

Title: Acts 2: 41-47

Theme: Series-Jesus Christ and His Church (Acts of the Apostles): Church's Radical Response

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Morning Prayer Service on 24/04/2016 at 10.30am

After the preaching of Peter to the crowd that turned out to celebrate the Jewish Pentecost, we are told that 3000 people were added to the number of the disciples. Can you imagine a rag tag bunch of disciples who were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, now having to take care of new converts!

Acts 2:41 opens with the response to Peter's sermon. *"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls."* These devout Jews did understand Peter's message and followed through with repentance. We need to remember that this was a radical departure from their practice of Judaism. Though repentance and ceremonial cleansing were always a part of Judaism, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was new. In addition, it has only been just over seven weeks since Jesus had been crucified, so this was a very risky action in view of the hatred the religious leaders had for Jesus. But about 3,000 of them understood that there was greater risk in remaining unrepentant, so they publicly identified themselves with Christ as a sign of their repentance.

Being followers of Christ is to be first and foremost, with the other things of life added to that and not the other way around. There is a big difference between being a Christian who is also a _____ whatever (you can fill in the blank), and being a _____ whatever (you can fill in the blank), who is also a Christian.

Salvation from sin is not about turning a new leaf and trying to be good but rather a turning away from a false faith to faith in Christ that leads to a radically changed way of life. Verses 42-47 gives a picture of the activities of these earliest Christian movement. Verse 42 looks like a skeleton summary that is given more flesh in verses 43-47.

The church has just been born and these new believers quickly recognised four basic elements that were to be the focus of their lives:

- 1. Devotion to the teaching of the apostles**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Breaking of bread**
- 4. Prayers**

This description in verses 42-47 suggests what the Holy Spirit can do. These verses do not lay down rules or specific structures for Christian living. In their context, they indicate that the reign of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ creates the potential for mutual service and growth. The life and work of a Christian community can reflect--even if only dimly--the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed while on earth and secured through his death, resurrection, and exaltation.

Let us now unpack verse 42 as we look at verses 43-47

1. Apostolic teaching

The Apostles' Teaching is listed first because these devout Jews of the early church put the priority on doctrine. In verses 37, Peter told them to repent and identify completely in death and in life with Jesus Christ- (for that is real baptism) in answer to their question, "what shall we do?". The apostles' teaching is what the apostles learnt from Jesus Christ which the Holy

Spirit now brings to their mind. **In 1 John 1: 1-3 we read “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard...we proclaim to you so that you may have fellowship with us....”**

They were in awe of Jesus Christ and His word. They knew that you could not trifle with God's word. These devout Jews understood that the religious system they had been under as developed by the Scribes and Pharisees had led them astray. They wanted to understand Jesus and follow Him so they gave great attention to what the Apostles were teaching about Him and explaining Jesus' teachings.

Only doctrine can define what God, which Jesus, what hope and what faith is commonly believed. The effort to do away with doctrine for the sake of unity is spurious at best. It more often has its foundation in false teaching and the demonic. It is tragic enough that so many people do not know the truth because they are in churches that are so weak in doctrine. It is even worse when people reject the truth to go have their ears tickled. In either case, the warning of Hosea is still true, *"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge"* (Hosea 4:6).

That is why "the Scriptures" is the centre of our tradition as evangelicals. We want to know, understand and apply what God says in His Word so that we may walk with Jesus in a manner worthy of our Lord in pleasing Him and of His calling of us (Col. 1:10; Eph. 4:1).

What about you? How are you doing in devoting yourself to the Apostles' Teaching? Are you being diligent to put forth the effort necessary to fulfil 2 Tim. 2:15?

I think it is safe to say that most professing Christians today do not follow this example. They make a false dichotomy between secular and sacred so that "church life" is separate and distinct from the rest of life. They claim that being a Christian is part of what they are, but it is not the focus of their life. There are many other things that make up their life and Christianity is something that is just added to the mix of those many things. The result is both a weak church and weak Christians.

2. Fellowship

This is the next basic element of church life. Many people think of fellowship as just getting together and talking until you get tired and disperse. That is just socializing. Fellowship is much more than that. The word for fellowship, The Greek word from where we derive the word fellowship is the same word we translate as communion. It signifies close mutual relationships and partnerships with one another because of some common bond. For the Christian, that bond is salvation in Jesus Christ. While socialization is a part of it, fellowship goes way beyond that to sacrificially ministering to one another according to how God has gifted you.

Their fellowship was so meaningful that if someone was in need, the others came together to help. I know this will be threatening to many of us with the Me, Me, I first- lifestyle that we live. Our lifestyle has deviated from how it is supposed to be that it is now everyone to him or herself! Hence many of us become defensive at such a mention that this mind-set that the early church had is practicable. Luke records this because it reflects the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and if the Spirit of Jesus is in me, His generous heart also should be reflected.

