

“Devoted ... Together”
Sermon on Acts 2:42-47 by Rev. Berry French
on Confirmation Sunday, May 7, 2017

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching 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

Later this morning we will welcome into the church 11 young people who will profess their faith in God made known to us through Jesus Christ. Profess their YES to throwing in with this Jesus movement ... this thing that defines who we are and demands our devotion.

Confirmands - this is a big day, a milestone in your faith journey. God loves you just the same today as on the day you were born and the day you were baptized. God loves you on the best day of your past year, and on the worst day of your life. **God absolutely loves you** and God has already **claimed you** ... but this is an important day when you become a confirmed member of this church. And thereby a confirmed member of the global church ... that stretches back thousands of years and stretches around the globe. There are folks being baptized or confirmed into Church families all over the world today: in huge cathedrals in Europe, in house churches in Asia, in small muddy rivers of Latin American, and in mega churches in Africa. And YOU are PART of that!

You're part of the **biggest social movement** in history; a religious and social movement that crosses all barriers of time and space, race and class, language and nationality. You're now part of something WAY bigger than yourself ... and that should be both **humbling and comforting**.

Thanks be to God, life is much larger than any of our individual personal stories. And when we throw in with the Church, we are naming that our life's story is part of a **much larger story that holds us all**. **A story that is eternal**: The story of God's love for us and for all of Creation, and the unfolding of that story in your individual life. Your life is connected to the lives of those around you, particularly the lives of the folks around you in this room today - your church family.

There are 2.2 billion Christians in the world today. That means roughly one third of all the people in the world have said YES to following Jesus and are with you in this journey. And that's just a snap shot of this year. Think about the billions of the faithful that have gone before us over the centuries.

We're part of something HUGE. This following Jesus thing is a life long journey and it's **worth devoting our lives to**.

Now - hopefully all of you have picked up that while I'm talking to these confirmation students ... this applies to all of us. Whether we are in high school remembering our recent confirmation, or we're blessed enough to have celebrated our grandchild's confirmation ... we are **ALL part of God's eternal love story**. We are all part of this social movement that connects us to incredible people of faith all over the world and all throughout time.

Today's Bible story in Acts tells us of the very beginning of the Christian Church ... actually, there's an important reference to the fact that these earliest Christians were still gathering in the Jewish Temple ... so this is before Christian was seen as a separate religion than Judaism. Early followers of Jesus were Jewish. Friends, we are part of an ancient story that goes way back to the Apostles Peter and Paul; the disciples James and John, the prophets Amos and Isaiah, and our forbearers Abraham and Sarah.

We're part of something BIG, and we're part of something ANCIENT. We're part of something **global** and we're part of something **so very local**. We're part of something we were **CREATED for** ... the family of faith.

Acts chapter 2 begins with the Pentecost story - the official birthday of the church. The Holy Spirit shows up BIG and it's a pretty wild birthday party which ends up with Peter preaching a sermon about how these folks aren't drunk, it's the Holy Spirit - which kind of makes me want to know more about this celebration. Regardless, Peter's Pentecost sermon results in ... verse 41: "So those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized and that day about three thousand people were added." Acts says it was about 120 prior to Peter's Pentecost sermon. And those 3,000 are the ones Acts tells us **devoted** themselves to study, fellowship, praying, sharing possessions, and sharing meals in each other's homes.

Acts 2 gives us a timeless summary of what it is to BE Church. It's what the early church first did when it became Church, and it's what the Church has been trying to do faithfully for the past 2000 years. Follow Jesus by gathering to study and to pray together, to share meals together, and share Communion together, and **give our money away** so that the Church can care for the community's needs: each other's children and the needy.

Confirmands – what we as the Church are welcoming you into is the same thing that those first apostles invited folks into - the Church. A community of people trying, sometimes successfully and sometimes not ... but trying to faithfully be Church.

I'm going to ask Emma Bell [8th grade Confirmation liturgist] to read verse 42 and 45-46 again. [Emma reads:]

hey devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... 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.

That's the church: Devoting ourselves to the Apostle's teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers .

- The Church is **a community where we study Scripture** and the wisdom of the previous generations as recorded in our tradition's confessions.
- The Church is **a community where we eat together**. We literally share meals together ... meals like the Potato Lunches, and meals like a few church folks gathered in a home around a meal table, and meals like the Eucharistic meal we celebrate at this table.
- The Church is **a community where we pray together**, and we gather weekly to **worship** together ... verse 42 says they devoted themselves to the prayers ... as in the set prayers that were part of an early liturgy or worship service.
- The Church is a COMMUNITY where, at least in the ideal folks **SHARED EVERYTHING they had**, so that no one was in need.

That's the church. We gather TOGETHER to study, to share meals, to worship and pray, and to practice GENEROSITY.

