

Sunday Service Sermons

05 September 2021

The Church and Its Growth

Read: *Acts 2:41-47* and *4:31-42*

Focus passage: “and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”

Do we stay steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers?

I like the story of Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus when he talks to them and they do not know him until he breaks bread with them and then they see who he is.

Maybe we should break more bread among ourselves.

I wonder if the apostles doctrine was the confession of faith.

Can we translate this to say that they continued steadfastly in their confession of faith, in their fellowship, in their breaking of bread and in their prayers?

It sounds good to me.

I do know that the early church services included the bread and the cup at each service.

Our Catholic brothers and sisters do this on their gatherings called mass.

Their Liturgy calls for communion each Mass Celebration.

I do know that the confession of our faith, the fellowship of believers and prayers are a must for Christians to be the believers that God wants them to be.

For myself I need to add the playing and singing of the great music of the Christian Tradition.

You give me great music, the confession of faith, eating together, and prayers and I am in good shape in my Christian life.

Yes, the breaking of bread did mean eating together as well and the celebration of Communion.

A pastor found himself talking one day to a member of his church who seldom came to service.

When the pastor urged the man to come, he replied rather smugly that he could be just as good a Christian staying home as he could in attending church.

The two men happened to be seated before a fireplace in which a coal fire was burning.

The pastor took the tongs from beside the fireplace and picked out one of the live coals.

He placed it on the hearth by itself.

That single coal, which had been fiery red when it was in the bed of burning coals, turned gray and began to cool off.

Soon it lost all its glow and warmth.

Then, without saying a word, the pastor picked up the cold piece of coal and placed it back in the midst of the live coals.

Soon it was aglow and began to give off heat once more.

The silent little drama drove the message home.

The delinquent church member dropped his head in shame and said, “Pastor, I will be in church Sunday morning”.

Nothing in the world is as personal and intimate as one’s encounter with Jesus Christ, yet each experience is unique within itself.

Only two principles are involved: God and the individual.

Yet it is not God’s will that a Christian continue alone or that he or she live the Christian life in isolation.

It was God’s plan from the beginning that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ be joined together in

spiritual fellowship, in a special kind of oneness.

This was the basic structure of the church that was conceived in the heart of God before the foundation of the world.

On the eve of the day of Pentecost, we read that the disciples were all with one accord in one place.

Just as warmth and fellowship exist in the togetherness of the church, so does growth happen in that environment.

Our theme this morning is the church and its growth.

In the Scripture passages we will discover three directions in which the church grew in the first century.

It is God's will that it continues to grow in these same directions.

The growth within.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls, And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

In these brief words we have the four fundamentals of Christian growth.

1. They were baptized.

Because they had already "received his word" with gladness and open acceptance, they publicly identified with Christ through baptism.

It was their way of saying to the whole world that they had begun a lifelong experience of death to self in order that they might come alive daily in Christ.

2. They were taught.

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

This was spiritual nourishment, food for the souls of these young believers, and they absorbed it.

They were consistent in receiving the Word of God.

It was their sustenance and their strength.

The result was that they grew both numerically and spiritually.

This is a vital phase in the Christian's life that is often overlooked.

Sometimes the church, in its commendable efforts to win the lost to Christ, fails to teach them consistently and properly in the way.

As a result, many remain spiritual babies, causing the church to give a weak and often ineffective witness before the world.

3. They experienced fellowship.

Fellowship, *koinonia*, is one of the most beautiful words in the New Testament.

It means more than a social get together.

It describes a communion, a sharing between those who have something special in common.

Because of the Spirit of Christ within them, the early believers began to love one another, share their burdens, and pray together.

They had a delightful sense of community, of belonging to one another.

4. They prayed together.

The early Christians continued steadfastly not only in the apostles' teaching and in fellowship, but also in prayer.

Their communication with God was not neglected.

This was their lifeline, their contact with the very throne of grace.

They practiced what Paul later expressed to the Thessalonians as, praying without ceasing.

They knew what it meant to remain in a spirit of prayer and openness before God.

The growth without.

In *Acts 2:43-47* we have an indication of the growth of the church "without", that is, the radiating effect of the church on the unbelieving world.

Note that fear came upon every soul.

A reverence and respect for these Christians and their faith struck at the hearts of the unbelievers.

This fear could also be interpreted as a conviction, a tool of the Holy Spirit in dealing with unbelievers.

But sadly, not all who feared in their heart, because of the testimony of these believers, responded

in repentance.

It is the same today.

Some unbelievers are struck by the sincerity of Christians but fail to follow through.

They stop short of repentance.

Furthermore, these Christians were "praising God, and having favor with all the people."

These first-century Christians were continually held in high regard by unbelievers.

Perhaps this is a serious indictment against many modern Christians.

Often professing Christians live in a spiritually substandard way.

Those who are unsaved, always yearning to find justification for their life lived apart from God, find delight in pointing out Christians who are not consistent in their profession.

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved".

God was at work in the midst of his people.

They were glorifying and praising him.

The result was a continual response on the part of the people around them, not seasonal or spasmodic growth but genuine and consistent growth.

Too often after great revival campaigns during which scores of people come to know Christ as Savior, we go back to business as usual.

That was not the case with the first-century Christians.

Growth without took place because they "Continued steadfastly" in teaching and fellowship.

The growth beyond.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke the word of God with boldness".

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul".

Marvelous things happened in Jerusalem.

But they certainly could not keep the gospel there.

It was too big to be contained in one city.

So God began to prepare them for growth beyond.

His preparation came in a strange way: it started with persecution.

When the early believers began to experience hostility and pressure from the unbelieving world, what did they do?

They prayed.

After the church prayed, something happened.

"The place was shaken where they were assembled together."

They experienced a physical sense of God's overpowering presence among them.

Perhaps he was saying to them in a symbolic way that he would shake Jerusalem and the world beyond with the message they were proclaiming.

Then they spoke God's Word boldly.

The message of Jesus Christ and his resurrection brings new life flowing from a living Christ into dying and dead people and institutions, awakening and empowering them.

God has made provision that Christians of every age can speak his Word with boldness and in so doing shake the structures of the society in which they live.

God did not intend for the church to stop growing after the first century.

The same principles of growth that he instituted in the early church are those that must be operative in the church today.

We must not be ashamed to confess him before others.

His Word must be faithfully and consistently taught, or else no inner growth can take place.

A koinonia fellowship, a communion and oneness, must exist among the people of God.

Believers must pray continually for a holy boldness to proclaim the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.

The Good News is not just for us, it is for everyone and we are the ones commissioned to take it to the world.