Verses 44,45 have been used by some to support the idea of communes and communism. However, both of those ideas have a forced nature to them while what is described here is a demonstration of voluntary and sacrificial love. They were not only meeting each other's physical needs, they were also encouraging one another in the Christian life. Verse 46 says that they were *"day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."* The result of all this was *"the Lord was*

adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." The verb here "being saved" is passive. It is something God was doing.

In Romania, and in many Eastern European countries, there are so many orphans institutionalized that there isn't enough food or medical supplies or staff members to take care of them. The babies, often past toddler age, are still kept in diapers and placed in cribs because there's no other way to take care of them. They are lifted out to be fed and they infrequently have their diapers changed. There is no real physical contact with other humans, especially any of the cuddling and holding that babies need to develop normally. They end up in semi-catatonic states and often die from a lack of human contact. This condition is called "failure to thrive syndrome."

We need to understand that "failure to thrive syndrome" can happen in our spiritual lives. It can be avoided and it can be cured. But, prevention doesn't happen by itself. The key to avoiding this spiritual disease is through fellowship. But, fellowship is much more than what you may think it is. We can see what I mean in today's passage. It's the prescription against "failure to thrive syndrome".

3. The breaking of bread

This is the third element. I think it does mean the Lord's Supper but in the context of the early church, it also embraces partaking of meals together. It was very important to them to be obedient to Jesus' command to remember His death until He comes. In addition, there is also a unity with the Lord and with other believers shown in the Lord's Supper. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17, *"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."*

What is striking is that these believers met daily. They could not get enough of each other. It was not a Sunday-Sunday affair. Many of us are isolated from each other in our little boxes. We need to come out and be more creative.

4. Prayer

This is the final element to which they were devoted. When the early church went to the temple, they prayed and praised God. When they went for a meal, they prayed and praised God. They understood the importance of coming before the Lord in prayer, in seeking His leading and blessing. Jesus had ascended to heaven and they could no longer see Him, touch Him or talk to Him face to face, but they could still talk to Him through prayer, and He would still communicate to them through the Apostles' doctrine and the moving of the Holy Spirit who now indwelt them.

Tragically, prayer is one of the more neglected of the spiritual disciplines. Frankly, this is an area of weakness for this church because the attendance for these various prayer meetings is very small. I challenge you to consider your own heart in this matter. Are you committed to prayer in any manner similar to these early Christians? We need it as much today as they did then. I do not believe we will be effective as a church in carrying out God's plan for us without prayer. These first Christians were committed to prayer along with the Apostles' teaching, fellowship and the breaking of the bread and the result was rapid growth spiritually and numerically as described in verses 43-47.

Conclusion

Don't you wish we could have that kind of thing taking place today? There's no reason why we shouldn't still be experiencing this kind of fellowship. The truth is, we can still experience signs and wonders and awe inspiring things in our church today, if we devote ourselves to true

fellowship and develop a freedom from goods and loyalty to God when prayer becomes natural to us at play and at work. Being of one mind means that we maintain a singular focus to serve God and serve each other. In reality that means that we have no other motive to be here or be with each other than to please God.

God's Word comes to the fore in our lives and choices. We do not do things as the world around us does it. We do not want to be the church of the 21st century in the sense of being yoked but the church of the first century in being at one with Christ. Our methodology may be current but our theology is ancient.

The early church in Jerusalem met in the courts of the Temple. They met to worship, teach and experience true fellowship. What can happen when we do this? Again, this question is answered for us in Scripture. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35)

What's the big deal about eating together? Fellowship is what goes on while we're eating together. There's something about humans that makes us bond together better when we share meals. I guess God just made us that way. We sit around together and share about our lives, we talk about our joys and our pains, our struggles and our triumphs. We can begin to bear one another's burdens; celebrate with each other and cry with each other. We can only pray for each other if we share with each other.

It's true that someone can become a Christian without a church or even a small group of believers. However, the effective Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. A Christian who lives a life away from other Christians will never mature and cannot persevere in the faith without fellowship. In other words, the "Lone Ranger" Christian will develop "failure to thrive syndrome".

Let's boil this down to practical terms.

Take two pieces of paper. On one I want you to respond to two questions.

- **What do you expect to gain from our small group?**
- **What do you expect out of this church?**

On the second piece of paper, respond to this other question.

- **What should this church expect from you?**

Leave the first sheet on your chair when you leave this morning. But, keep the second sheet for yourself. I ask that you take it out during your quiet time this week and ask God to tell you what you should do and how and when and where.

Let us pray.