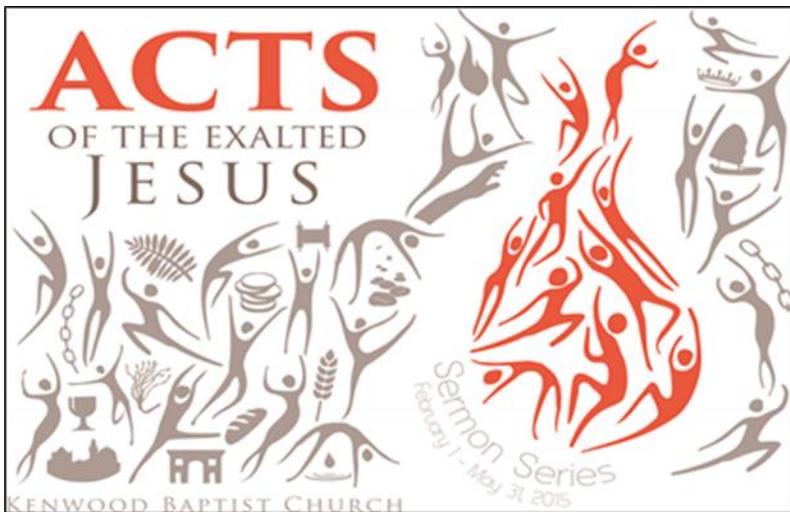


Jesus Creates a New Community
Acts of the Exalted Jesus Sermon Series
Acts 2:42-47
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
February 15, 2015

TEXT: Acts 2:42-47

This Sunday we continue in our New Testament series on the Book of Acts. Last Sunday, we saw that the first act of the Exalted Jesus was to pour out the Holy Spirit upon the believing



community, signaling to us that He is alive, that His promises are true, and that His dominion is over all the earth as the Gospel was announced to all nations. The next act of Jesus which we will look at this morning is to create a new community of people gathered in His name. In Acts 2:42-47, we read that the earliest followers of Jesus were characterized by certain observable behaviors like devoting

themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Jesus' action in the world that we see next is to create a people, not just a collection of individuals, but a new society, a new fellowship, a mystical, sweet communion, we might say. Jesus gives to us desires for these things, and as we look at this paragraph that is so touchingly set before us by Luke, we see that there is a desire within us for these things. I cannot tell you this morning that you should want these things. What I want to tell you this morning is to yield yourself to the desire for these things that comes from Christ. The Christian community is a gift; it's not a right. It is a blessing that comes from Christ, and the desire for it also comes from Him because Christian community, the fellowship of the redeemed, is something that Christ is doing, that He is making in the world.

Let's look closely together at this passage. We will see the attached activity that characterizes the followers of Christ, and then we will see the results of their communion together. At the end of the first sermon that is ever preached, a Christian sermon, Peter's sermon In Acts 2, he finishes the sermon by telling his hearers that Jesus is alive; that He is exalted at the right hand

of God; that He sits enthroned above the earth, then, and this morning; and that He is Lord and Messiah. When the people heard this, Luke tells us, as only a doctor could, they were cut to the heart by these words, and they responded in Acts 2:37 and said:

“Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter responded and said in Acts 2:38a:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you. . .”

We should repent. We should turn from our sinfulness, and we should be baptized as a covenant sign of belonging to Christ, symbolizing the washing away of our sins, and receive the Spirit. When the people did this, Luke tells us in Acts 2:41:

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Three thousand people responded to this royal announcement about Christ and were added to this community. What we read about then, beginning in verse 42, is how this community was observed, what characterized their life together. All of the verbs in this paragraph are in the Greek imperfect tense, which means that they are descriptions, not of a single action, but of a continuous action. The Christian community is not one thing you do and then you're out. It describes a life together that's dynamic, that's moving, living, that's repeated. It is a way of living.

