

Back to Basics

Text: Acts 2.41–47

Theme: Our activities as a church reflect the glorious grace of our salvation in Jesus Christ

Introduction — New Year's Resolutions

- did you make some? How are you doing on this morning of day #7?
- if broken, why? Because unrealistic? Or unattainable? Or some other reason?

Question: can a congregation establish resolutions?

- I believe we can and perhaps we should
- but who would determine these? How do we go about that?
- does every single voice weigh in? Or just a select few?
- my contention is this: the Word of God determines our intentions
- and the text before us this morning is a fine example of how to do this

Acts 2.42–47 is the description of the earliest church in the New Testament

- this whole passage is talking about a large group of believers
- New Year's resolutions are usually something individuals come up with on their own
- but I want us to think corporately, congregational this morning
- I hope that as we do, you will challenge yourself individually to do these same things
- to the extent you do them in your life, in your household, with your family...
- ...to that extent we will be able—or unable—to do them as a whole church
- so, I am expecting you to take part on your own, see your life built up
- but as a church, this passage offers us some excellent resolutions to live by in 2024
- they are excellent because they are activities that help us reflect Jesus Christ
- the glory of His salvation will shine forth, as it did 2,000 years ago, if we live like this

So let's look at this church in Jerusalem thru Dr Luke's eyes

- let's think hard on applying these activities at Albion
- let's get back to basics and let Jesus shine forth from us
- most all of this text is self-explanatory, so I won't spend lots of time opening it up to you
- rather, it is an immensely practical description which I believe we can emulate
- so my focus from this passage will be far more upon the application for us as a body

We start by seeing this church truly experience explosive growth on Day of Pentecost

- Christ was proclaimed by Peter & Apostles
- over 3,000 put their trust in Jesus
- and this group of brand new believers "devoted themselves"
- that word tells us they continually gave all their energy and attention to the elements which follow
- they didn't do this sporadically or only occasionally
- this was their ongoing love and passion: to **BE** the church of Jesus Christ on earth

Let's examine this model church and follow her godly example by being...

I. A LEARNING CHURCH

- first thing they gave themselves over to was the apostles' teaching
- these early and new believers loved to learn from the Scriptures
- they wanted to know what the apostles taught about Jesus

- many things Luke, the author here, could have said they did
- but first and foremost is the Word of God

1. Sign of a Spirit-filled church

- Spirit-filled churches always want the Word, love the Word, study the Word
- this grounds their experiences, helps them interpret them, rather than other way around
- this initial teaching came from the apostles
- they had been with Jesus, heard His teachings, witnessed His miracles
- they had borne witness to the resurrected Jesus,
- therefore, they had been given authority by Jesus to teach
- and this is what we must long for, here at Albion: the teaching of the apostles and prophets
- we are... *“members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone”*

2. Spirit-filled church is a Bible-studying church

- these two things go hand-in-hand
- to have the Spirit is to long to be in the Word
- and to pour yourself into the Word is to have the Spirit guiding you

3. Let us be like this early church

- we have so many opportunities here at Albion to do just this
- you’re doing it right now, hearing the Word preached
- but hearing isn’t all there is nor is it adequate on its own
- do you participate in the study of God’s Word here?
- many of you, but not all of you, participated in a Bible class barely an hour ago
- there are several mid-week Bible studies to avail yourself of
- but here is the challenge of this basic element: have a passion for the Word of God
- and let it be seen by your involvement in one of these studies: we all need it

Another basic which this early church manifested was that they were...

II. A FELLOWSHIPING CHURCH

- “fellowship” means a common participating in God & Christ through the Holy Spirit
- Christians are drawn together into this fellowship
- **“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”**
(1 John 1:3 ESV)

1. Holding in common

- but what do we hold in common? That...
- **“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”**

(Ephesians 4:3–6 ESV)

- these great spiritual realities bind us together
- the earliest church was given over to this in its fellowship

2. Strengthens faith, strengthens the church

- the stronger your vertical fellowship with God is, the stronger will be your horizontal fellowship with believers in local church
- these feed off the other
- fellowshiping—participating, serving, actively involved in the local church
- these are outward signs and they are basic to the church
- because you share in God, you will share out with other Christians

The third basic they evidenced was that they were...

III. A PRAYING CHURCH

- note: it says “the prayers”
- this is a reference to something more formal than spontaneous prayer
- I’m sure they were given to that as well, but Luke pays attention to details
- these are prayers that were a part of gathered worship in a formal setting

1. The prayers

- remember: all these first converts were Jews
- had certain prayers learned, memorized, recited at the Temple
- many of them would have been psalms
- formal, written prayers of saints of the past can guide in our own praying
- they can instruct us how to pray better, more effectively
- they can help us keep our mind focused and on track
- there are many good sources for these:
 - *The Valley of Vision* is my favorite
 - *The Common Book of Prayer*, ancient, but very helpful as a guide
 - *Take God’s Word With You* uses Scripture to fuel your prayers

2. Our prayers

- while pressing corporate prayer here can’t neglect private prayer
- your private prayers feed and help sustain the Word, fellowship, worship & outreach at Albion
- but as I said, this passage is corporate—about all of us together
- I know Albion is a praying church, as individuals
- but would a stranger or newcomer know this by how often we pray together?
- Charles Spurgeon once had American pastors visit him in London
- showed them the church building, then asked if they’d like to see the boiler room
- thinking one boiler room was like all others, they politely declined, but he insisted
- down long set of stairs to basement, took them to a room
- there, one 100 people were on their knees in devoted prayer
- “This is the power plant of this congregation” Spurgeon said
- this room is always full of people praying for all we do
- the people rotate and change, but the prayers never cease to go up to our Father
- Andrew Murray said, “Most churches don’t know that God rules the world by the prayers of his saints.”
- John Wesley was even more specific: “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”
- And E. M. Bounds claimed, “The church upon its knees would bring heaven upon the earth.”
- just imagine what God might do if we truly devoted ourselves to praying together more

That early church was also...

