



"A Missional Church"
Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"
Acts 2:42-47
By: Dr. Peter B. Barnes
October 3, 2010

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Introduction.

When I say the name, "BP," what comes to your mind? A leader in alternative fuels? The oil spill in the Gulf? The CEO who said, "I want my life back"?

When you think of the city of Austin, what comes to mind? The University of Texas? Our state capital which is two feet taller than the one in Washington, DC? Keep Austin Weird? The live music capital of the world?

When you hear the name Lance Armstrong, what do you think of? The 7-time winner of the Tour de France? Cancer survivor? The Livestrong campaign? Alleged drug doping?

Reputation. It's an interesting word. It is defined as "the estimation in which a person or thing is commonly held." Every person, organization, institution, and every church has a reputation, and each of us leaves a mark on the world. We leave behind a wake of influence, either good or bad, large or small.

We've discussed what BP and the city of Austin and Lance Armstrong are known for, but let's bring it closer to home. What are you known for? And what is this church known for? What are the things that mark our lives individually as Christians and corporately as a church?

The early church had a reputation, and we find a listing of the activities and qualities which marked their early life in Acts 2:42-47. As we study the passage, we discover there are 5 things which established their reputation. They are marks which should distinguish every church and every follower of Jesus Christ today.

I. The Marks of a Missional Church.

Verses 42 through 47 of our passage give a description of church life in Jerusalem in the days that immediately followed the remarkable events of Pentecost. As a result of the sermon Peter preached, 3,000 people gave their lives to Christ and were baptized that day. The power of God's Holy Spirit was



poured out on these early Christians, and they experienced a transformation in their personal lives which resulted in an experience of community unlike anything they had ever known before.

There are 5 marks of the early church we should notice in the text. **First, worship marked their lives.** We learn from the passage that every day they continued to meet in the Temple courts of Jerusalem to worship, and they also devoted themselves to the “breaking of bread,” which scholars believe is a reference to their celebration of communion in the context of a meal. Here we see the early church enjoying a balance between structured and unstructured worship, formal and informal. A healthy church needs both.

Second, we read in the passage that **discipleship marked their lives.** *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching....”* The early church was a learning church, and they gave themselves to the teaching of those who had been with Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry. They entered the school of discipleship, as it were. and they were eager to learn.

Next, the early church was marked by community. Verse 42 says *“they devoted themselves... to the fellowship....and they gave to anyone as he had need.”* *Koinonia* is the Greek word that is translated “fellowship” in this text, and it comes from a word which means “common.” The common fellowship of the these early Christians expressed itself outwardly in the way they cared for one another, and they sought to encourage one another, support one another, and help one another. It was an interdependent fellowship that was attractive and attracting.

Fourth, the early church was marked by evangelism. The text tells us, *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* The first Christians in Jerusalem were not so preoccupied with worship, discipleship and fellowship that they forgot about evangelism. They realized the Holy Spirit is a missional Spirit, and He created them to be a missional people who shared the Good News with others.

Finally, the early church was marked by service. Verses 44 and 45 say, *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”* There was a self-sacrificial, serving nature to the early church. No one considered their possessions their own, and they offered them freely to those in need. The sharing of their wealth was voluntary, it was not under compulsion, and their lives were marked by generosity, especially for the poor. That is the way of the Spirit whenever a person’s life is transformed by God.

WHPC takes seriously these 5 marks of the early church, and they are activities and characteristics of church life we want to mark our church, too. That’s why we’ve organized the work of our ministry into four divisions – worship, discipleship, community, and mission. We’ve combined evangelism and service into mission because we believe they are the two sides of the same coin of outreach. Our witness to Jesus Christ seeks to meet the spiritual and the physical needs of people as we try to minister to the whole person.

Earlier I asked you what BP, the city of Austin, and Lance Armstrong are known for, what their reputation is. If you were to ask our neighbors about our church, how would they describe us? What marks us, and what are we known for? What is our reputation? In the years to come I hope our reputation grows in these 5 characteristics and qualities.

In many ways we’re doing a wonderful job with these 5 marks of the church, but we’ve got room to grow. And I’m excited to see what our church will become and what we can accomplish together by the power of the Holy Spirit as we lean into these characteristics and activities even more in the future. But it’s up to each one of us. Every member and friend of this church is vitally necessary if we are to



establish a reputation in this community for Christ-like faithfulness which also marked the early church about which we read here in this passage.