Luke tells us that there are four devotions that begin to arise within the hearts of those who receive Christ as Savior, Messiah, and Lord, and we will look at each of these together. In Acts 2:42 we read:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The first desire that Christ creates in us is that the followers of Jesus *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*. There is a new interest, a new appetite for the Word of God that rises up within us after we commit our lives to Christ, an attentive listening to the Word as it is taught and preached. I remember when my sister Linley first came to Christ. She is a mechanical engineer, and she is one of those people who loves to read the manual. She reads the manual for things; she reads computer programming language like it's Virgil's poetry. I can't make sense of manuals; it's a language I don't really speak. I don't understand it; there's no narrative prose; there's no plot. I have a hard time penetrating it. But when my sister came to the Lord, one of the things we all saw that changed was an appetite for the Scriptures. She began to read the Word of God, and we were all saying, “Wow, Lynley is reading. It's amazing!” It was a Christ-given appetite for the Word rising within her. Luke uses this word *teaching* to also describe the

preaching activity. In Acts 5:28, it's the public proclamation of Christ; in Acts 13:12, it's a Christian message spoken by Paul and Barnabas; in Acts 17:19, this is the word he uses for Paul's preaching in Athens. The preached Word of God, the taught Word of God, becomes something that the followers of Jesus seek and desire. It has a transforming effect on us.

A few years ago, I heard Dr. Randy Bond speak to a group of students at the medical school. This man give such a weighty testimony, the gravity of his words caught me off guard. He was a doctor, and yet at the end of his testimony he talked about how Christ had led him. He was in the process of selling his home in Anderson Township, stepping down from his position at Children's Hospital, and on his way with his family to Africa to begin a new medical work. I wondered how a person makes a change like that. I had the opportunity to be in his home a couple of weeks afterward, and I asked him privately, "Randy, what happened to you?" He said, "What happened to me is that I just started listening more seriously to the preached Word of God." He said, "I'd take it in on Sunday morning, but then throughout the week I would actually to go back and I would listen to it again as I did my exercise. I would really let the Word begin to penetrate me. It just started fashioning new desires in me, and I heard Christ's call at this time in my life." Jesus will give you an appetite for the Word, and I want you to yield to that appetite.

Mark Dever, in his book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, places expository preaching as the first mark of a healthy church. He says:

"If you don't have this, then all of the other marks that you may have will fade over time."

I seek for this at Kenwood, and I want for you to desire this and hold me, or whoever else is preaching here, accountable to this. Dever says:

"Expositional preaching is preaching in service to the Word. It presumes a belief in the authority of Scripture—that the whole Bible is actually God's Word (that all of the Bible is relevant to us all of the time). But it is something more than that. A commitment to expositional preaching is a commitment to hear God's Word – not just to affirm that it is God's Word but to actually submit to it. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles were given not a personal commission to go and speak, but a particular message to deliver. Likewise Christian preachers today have authority to speak from God only so long as they speak His message and unfold His words.

"A preacher should have his mind increasingly shaped by Scripture. He shouldn't use Scripture as an excuse for what he already knows or he wants to say. When someone preaches in a way that is not expositional, the sermons tend to be only on the topics that interest the preacher. The result is that the preacher and the congregation only hear in Scripture what they already thought before they came to the text. There's nothing new

being added to their understanding. They're not continuing to be challenged by the Bible.

[In the end], the church will slowly be conformed to the pastor's mind rather than everyone, including the pastor, having their mind conformed to God's mind."

We want to hear the Word. The preaching should be an unfolding of the words of God, not just someone coming in and telling us what they already know or their favorite topics. That's why I want you to read the text of Scripture before Sunday morning, to get your heart ready. That's why we put the sermons online, not so that you can say, "That was a great sermon by David." I am actually a little embarrassed when people tell me things like that. If you listen closely, most of the time I say back, "It's a great passage," because I'm preaching to myself every time before I come here. It is interest and devotion to the Word of God that we treasure, not to the words of any person.