IV. A GOD-FEARING CHURCH

- “and awe came upon every soul”

- word “awe” is *phobos*—meaning “fear”
- this is not a horrifying, terrifying, I-can’t-move-I’m-so-scared fear
- this is the deeply humbling, powerfully reverential, greatly solemn type of fear
- **“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41 ESV)**
- when in the presence of God the Son, His followers knew this tremendous awe-filling moment
- so, just when you think you have God figured out
- just when you think Jesus is just the best buddy you ever had
- He’ll do something that drops your jaw & you have to worship Him
- imagine the impact this type of holy fear would have on all who enter this place?
- it would be palpable when we worship, quieting & stirring when God speaks thru His Word
- pray that we would grow greatly in our awe and fear this year

This fear of the Lord came about because this church was...

V. A HAPPENING CHURCH

- there was reason for this awe and fear in every heart
- God was working powerfully thru the apostles
- what Jesus was able to do, His church was doing in greater numbers now, even as He said
- God’s power was shown thru Jesus’ miracles for a reason
- it was to validate who Jesus was and His authority as the Son of God
- apostles carried on with this thru signs and wonders, authenticating the powerful in-breaking of the gospel of the kingdom
- something new was here: the kingdom of God
- I believe these kinds of signs have ceased among us today
- why? Because they fade away by the end of Acts & the apostolic age
- but also because as the gospel spread, message no longer needed this type of validation
- it was now visible through changed lives of believers testifying to God’s transforming power
- so I wonder: has your life and way of living changed in a way that makes unbelievers take notice?
- does it cause others here at Albion to say, “Look how God is working and growing so-and-so”?

As we move on, we see that another basic to get back to is to be...

VI. A SHARING CHURCH

- **And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.**
- the word used here is from the same root word from which we get fellowship
- in other words, these early Christians participated in meeting one another’s needs
- many of these converts may have been servants or slaves of more prominent Romans
- others may have had business in the marketplace, but because of their association with Christ, they may have lost business or seen it greatly curtailed
- widows and orphans also were a plenty
- Jesus command to love one another as He had loved them motivated them in this sharing
- one of the delightful elements of life at Albion is how God moves in the hearts of all of you
- you share, you show your love for one another in wonderful ways
- and it’s not just here: the Ingathering offering goes around the world doing the same thing
- pray that God keeps providing so we can keep providing for one another’s needs

One basic element that almost needs no mention is that they were...

VII. A WORSHIPING CHURCH

- **And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**
- these new believers were not content with just an hour on the Lord's Day morning
- they met to worship daily, revealing the day by day reality of their faith in Jesus
- this breaking of bread may have been simple meals together, but also symbolizing the taking of the Lord's Supper as a meal
- their hearts were overflowing with praise and generosity
- they knew that which they had been forgiven & returned that with great aplomb
- the risen Christ is a reality—do you live like it? Give like it? Share like it? Long to worship together like it? Pray together like it?

We're nearly there, as we see...

VIII. A JOYFUL CHURCH

- **with glad...hearts, praising God**
- these Christians gathered together gladly, with eager anticipation
- there was no begrudging attitudes about what they were giving up to come together
- there was no clock watching as this was the most important & best place to be
- there would have been singing praises to God, testimonies of God's greatness among them
- even in times of suffering and, eventually, persecution, the joy of the Lord was upon them
- I wonder: does our joy show like this?
- do we long to be here, no matter what, on the Lord's Day morning?
- or do we often seem like we'll show up if nothing better comes along?
- do we begrudge the Lord one hour out of 168 each week?
- anxiously waiting until the final "Amen" is spoken to get out the door quickly?
- when these days get darker and more difficult, will our joy sustain us, as we gather?

Well, at last, the result of all this is that they were...

IX. AN ATTRACTING CHURCH

- **praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**
- when Christians act like their Lord & Savior: learning, growing, loving, sharing, praising...
- the world sits up and takes notice
- these believers lived in such a way that all others thought highly of them
- as one writer said: this church was unified, magnified, and multiplied according to God's grace
- the way they lived out their new-found faith was a powerful testimony among the unsaved
- imagine what a witness we would be simply by getting back to basics such as these
- you can witness to someone with genuineness because you live like this
- you can be a Philip, like in John 1.45, going to a friend
- you can testify to Jesus being the Savior
- and if they object or seem hard-hearted, well, do what Philip did
- he simply said, "Come and see"
- invite someone; remember I told you a few weeks back: 86% of those who come to church do so at the invitation of a friend
- we're seeing some of the fruit of that already
- wouldn't it be great to see even more, may God be so pleased to add to our number

Conclusion –The world around us does not really know what it needs

- it doesn't even really know what it wants
- but what it needs and wants, or needs to want, is a church like this
- are we up to the task?
- will we go through 2024, trusting depending, leaning upon, and looking to Jesus?
- pray that it will be so
- join in, actively participating; don't sit on the sidelines
- come along for the ride and see what God will do