II. The Marks of a Missional Christian.

As I think about the early church, it strikes me that these 5 characteristics which marked their corporate life were also qualities which were descriptive of their individual lives. The reputation of the church was built on the reputation of the individuals who comprised their fellowship. I don't know if Rick Warren was aware of it or not when he wrote his best-selling book *The Purpose Driven Life*, but the five purposes about which he writes parallel these 5 marks of the early church in Acts 2.

In his book, which I highly recommend, Rick tells us what you and I were made for. First, he says **you were planned for God's pleasure**. You were made to worship Him. Bringing enjoyment to God, living for His pleasure, and giving Him praise is the first purpose of why we were created. God wants to have a relationship with us, and as the Westminster Catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

You were created to become like Christ and be His disciple. From the very beginning, God's plan has been to make you into the image of His Son, and God's ultimate goal for each of our lives is not comfort but character development. He wants us to grow spiritually and become like Christ so we will embody the kind of character described in the Beatitudes of Jesus or the fruit of the Spirit about which Paul writes. Transformation is at the heart of the Christian life, and discipleship is the path we need to follow to experience it.

You were formed for God's family, and there is a place in the family of God for every one of His children. The Bible is the story of God building a family for Himself, and when we place our faith in Christ, we are adopted into the family of God, and we become brothers and sisters to one another.

You were also shaped for God's service. Each of us was put on this earth to make a contribution. We weren't created just to be a consumer of resources and take up space on this planet. Instead, God designed us to make a difference with our lives, and God wants us to give back. He wants us to serve.

Finally, you were made for a mission. God is on a mission of love to reach a lost and broken world, and He invites us to join Him in it. Jesus told His disciples, "*As the Father has sent me into the world, so I am sending you.*" It's our calling in Christ; it is our mission for God.

Conclusion/Application.

Most people struggle with three basic issues in life. The first is the issue of identity – Who am I? The second is the issue of importance – Do I matter? And the third is the issue of impact – What is my place in life? The answer to all three of these questions lies in the five purposes in Acts 2. You were planned for God's pleasure. You were created to become like Christ. You were formed for God's family. You were shaped for God's service. And you were made for a God's mission. Cultivating these qualities in your life will transform you, and it will transform our church. It's what will impact our reputation, and it makes impact the world around us.

I'll give you an example. Two weeks ago, I heard Alex and Marcella de la Fuente tell the new member class why they came to our church. Their story confirmed to me that the 5 marks of the early church are alive and well at WHPC, and I was moved to tears by what they said.

Alex related he and his wife moved to Austin 20 years ago, and because they were Catholic they began attending the Catholic church down the road and they've been there all these years. But last



January something happened to them. Their daughter Paulina had an aneurism in her brain, and she ended up at Dell's Children's Hospital. Her condition was critical, and Alex and his wife were worried sick.

Many of the young people and volunteers in the middle school ministry from our church wanted to come and visit Paulina in the hospital because she had gotten involved in JAM, our middle school ministry. But Alex didn't really want anyone to come. He didn't know any of these kids of the volunteers, and they just wanted to battle this thing alone. However, the kids insisted, so they came and they gathered around the hospital bed. They talked and they laughed and they loved on Paulina and their family. And they prayed for her healing as they joined hands together around that hospital bed and asked God for a miracle. Paulina was healed, and she was able to return to school.

Alex and Marcella figured a church which had young people like that might be worth visiting, so last February they began to attend WHPC. Alex said he had never seen people so excited about their faith before, and he had never heard people talk so openly about God as if they really knew Him and had a personal relationship with Him. At this, Alex began to cry, and it was obvious that the Lord had touched him by the Holy Spirit, and the marks of our church had impacted him personally. That's why he and his family joined our church, and they were recognized as members here last Sunday.

Friends, may we continue to cultivate these qualities of church life at WHPC, and may we nurture our own walks with Christ so we remember:

- We were planned for God's pleasure
- We were created to become like Christ
- We were formed for God's family
- We were shaped for God's service; and
- We were made for God's Mission

It makes a difference. Just ask Alex and Marcela. Amen!