Secondly, they devoted themselves to fellowship. The Greek word here is *koinonía*, to share in common. Jesus came from His throne in heaven and actually creates within us the desire for a shared life. We were really not designed to live alone. Most people know that when you're by yourself you can make good decisions for about two to four hours, then after that four-hour mark, you just start to fade in your capacity to make good decisions. Remember what the first *not good* is in the Bible? The first *not good* in the Bible is when the Lord looks out and says it is not good for man to be alone. That doesn't primarily mean marriage, because marriage is a temporal thing. Marriage isn't an eternal institution. God has created us for a shared life, a life together. This new form, *community*, means that there is a massive **we** that is more important than **I**, and **us** that is more important than **me**.

Thirdly, they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. This was the place of my moment of greatest learning this week. This was huge because I'd always come to this section and thought that the breaking of bread was our Fellowship Hall time, time over lunch or dinner. But as I looked at this more closely, I saw that the language that Luke uses here for the breaking of bread is the language that he most frequently uses to describe the breaking of that special bread, the bread of communion, the Body of Christ signaling the shared participation in the Body of Christ that we have as the people of God. In Acts 20:7, he says:

"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, . . ."

That's communion in the context of worship. It is Jesus who said to His disciples: "This is My body broken for you." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:16:

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

Not only does Jesus give us a desire and an appetite for the Word; not only does He give us a

desire for a shared life together; He gives us a desire to share in a participatory meal with the Body of Christ to signal our belonging to Him, and together belonging to Him, to one another: our sacramental life in Christ, the Lord's supper, Communion, and baptism. It is one loaf, and we all share in that loaf together. The only requirement is that Christ is yours as Savior.

I've been reading this last few weeks a biography of William Carey, and I have the great privilege of being one of the *Perspective* speakers in a few weeks, sharing about early Christian pioneers of the modern Christian missionary movement. I was gripped by this aspect of the Gospel spread in India. Carey was an English, Baptist missionary, and the modern missions movement really started through him, this self-taught shoemaker that God used. He eventually was given a Ph.D. by Brown University, and God used this shoemaker from England to translate the Bible into 35 languages in India. One of the decisions that the missionaries faced in India was: "Does the Gospel break the caste system? Does the Gospel of Jesus Christ shatter those either human rankings of society, or an idolatrous ranking of society?" In India, the caste system separates people into different registers, and they are not allowed to eat with each other or touch one another, the highest caste and the lowest caste, the untouchables. Some of the Christian groups in India said the caste system is just part of the culture of India, and you know where that led? That led those churches to have separate communion cups for Brahmans and separate communion cups for each class. But the Baptist missionaries said *no, no, no!* The Gospel breaks the caste system, and we all partake of one loaf, one bread. If you belong to Christ, then you are a full member of the people of God, and we are all equal in His sight as forgiven sinners. This was a startling impression created in India by this group of believers in Christ, across these caste lines, eating together the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

Fourthly, *they devoted themselves to prayer*. Jesus awakens within His new community a desire to be with Him. Prayer has its greatest effect on the person praying. When we are in prayer, we are with Jesus. We desire to share our longings with Him; we desire to hear Him. Sometimes we have a truncated view of prayer: prayer means I do all the talking, and prayer means I just ask God for the things I need. That is not biblical prayer. I would submit to you that a marriage relationship would not be very vibrant if it consisted only of telling your spouse daily what you wanted him or her to do for you, and that was the extent of your communication. I think that would be a cripplingly weak marriage. Prayer is about being with the Person, both speaking and listening, and growing in Christ likeness.

These four behaviors are created by Christ. They are not duties that you must do, and shame on you if you don't. But, when you receive Christ and the Holy Spirit comes into you, this will start to happen to and you must yield to it. Just don't quench the Spirit. Luke tells us that the result is that everyone was filled with awe and wonder. It is amazing that we get to share a life together,

that we get to hear God speaking to us through His Word as it is taught and preached, that we are one in Him. Theologians have called the church the *mysterium tremendum*. It's an extraordinary reality in the world, and God dwells among the gathered body, and there are wonders and signs performed.

