

## The New Community part 2

Here is something to think about.

What if all churches had glass walls. Where people could look in and see what Christians looked like, how they behaved and if their belief really made a difference to their lives and their coming together!

Fanciful thinking? Let me introduce you to the 'Crystal Cathedral' California. The Cathedral has more than 10,000 windows of tempered silver coloured glass.

Now I have to confess I did not bother reading the bmf on the website as to why they had this kind of building. Set aside for a moment the ethical questions about such a large structure in a world of need and let our imaginations run for a moment. Imagine every church was built similarly – maybe a bit smaller! Imagine if this church was like that! How would we feel about it - would we welcome it or would we feel threatened by that?

It would be great to have time to talk about that with one another – maybe of tea and coffee.

But why am I asking this?

To me there seems a transparency to this early community. What they were about - was known by all. They were well known and we can see from verse 47 they enjoyed the favour of the people.

Why? Was it because their love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness and self control – the fruit of the spirit were evident in them? Was it they proclaimed, lived and exuded the forgiveness, grace and love of the Saviour and Lord they followed?

Now sure we will see in a few chapters that public opinion can change overnight but for the briefest of moments those in Jerusalem liked what they saw. And as we will see in future weeks that as this good news community dispersed - others too would be attracted by the light that shone from their lives. Why? They were not perfect people! Was there something about them and their message?

One of my friends is great personal evangelist. His friends keep becoming Christians – it's amazing. People say of him the thing that they find intriguing is not his cool personality because he is a wee bit quirky but actually his centeredness. Come hail or high water he has reserves they do not. They put it down to God's work in his life and they are intrigued to find out more. Were the early Christians like that?

Was it the quality of love they had for one another?

Jesus himself said,

**John 13:34-35** <sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We will be known to belong to Jesus, and by inference that Jesus is real, because we love one another.

These were no Sunday Christians. Sweetness and light for church on Sunday but very different out with the company of Christians. They sought to live authentically Christian lives Monday through to Sunday and it provoked questions from some and it drew others in.

But what was it that was fuelling their faith, life and living?

Look again at the passage from Acts with me p. 1093

It seems to me that these early Christians were benefiting from a kind of framework for their faith in which it was able to grow.

Like we put up frame for our plants in the summer and they grow and prosper. So this framework for these early Christians was helping them to grow in their faith.

Luke gives only the bare bones but it is enough for us to learn from. We saw last week two elements from the framework

**Acts 2:42** <sup>2</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

They devoted themselves to the

Ministry of Learning (Discipleship)  
Ministry of Fellowship (Fellowship)

Before we look at the remaining 3 let's look through the passage as I think it raises a couple of questions in regard to miracles and communism!

vs 43

**Acts 2:43** <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Does God perform miracles today? Of course he does – the biggest miracle he performs is being performed every minute of every day around the globe. It is the miracle of a person becoming a Christian. Stepping out of darkness and condemnation into the glorious light of Christ. To bathe in his love, his forgiveness and receive new life by the Holy Spirit. I am also of the opinion that he still performs miracles today but they are not on demand and less frequent than at this time. Why?

If we trace back through the biblical account we see signs and wonders come in clusters – they accompany new messengers, new stages in God's revelation – Moses, Elijah, Jesus. Here is a new

stage, a new revelation from God and so come a significant cluster of signs and wonders.

**Acts 2:44-45** the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Is this communism? Does Christianity prohibit the purchase of private property? It looks like it here doesn't it? But we always need to interpret scripture with scripture. What do I mean by that? What happens at one time needs to be weighed up with other occasions. Here the people are coming of their own volition. Later we will see it is not demanded by God – others still own their property but use it for church meetings, some try and sell it and pull the wool over God's eyes. This is not primitive communism but does I think demonstrate something of the generosity that we can expect God's Spirit will prompt in us. It is not communism but communalism – where the church view themselves as a the children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ – family and family help one another out don't they? The Christian view of our material goods is that they are not ours but God's and to be used for his kingdom and glory. My car, my house, my finances, my time are not mine they are gifts from God to be used to feed and water me, bring glory to his name and for the good of others. So it is for each of us. This early community is radical and calls for radical Christianity, which is actually normal Christianity. I see elements of these things amongst us every week

and it is good. With the Holy Spirit's help it could become more.

In the passage then we what we find is that the early church were committed not to communism but to a ministry of service through deeds.

<sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

### **Ministry of Service through deeds**

The God of heaven had plundered its riches for the salvation of his people. The redeemed of God in those early days having received the riches of heaven – the promised Holy Spirit and all the benefits of Christ they saw their material possessions for what they were – wood and straw in comparison to what they were receiving.

Their sharing was the fulfillment of the command of Jesus to love their neighbour. Not because they had to but because they wanted to. It was spontaneous. But as we will see in future weeks it was not naïve but considered and well applied.

But the church in its history has not always been so generous. Bishop Ambrose of Milan in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century rebuked the church for its lack of generosity and ministry of service. The church in Milan was focusing its money on beautifying it's churches - altars and sanctuaries. To which he said

“a slave redeemed at the church’s expense is a far better decoration for the holy communion table than a golden chalice”

The church is to be committed to the needs of others. We do it amongst ourselves in good and practical ways. Lifts for those without cars, taking folks or collecting folks shopping, visiting the lonely. These things are really commendable. Of course we now live in a global community where the needs are great. Christian Aid organizations are very good at giving aid in a way that helps both the long and the short term. Today we can buy a goat for £12 that will be given to a person who will get milk and fertilizer from it. Breed it and return one of the young to be passed on to another who can do the same. I have in the past bought goats for friends who have no need for Christmas gifts.

“An ounce of action is worth a tonne of theory”  
Engles

The church in those days certainly got into action!

This is potent stuff isn’t it?

They devoted themselves to the

Ministry of Learning (Discipleship)  
Ministry of Fellowship (Fellowship)  
Ministry of Service through Deeds (Service)

**Acts 2:46-47** <sup>46</sup> 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, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.

The practiced a Ministry of Worship

### **Ministry of Worship**

This was a community profoundly aware of how thankful they were to God. Praising for what he had done and was doing in and through them.

In large and in small assembly, in formal and informal context, in the temple and in their homes they met and praised their God. Their hearts were warmed and there was gladness and sincerity.

Their worship was an outward expression of the culmination that they were seeing their God do in, through and for them. It was celebration out of the context of lives with a God consciousness. Not praise in a vacuum. It was the overflow of warm hearts not kick starting cold hearts. It is celebration and overflowed from their glad hearts. That is worship in Spirit and truth – like Jesus talks about in John 4. I need to recapture that view – I am sure many of us feel the same.

Finally,

**Acts 2:47** And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

They were involved in a ministry of witness through words

### **Ministry of witness through words**

These early Christians were telling their friends about what they had found and the Lord was blessing their witness and opening spiritually blind eyes.

Today people are searching for God. I have been up to the university campus a couple of times recently and bumped into a few students I know. They tell me that their classmates know they are Christians and ask questions about their faith on a regular basis. The cut and thrust of what the church is and does is not within this building. It is in the university lecture theatre before the lecture begins, in the workplace at lunchtime when folks get together, in the sports club after the game, over the dinner table when friends come round. Why? Because it is there that our Christian lives and the Christian faith are being tried and tested as it is observed in your life. As Paul tells us in

**2 Corinthians 5:20** We are ... Christ's ambassadors.

It is more often than not on the basis of our witness at work, at home, at play that our friends and family will accept an invitation to church or a church event.

When they have seen something that interests them, it is on this basis that the church will grow.

A survey of 10,000 people was conducted asking how people ended up coming to church

2% I had a special need  
3% I just walked in  
6% I liked the minister  
1% I visited here  
5% I liked the Sunday school  
1/2% I attended a gospel meeting  
3% I liked the programs  
79% A friend or relative invited me

How will the church grow? Are young energetic enthusiastic ministers the key? No. Christ is the key and you are the instruments through which he desires to work - through your witness.

Think of it this way – say 100 of us invite 10 people each to church over the course of a year. That would be 1000 people invited. Say only 10% could come there would still be 200 – you and 100 friends. Say of those 10% kept coming to church that would be 110 people here. 10 more than we had previously!

We want this church to grow don't we? We want more people to know Christ don't we? I cannot promise that we will grow numerically if we implement what we see here in the early church in this church but I can promise we will grow spiritually if we commit ourselves to the ministries of

Learning (Discipleship)

Fellowship

Service through Deeds (Service)

Worship

Witness through Words (Witness or Outreach)

These have got to be our priorities and may it be that the Lord in his grace adds to our number and grants us more of a taste of that Spirit filled community.