

Introduction:

- A. You know, I'm not sure I should bring this up, but people are rating churches now online, like on Churchrater and Yelp. I don't know what they rate exactly—the music, the coffee, friendliness, the length of the sermon? But what if you read this review of a church: **Acts 2:42-47... Wow!** That's like the perfect church! Years ago I heard the tongue-in-cheek advice, "If you find the perfect church, don't join it, because then it won't be perfect anymore." But I think joining a church like this one would help me be a better Christian. Not perfect, maybe, but better.
- B. Jesus was crucified, rose again, and forty days later ascended into heaven. Ten days after that, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit swept into the room where 120 followers of Jesus prayed and waited as he had instructed. There was the sound of a violent wind—God exhaling his Spirit into the lives of his people. There was the sight of flames coming to rest over each one's head—God igniting and accepting the sacrifices of their lives. And each of them spoke in the language of people from far off countries, so that everyone in the city heard these believers witness to the wonders of God in their mother tongue. Then, according to Acts 2, Peter stood to preach. He explained what the death, resurrection, ascension, and now this outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant and called people to repentance and baptism—to identify with Jesus as Lord and Christ. And 3000 people did so. And now we had a church. The church you just heard about.
- C. None of us has ever been part of a church quite so wonderful as that was—so alive and loving, so influential and favored. Yet that church is our model for what happens when you put Christians together who breathe the life of God, whose lives are sacrifices aflame for God, and who are eager witnesses to the wonders of God.

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT STIRS IN US AN INSATIABLE HUNGER TO LEARN ALL WE CAN OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST (v.42)

- A. **V.42a...** Those early believers heard teachings no one had ever heard before. Some of these people had heard and seen Jesus, but only in bits and pieces. None of them knew as much as we know. Imagine hearing the story of his birth in Bethlehem for the first time—the angels; and then of the magi who came; of hearing the dark three-part story of Jesus temptation and triumph in the wilderness; of hearing Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount for the first time—*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God.”* Imagine Peter telling about being at Jesus’ transfiguration, or with him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and what it all meant. Imagine taking a journey through the familiar Old Testament stories—Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, the Exodus, the promise to David of a son who would reign forever—looking through all of them like a stained glass windows and seeing Jesus. Seeing Jesus in all the sacrifices and ceremonies, in the psalms and prophecies. Who’d want to even stop to eat! Mysteries kept hidden from the creation of the world were being revealed!
- B. The apostles’ teaching is passed on to us in the form of the New Testament. The equivalent today of being “devoted to the apostles’ teaching” is being devoted to the study of the Bible, both on our own, in small groups, and under the teachers God gives us. Even though many of us know much more than that spiritual kindergarten class, the miracle of Scripture is that it is always life-giving, always reorienting, always truth come alive. The Bible will not always fascinate us, nor will we always *feel* its benefit. We will read things we don’t understand, but the Bible will never crumble under scrutiny; never come up trite or outdated or impractical. 2 Tim. 3:16-17: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,*

correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Ask the Spirit to stir in you a fresh desire to learn God’s word.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT BINDS US INTO A FELLOWSHIP LIKE NONE OTHER (v.42)

- A. See the word ‘fellowship’ in v.42? *“They devoted themselves... to fellowship.”* It’s the Greek word *koinonia* and it carries the idea of ‘having in common.’ The bond between Christians exists nowhere else. We are, all of us together, the very *body* of Christ. We don’t just *believe* the same things; we are inhabited by the same Spirit of God. Yet, it is no small things that we *do* believe the same things—things that bind no other people. Paul wrote in **Eph. 4**, *“Make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace. There is **one body** and **one Spirit**, just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called; **one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**”* That is the fellowship to which we’re devoted.
- B. I take the next two phrases as the key elements of that fellowship: **v.42b**, *“they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* *“The breaking of bread,”* many Bible students think, is a reference to taking communion together. Remember what Jesus said at the last supper? *“He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”* If there is one thing Christians the world over want to do, it is to remember Jesus! Not just *remember* him but to have real *fellowship* with him in Communion. Illus.: Last summer Barb Lindberg’s parents, Harry and Ruth, moved from Milwaukee to an assisted living community near here. Barb told me that because of their health they hadn’t been able to go to church in a couple of years. She said they

especially missed having Communion. I told her I'd be happy to go and serve them so a couple weeks later we gathered: Harry and Ruth—wonderful, godly, encouraging saints, Barb and Jim, and Barb's sister, Nan. I read some scripture. We sang, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," and we enjoyed the Lord's Supper together—the six of us. **Well... seven actually, because Jesus was there, too.**

That one act unites Christians and Christ everywhere.

- C. Another characteristic of their fellowship was that they devoted themselves to prayer. I'd bet that when a church is *not* like this one in Acts 2, the reason most often is that they do not devote themselves to prayer. As you can see, prayer in this context was praying *together*. As we'll see in an example next week, they prayed together fervently, standing on Scripture, undaunted by pressure, and when they prayed for boldness, God shook the room!