As we continue in Acts this spring, we will see that there are healings that happen; answers to prayer; God's people are protected from tyranny; some give their lives as testimony to the truth of Christ; the Word of Christ spreads; hearts are opened; the Gospel crosses cultural barriers; disagreements are resolved. I consider all of these signs and wonders. The next thing Luke tells us is another astonishing effect of the church. He says in Acts 2:44:

"All the believers were together and had everything in common."

They actually shared their life together. This verse tells us that Jesus takes seriously this new community. Howard Snyder in a *Perspectives* article I read this week on the church writes:

"These truths show that being a community and a people is a gift from God through the work of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is not produced by human techniques or plans. The church is constituted as the people of God by the action of Jesus Christ, and this reality opens the door to the possibility of true and deep community."

Community is a byproduct, a result, an outcome of the work of Christ on the cross, and the filling of the Spirit is not a right; it's a gift. This new community actually shared their lives together in concrete ways. In Luke 2:45, he tells us:

"They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

For many Americans, this verse strikes terror in the heart of our being. They sold their property and gave it away. Our individual rights, property ownership, self-determination, aren't those three of the Ten Commandments? They're not, but this isn't the description of atheistic communism, either. The verbs are in the imperfect tense, which means it was an observable behavior. The people actually sold some of what they had. They gave some of what they had to the mission of the local church, and part of that mission was giving to people who had real needs in the community. This is a behavior that comes from Christ and the Spirit. Americans today are not givers. On average, we spend 12% as a nation on entertainment, and Americans as a whole give 1.5% to all charities, including the work of God in the church. So we spend roughly six times of our income on our own entertainment. We watch six times more movies, go to six times more sporting events. Whatever it is, we give six times more of our heart and resources to those things than what is described here. That is why it is so startling. I don't think it means that they sold every single piece of property and had nothing for themselves. It means that they gave in a significant way to support the life of the community. I love tithing; I believe in tithing. It has been in our family for over 20 years that our first activity is to give 10% of what

we receive back to the Lord, and I love that. I did that even before I was a Christian, and I continue to do that as a pastor. I get the extra special privilege because the tithe I get to give is like doubly holy in a sense. My giving back to God's work at Kenwood is giving God back money that has already been given to Him once. I get to give back, so that's twice. The holiest money in the world is the money that is given to missions. It's like the holy of holies of money because it's money given to God, then given back into God for God's purposes in the world. Part of our life together is to give both to missions and, through our deacons fund and benevolence resources, to families in real need. This is a beautiful part of our life together.

Samuel Escobar, a Peruvian theologian, writes:

"God calls those who become His people to be part of a community. So the new humanity that Christ is creating becomes visible in communities that have a quality of life that reflects Christ's example."

The church is supposed to be the instrument, the vehicle through which God displays the life of Christ in the world. This is an awesome thing. One pastor I know says that the church of Christ is more important than any other institution in the world. This is God's chosen way to display the life of Christ in the world. Luke tells us that these activities continued daily. They met together in the temple courts, the place of preaching and teaching; they broke bread, shared communion in their home worship gatherings; they ate together, the fellowship aspect, with glad and sincere hearts; and they were praising God. Part of prayer is praise, and they enjoyed the favor of all the people. The result of this dynamic, living, vibrant Christian community has its ultimate outcome in Acts 2:47:

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

It is not the result of human plans, of human words. It's not the result of a well-funded marketing plan. It is the result of the life of Christ being lived among a group of people, and in Acts 2:21, the Lord adds to that group those who are being saved, just as Joel 2:32 had promised:

"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

If this is true, who would not want to be part of that? If this is really what the church is and means, who would not want to be part of that? Yet, many, even many professing Christians, hold themselves back from a deep commitment to a local church. Chuck Colson, in his book *The Body*, explains:

". . .modern Christians, especially evangelicals, see the Christian faith primarily, if not exclusively, as the gospel of 'Jesus and me.' Christianity is simply a personal relationship with Jesus. Accept Jesus into your life and you will be saved.

“This is true as far as it goes, but it falls woefully short. Although we are justified through our faith, Christianity is much more than just a private transaction with Jesus.

