

Sermon: Why Church?  
Acts 2:41-47

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Why? Part 2 6/12/16

**Acts:41-47**

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## Sermon

Last week we spent some time thinking about why we follow Jesus, why we become and stay Christian. As part of that conversation I eluded to a shift in our culture that has moved faith into a category of choice - not just which church you would choose, but if you would choose religion at all. The conclusion I came to was that I believe in Jesus because I believe he is who he says he is: God with us and God who is saving!

Most of us who are gathered here today do believe that Jesus is Lord and actively seek to follow Christ in our everyday life. And most of us here today also feel like part of following Jesus includes belonging to a church. But I wonder if you have taken the time to consider why it is that you do come to church? Why does it matter for you to be part of a worshiping body? Take a minute to come up with an answer, why do you come to church?... Now share a brief answer with a neighbor near to you....

I wonder how many of you said something to the effect of the social connections of church - it is the people, the friends, the community, the fellowship I experience that keeps me wanting to be part of a faith community? Or maybe the family connection, that it is how you grew up, how you were taught, or because it is habit. All of these reasons point to a social reason for going to church and for decades this reason has been the primary reason why churches have grown and thrived or at least survived - because society/culture has said that church is an expectation and that it is a place to find community and connection and friendships. But times have changed and so has the expectation that Church is required attendance. The need for community is still necessary, but there are now many different ways that our culture identifies their community - work, social media, family, friends - each of these continue to give us a sense of community.

Folks are choosing sports with their kids, family time when Sunday may be the one time all week that people are able to be together, rest for so many of us who are overworked, - all of this instead of traditional church. People choose what they do because of a desire or passion or need in their life.

And when young people do come through the doors of the church, if there only want is community, then is it any wonder that they don't return when they do not see their peers in church.

So have we been wrong all these years to understand church from the view point of a social connection point? Let's take a look at the early church to see if we can find some answers. In our text today, we read about the very first church, gathered directly after the pentecost moment. In this first gathering I do see a number of social contexts for their gathering. The community gathered around the breaking of bread, they were worshiping in temple, they had all things in common. Each of these social constructs point to the building of community which meant growing in relationships with one another and through those relationships finding trust and through that trust they were able to care for one another and become united.

But if you read the text again, you will see that there was more than a social aspect to this first church. You will begin to see that, at its core, the church was founded on a commitment to Jesus - they were selling possessions to give to those in need, praising God and goodwill with people, devoted to apostles' teachings. The first church gathered as a community, but they gathered with a purpose, to follow Jesus Christ. And they believed that if they were going to follow Christ, that they needed to do so in community. They needed to learn from one another, they needed to care for one another, they needed to care for the world around them. And though they could do some things on their own, together they became a body of compassion and love that changed the world.

You have heard from me and many other church leaders over the years that the church is more than a building. I would also share that the church is more than traditional worship on Sunday morning and it is more than the relationships that we sustain through sharing our stories and caring for one another. In other words, the church is more than another country club or sporting event, or restaurant where people can gather as a community.

Why does the church matter? Because we are community gathered by our commitment to following Christ. For we are Christ's Body and together we are called to learn and grow, to serve and to care, to love and support. And together we can change the world. Thanks be to God for calling the church into being. Amen