It's the **basics of the Christian faith**. It's what our WeekDay school is teaching my children. Through the ministry of our WeekDay school, my Aubry and Will – ages 5 and 2 – are learning how to **be together** with other kids and adults. They are learning the **stories of Scripture** through song and story. They are learning how **to share** ... toys, crayons, and turns on the slide. Aubry and Will are learning **how to pray** ... with simple “Thank you God for rain” prayers or Johnny Apple Seed blessings. They are learning how to **eat together**, how to share a meal ... or a least a snack of goldfish and grapes.

It's what the church is teaching our children and youth through Sunday school and Ma'I and youth group.

These confirmands, as a part of our middle school youth program have been studying Scripture every Sunday morning in Sunday school with faithful Apostle's like Kent Patton and Ally and Brett Gudeman. Brett is bringing his current

seminary education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte into our middle school Sunday school class room week after week. And at least twice a month our youth are **sharing a meal** ... breaking bread around tables together and praying over our food.

Very intentionally our Confirmation process is part of a larger program that cares for and nurtures our young people from infancy into adulthood. From pre-school into elementary school and middle school we are preparing them for Confirmation. And once they complete confirmation ... once y'all complete confirmation today, you will move into our high school youth program where will continue to explore on a deeper level the questions of faith and life together.

Being Church. Being together in community. Spending set aside time worshipping God - TOGETHER. Praying together, studying Scripture together, and taking ACTION on being generous: sharing.

This past year **30 of our young adults** here at Black Mtn Presbyterian have been gathering once a month for small groups. We have three separate young adult supper clubs that gather in small groups, in one another's homes, to share a meal - to break bread, and to talk about life and faith and pray for one another. That's being Church.

And it happens in our men's group. It happens in our Presbyterian Women circles every month - gathering in homes to break bread and study Scripture. It's right out of Acts' description of the early church. It's happening in our new mom's group - in each other's homes around bread and wine.

The Prophets of Praise gather every single Tuesday evening to rehearse together - and y'all are TOGETHER, studying Scripture in it's sung form ... studying the themes of our Christian faith through music. Our chancel choir gets together every single week on Wednesday evenings and sings the stories of our faith. They offer up their voices as worship, as prayers, as study ... TOGETHER in many voices.

Every single Sunday morning at 9:40, there is no available space on our whole campus, because small groups of children and youth and adults are gathering TOGETHER to STUDY and FELLOWSHIP. Every single Sunday morning, we gather TOGETHER as a community to worship, to pray, to study Scripture, and to offer our money in order to care for the community.

So, the challenge and invitation that Acts bring to us today is to follow the early Church and devote ourselves ... DEVOTE ourselves to following Jesus TOGETHER.

This morning, **I'm inviting YOU to do that specifically by joining a small group of this Church** OR by re-committing to a small group of this Church. I've tried to make it easy for you to do that. On the back of the bulletin there are at least 2 groups you can choose from.

So pull out your bulletin and look over the list on the back [*readers, see list below*] and choose one group that you'd like to try this month ... to check it out and see if it is life-giving. Pray over this list, and commit to taking a step towards deeper community.

[prayer]

Join me in prayer:

O God who dwells in holy relationship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... remind us that you knitted into our souls the desire and the need to be in relationship ... to be known and to know others. Remind us that while our faith is deeply personal, it is also foundationally relational.

So give us the courage this week and this month to reach out in our faith community so that we can become known, and deepen our faith, and more truly know others.

May it be so, Holy Trinity ... Make it so for us. Amen.

Bulletin blurb for small group options at BMPC:

A big part of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully is to follow Jesus WITH other people in COMMUNITY. The book of Acts tells the story of the early church, much of which is centered around doing faith TOGETHER. In particular as we study Acts 2 today, you are invited to find a community – a small group at BMPC. If you're already involved in a group, please consider personally inviting someone.

- *To join and adult Sunday school class, just show up next week @ 9:40. Contact Ginny Soll, gsoll@bmpcnc.org, for a description of adult classes.*
- *To get involved with Presbyterian Women, contact Connie Schmipf: gsechota@bellsouth.net*
- *To get involved in a Men's group: if you're over 55, contact Ken Kelly krkelly74@gmail.com ; if you're under 55, contact Travis Reece, RKSchimney@gmail.com.*
- *To join our mom's group, contact Mary Carroll Dodd, marycarroldodd@gmail.com*
- *To join our choir, contact Mike Barker, michaelb@bmpcnc.org*
- *To become part of our youth advisor team, contact Berry, Berry@bmpcnc.org*
- *To join our young adult social gathering, contact Summer Kirkpatrick, summerbrooke@gmail.com*
- *All, especially families with young children, are welcome to come out to Lake Tomahawk on May 21 @ 7pm for a Montreat Conference Center sponsored viewing of the movie Moana.*
- *To start your own group, contact Every Disciple Has a Call chairperson Gene Schmipf: gsechota@bellsouth.net*

We encourage you to pick up a Every Disciple Has A Call booklet and review all the opportunities at BMPC through small groups and various forms of volunteering, study and care giving.