursue, to CONTINUE in this teaching. It's a lifelong quest of relating everything in my life to this great reality: God incarnated. God became physical, became human and stepped into human history in Jesus, the promised Messiah.

In Jesus Christ, God lived the life I failed to live and died the death I deserved to die. He traded places with me...and everyone who receives this Word, who is baptized into this New Community, receives forgiveness of sins (past, present and future sins) AND receives the gift of New Life. The Heart of God, the Spirit of God somehow comes INTO MY PERSON and He begins to transform me... New Life.

A Christian is a person who receives that message and then ALL LIFE LONG, she continues in it. We use it on our hearts; we trace out its implications into all the geography of my heart, my motives, my issues.

God loves me...God is not disgusted with me...God has an unfathomably great future for me...What does that mean for how I spend money...time...? How I play? They continued (WE continue) in the Apostles' Teaching. It takes our whole life to see everything differently because Jesus Christ has come.

What is a Christian? – Someone who CONTINUES, 2<sup>nd</sup> TOGETHER in the name of Jesus Christ. “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (46).”

TOGETHER – it's a preoccupation for Luke... because it was so very evident in the early church. They continued (v. 42) in “the fellowship”... Luke uses lots of words to express the sharing and the togetherness, the unity of these early believers in Jesus Christ. They were REALLY into each other.

Peter says in v. 40 “Be saved from this perverse generation” – We associate the word “perverse” with sexual aberration but the word is “skolios” (like scoliosis – curvature of the spine). What does that mean, “Be saved from this bent generation”?

Well, he means their way of looking at the world. As a culture or society they had a mindset that was twisted. It wasn't only their individual sin but a common, shared way of seeing life that was bent.

Every generation has its issues... the depression generation, the baby-boomers, gen-x, the millennials – some twisted ideas we share and each has its own bent ideas. ONE curved idea that we share but that seems to be getting more and more twisted is radical individualism.

The magazine, *The Atlantic*, is doing an ongoing (quote) “special project on the changing nature of beliefs and practices among teens, 20-, and 30-somethings” called Choosing My Religion.

There are a lot of good things going on...but this one aspect is continuing to degenerate at an alarming rate and that is “the privacy cult”. For generations, we’ve been “Bowling Alone” (according to Robert Putnam, the Harvard professor/political scientist) and now the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. The *Atlantic* series makes it clear:

*“...fewer young Americans identify as religious or attend regular services than members of any other living generation... Looking out at a generation full of folks who don’t go to church or synagogue or mosque, some sociologists and commentators can’t help but wonder: What will become of us?”*

In many parts of the world the “nones” (i.e people with NO religious affiliation...with NO faith community) in many parts of the world those numbers are dropping ... but not here.

BUT what Luke wants us to see is that a Christian is a person continuing TOGETHER with others. It’s one of the ways our generation is particularly twisted.

It was probably the African Church Father Augustin of Hippo who coined the phrase incurvatus in se – i.e. we are curved in on ourselves...it's the ingrown self... and our generations have a very advanced case of this scoliosis of the soul.

But the Gospel...if we really get it...if we simply believe it...the Gospel can actually liberate us from the strong gravitational pull of our culture. We can find in the doing and dying of Jesus a counter-impulse to our generation’s slavery to the self.

To be alone...may feel good...to be private and isolated from others may seem convenient and desirable but it’s curved-in...it’s an illusion... it’s less than human (we weren’t made to alone).

Note the intensity of their togetherness. They got free from the craving to hold on to stuff...that basic human condition in which our possessions come to possess US. They lost their fears...opened their fists.

They shared their homes...their time...they ate together. There were BIG gatherings in the temple courts AND there were little gatherings in people’s homes... OUTSIDERS took note of their gladness and simplicity of motives...and even non-believing people were impressed.

It wasn’t an imposed thing...it was a liberation from the fears and self-centeredness and the illusion of self-sufficiency that actually twists us and leaves us curved-in on our private selves.

It’s actually hard to talk about it... BECAUSE...it sounds like I’m saying, “YOU better give up your privacy and start sharing your time, talents and treasures with OTHERS...” and THAT sounds like

bad news and LAW...but really, it's the Gospel that can save us from OUR curved-in generation. We can't even see how our isolation is warping us...but the Gospel is able to let us see it and then be moved away from it with gladness and sincerity of heart and joy and abundant life.

Last, a Christian, according to this little summary statement (Acts 2) is a person 1<sup>st</sup>) CONTINUING, 2<sup>nd</sup>) TOGETHER and 3<sup>rd</sup>) In the Name of Jesus Christ.

They were not yet called Christians; soon they would be called "The Way" (9.2) ... Probably they thought of themselves as people "baptized into Jesus Christ", that they were represented by Him...He was paying their bill...like at a restaurant when you're on a list and the hostess comes up and says, "Campo? Party of FOUR?"

Well, they thought of themselves as IN the "Jesus Party" – like, "I'm with Him." He was the Head of the Family, the Head of a New Humanity...and He was the source of their individual identities and their source of status – "I'm with HIM"...and being related to Him made them related to one another as a Family.

It was a day of revelation...that's why the miracles and signs because God was saying, "YES! This is from ME...I am validating what these Apostles are saying." And there was awe and "THE prayers". Probably they were reading and praying TOGETHER from God's prayer book, The Psalms, but now with a new focus...the Psalms all point to Jesus Christ.

They're praising God and the world is watching.

Again, the same for today...the Church where the Spirit lives is a family with a tri-directional focus: we're oriented upward, inward and outward.

We are in Christ and praising God, satisfied in God (upward), we are together loving one another (inward) and we are living life before a watching world as an alternative City within the city (outward)... hopefully enjoying favor with all the people.

So...if you're not with us...we extend our arms to you... repent, be baptized, join us...start to know a liberation from our generation's bent-ness...and then continue (keep coming...keep putting yourself under the down-pour of grace and good news...this teaching called Gospel/Good News...keep coming even when you don't feel like it)... continue ... and together (we need each other much more than we know) continue...together ...in the name of Jesus Christ... and may God add to our number those who are being saved.

Pray.