“When Peter made his confession [You are the Christ, the Son of the living God], Jesus did not say, ‘Good, Peter. You are now saved and will have an abundant life. Be at peace.’ Instead, He announced the church and established a divinely ordained pattern. When we confess Christ, God’s response is to bring us into His church; we become part of His called out people. When we become followers of Christ, we become members of His church and our commitment to the church is indistinguishable from our commitment to Him.

“These are radical words. For we know many Christians who say they are believers but are not members of a church. By that, some mean that they are not members of a local congregation. But many mean that they do not need the church in any sense.

“Yet, according to Scripture, Christianity is corporate entity. This is why we speak of the body with its different parts, the community of the redeemed, the holy nation and royal priesthood or as Carl Henry calls it, ‘the new society of God’s people, the new society of the twice-born.’

“The church is no civic center, no social club or encounter group, no Sunday morning meeting place. It is a new society, created for the salvation of a lost world, pointing to the kingdom to come. And if we properly understand the exchange between Peter and Jesus and the rest of Scripture, we come face to face with a truly staggering truth about the nature of this new society: It is so dear to our Lord that He purchased it with His own blood.”

Samuel Stone, an English pastor of the 19th century, served a church where they recited the *Apostles’ Creed*. As they recited the Creed, he was concerned that people did not understand the words of the Creed, and so he composed a hymn for each line of the Creed. There are 12 sentences, and for the line, “I believe in the church, the communion of saints,” he wrote the hymn, *The Church’s One Foundation*. It’s a beautiful hymn. The melody is beautiful, but the words are precious to us because they are soaked in Scripture. The words say:



“The Church’s one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

“She is from every nation,
Yet one o’er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.

“Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till, with the vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

“O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee:
There, past the border mountains,
Where in sweet vales the Bride
With Thee by living fountains
Forever shall abide!”

This body, this community, is the Body of Christ. It's a sweet, sweet reality. It is not good to be alone. God has designed us to live together as His people, using our gifts, sharing them.

I want to challenge you in conclusion. Let me say this negatively, first. Negatively, don't imagine that you love Christ if you are indifferent to the Body of Christ. Don't hold yourself back from Christ by not committing to a local church. It is a bride being perfected. Some of that needs to happen within each of us. Don't suppress or quench the move of the Spirit, as the Spirit of the Lord gives you a new appetite for His Word, a desire for this life together, a desire to share our sacramental life, and life of prayer. Do not neglect these things. Stated positively, I want to challenge of us to **be** the church, not to just **go to** church, but to **be** it. Be this people. Be a people devoted to the Word of God, in our personal reading, in memorizing it, and in the teaching and preaching. Be devoted to our shared life together, not just individual pursuits or even of a small group within the church, but be devoted to our shared life. Support it with your

time, your talents, your giving. Be here for those times when we share the sacraments together that we can do only together. Be devoted to prayer, not just your personal requests, but time with God, that we might become the people that God is designing us to be. I promise you, from the Word of God, that there will arise within us together a sense of awe, a sense of wonder and astonishment at the life together that we get to enjoy in Christ, and God will work here extraordinary things. He will do things like lost people being found. He will do things like people being healed. He will do things like reconciliation of relationships and families. He will answer prayers. Those in real need will be supported. He will give us grace to persevere under trial, temptation, or illness. There will be an increase of faithfulness in marriage, of turning away from falsehood to truth. Demonic power will be broken. The degradation of the image of God will be restored. These things will happen here, and you and I will see it together, and the Lord will add to the number daily of those who are being saved. Of the 174,000 daily new commitments to Christ, we will see the portion that Christ will allow us to see. We are to be the Body and live this life together. Look in your heart and ask yourself what parts of this have I neglected. Is the Word of God a very small part of my intellectual pursuit? Am I radically living for myself? Do I come in and out of here in utter disregard of the people around me? Is being here on Sunday a large priority for my soul, for my family? Am I devoted to prayer, not just my requests, but really being with Christ? We need to pursue this life together. It's a gift, not a right. It's a working of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

Amen.