The less we pray together the less we think of Jesus. By small degrees we become more self-sufficient, more self-obsessed and worldly. We slowly lose our appetite for God's Word. We care less about being with other believers. We grow insensitive to sin, and cannot see where love should take us. We spend much time on things that matter little, and little time on things that matter most. The church may look great on the outside, but no one outside is in awe of God's work through us. The enemy does not attack us because he already has us where he wants us.

Illus.: I had been a pastor only about a month when I went to a pastors' conference that focused on the historic revivals of the church. These were revivals where the Spirit came so mightily upon Christians that people purged their lives of their sins, weeping and praying and rejoicing for days on end. Whole communities came to Christ. And at the beginning of every single revival, there were people praying—persistently, insistently. Ever since that

conference—all my ministry years—I have wanted to be part of a church that prayed. My own praying has been fitful and unsteady. I need to pray with others. I need to pray with you, more often and earnestly. I want us to pray for kids and health, jobs and sorrows, but also that God would open doors for the gospel *till they open*. Illus.: I was stirred by a couple lines a friend wrote on Facebook about a chapel speaker at TEDS this week. *“I sat amazed as he talked about manifestations of God’s Spirit on some of the Ivy League campuses where he ministers. His staff and students are praying two hours a day and seeing amazing things happen.”*

The Holy Spirit binds us into a fellowship like none other at the gravity at the center of that union is *“the breaking of bread and prayer.”*

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT DRAWS PEOPLE TO US WHOM HE HAS CONVINCED OF THE GOSPEL (v.43)

V.43 seemed like a verse out of place in this context, because the verses before and after it are about Christian fellowship.... In the story right after this, in **ch.3**, we’re told how Peter and John heal a lame man. Look at **vv.11-13**... And he continues preaching the gospel. Picture a simple equation: the sign of the healed lame man *plus* Peter’s gospel sermon *equals* people believing in Christ. And when they believed they were welcomed into the waiting arms of the church.

There’s been a debate about whether “signs and wonders” continue. Of course they do! **Signs are miracles with arrows on them pointing to Jesus Christ.** God constantly does things which authenticate to unbelievers the truth of the gospel. We hear of people seeing visions of the risen Christ. People experience some exquisitely timed mercy, some God-obvious miracle of rescue or healing. A Christian’s loving endurance in the face of terrible persecution can be a sign and it is a *wonder* to some to watch Christians die unafraid. Such miracles open

people to hear the good news of Jesus, and if they believe Jesus' church waits with open arms.

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US SACRIFICIAL LOVE FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS (vv.44-47a)

- A. **Vv.44-45...** We'll talk more about this in two weeks so I'll be brief here. This sacrificial generosity is a sign and wonder in itself. Surely such behavior reverberated up and down the streets and neighborhoods of Jerusalem. Jews were accustomed to giving to the poor but they had never seen anything like this. We are not commanded to "have all things in common." But every church alive with God's Spirit sacrifices to love for one another. For believers in our own church and beyond. If that *doesn't* happen, the Holy Spirit is being stymied among us.
- B. **Vv.46-47a...** We can't do that either—meet every day. In fact, it might get a little much! But this *is* true of God's people: We love each other and we want to be together. Some of us, extroverts perhaps, would hang out every chance we get. Others, more introverted, need some space. But there are no Christians, alive with God's Spirit, who just want to be left alone. We like our fellowship over a meal or coffee. We like to worship together, to praise God in singing or in stories. We like to share our lives.

SUMMARY: You see many of these things here at VCL, don't you? And you see what we lack. These are not our corporate goals. We don't just try harder to pray or give, or schedule Communion more often. We clear away the hindrances to the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our weaknesses are addressed much more by repentance and prayers for God's grace in Christ than they are by resolve. That is true for each of us personally, and for us as a church.

Isn't it true that we're not quite sure we want this kind of fellowship? It sounds kind of... well, time-consuming, intrusive, a little ... *close*. But when the Holy Spirit worked most freely and when Christians were most vibrant, this was what happened. You

and I will not *lose* when we seek the Holy Spirit's fullness. We don't *lose* independence or privacy or valuable time. We only gain in the life of Christ. And look at **v.47b**.

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT USES THIS KIND OF COMMUNITY, BOLD IN OUR WITNESS FOR CHRIST, TO DRAW INTO OUR NUMBER THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED (v.47)

We hear pretty often how the church is a *hindrance* to people seeking God, but *this* church need not be like that. Many churches are *not* hindrances, except to those who love darkness rather than light. *This* church, like the church in Acts 2, can be—and *is*—so naturally alive with God's Spirit that lost people are drawn to Jesus Christ through us—through you personally, and through our life together. Jesus told us, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” [Jn 13:35]