

Easter Worship Series: Acts of the ‘Sent Ones’
“The Church’s Job Description”

Fourth Sunday of Easter: 11 May 2014

Sermon Text: Acts 2:42-47

Festival of the Christian Home/Mother’s Day

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

**“HE WHO DOES NOT HAVE THE CHURCH AS HIS MOTHER
DOES NOT HAVE GOD AS HIS FATHER.”**

(SAINT AUGUSTINE)

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Luke’s Gospel was such a success that, perhaps, someone suggested to Luke: “Why don’t you write another book?” No one ever suggested that to me. Thus, we have Luke’s second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. Thus, Jesus’ ministry does not end with his Ascension, but continues on in the church’s life. When Luke’s readers began to read Acts seriously, the early church was nearly as old as FUMC. So Luke looked back on the first days. We know what it is to look back nostalgically at our history—if you don’t believe me then ask Billie Liddell and the church history bunch!

[42] They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. [44] All who believed were together and had all things in common; [45] they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] 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, [47] 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 (Acts 2:42-47).

Mercy—that’s quite a church we think. A church where each Sunday there are miracles, a church where everybody sells what they have and gives the proceeds to the poor, a church where our covered dish suppers are Love Feasts, a church that grows every day in numbers. This passage comes right after Luke’s report of Pentecost, right after Easter. It is as if Luke says: “You want proof of the resurrection? You want undeniable evidence that the Holy

Spirit really descended upon ordinary people turning them into saints? Then here it is: the history of First Church Jerusalem, a church full of miracles, amazing growth, and 100% giving to benevolences. Wouldn't you want to go to a church like that? Well we can, but we may need a few changes.

The early church specialized in four key actions: 1) the apostles' teaching, 2) fellowship, 2) breaking of bread, and 4) the prayers. It seems mundane enough and simple. But in order to receive God's gift of grace the church prepares itself to receive this gift. Luke reminds us that they first devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching—they listened to scripture to continue Jesus' work through them.

Second they devoted themselves to fellowship (*koinonia*) from the Greek root *koine* which means "common." These people got to know one another. We practice fellowship at our annual picnic. We employ fellowship when we gather for worship, choir practice, Bible Study, Sunday school, softball practice, youth group, or one of the scores of small group occasions our church offers to help us fellowship. Why is "getting to know you" important? By knowing one another we participate in community. Paul writes, "Members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). We create fellowship so that we can minister to one another in times of joy and in times of sorrow.

Luke also reminds us third and fourth of all that the early church broke bread together and prayed together. "A church that worships together stays together." We eat together. We pray together. Thus the church includes a community of people who study scripture together, fellowship together, break

bread together, and pray together. The operative word is “together.” We, like the fleeing Hebrews, do it together. Not some. Not just a few. But all of us study, fellowship, eat, and pray—together.

I am not sure which is more impressive or miraculous—that “all who believed were together and had all things in common” or the previous verse. If you can’t remember it, Acts 2:41 reads: “So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” Every church wants new members and some churches even do the things necessary to make real evangelism happen, but 3000 in one day? This is more than even Rezolia Johnson could imagine!

Do you know what happens when we add 3000 people to a small close-knit community? We get chaos. As Madeleine L’Engle wrote; “A life lived in chaos is an impossibility.” Luke is up to something here when speaking about the church’s infancy. Luke offers another creation story. Yet, this time the creation is not of the world, but of a new people. We call it church. But the church that lacks certain features can indeed turn seriously chaotic.

In a former church we were working on a 1.6 million dollar building project. For a year we were without heating or cooling at times. Several Sundays that year the temperature was pleasant. Building projects are never enjoyable, but this one was a nightmare from the start. One Sunday morning between worship and Sunday school a construction worker hit a gas line with a backhoe. I then witnessed a church in chaos. People scattered and frantically searched for family members. The Fire Marshall told everyone to go home, but since everyone was running about it was simply chaotic. Mothers were frantic about children, the Adult Sunday school classes wanted to meet for fellowship,

the finance committee was riled that we failed to take an offering. I asked the contractor: “What was that guy doing on a backhoe on Sunday morning?!”

When chaos reigns or a church is unsure about how to proceed, then we consult our list. Can we return to the early church’s checklist of appropriate tasks? Can we return to being a community of faithful people who study scripture together, fellowship together, break bread together, and pray together? In a sense, that is what we will try to do this fall when we study *Unbinding the Gospel* together as a church.

We do not refer to the church as “Mother Church” by accident. It nurtures us and offers us absolute love as Christ did for those to whom he ministered. As a Spanish Proverb puts it: “An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.” And even so a free thinker like, Abraham Lincoln, remarked: “I remember my mother’s prayers and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life.”

“He who does not the church as his mother does not have god as his Father” wrote Saint Augustine. And it was Augustine’s mother that gave the church one of its greatest leader, theologians, and saints. St. Monica, Augustine’s mother, was born of Christian parents at Tagaste, North Africa, in 333. She had three children, Augustine being the eldest. Augustine caused his longsuffering mother great anxiety as he was wayward and, as he confesses, lazy. Into adulthood, Augustine expressed heretical propositions. Monica drove him from her table. Yet, a strange vision urged her to recall him. During this time she went to see a bishop, whose name is lost to history, but who consoled her with these words, “the child of those tears shall never perish.” In due course, after seventeen years of struggle, Augustine and Monica spent six



months of true peace at Cassiacum, after which time Augustine was baptized in the church of St. John the Baptist at Milan. On their return trip from Italy to Africa Monica died at Ostia. And perhaps one of the greatest theologians and saints of the church wrote his most brilliant pages of the *Confessions* as the result of his grief.

The church seeks to help us grow into God's image—the image by which we were created and—it is your mother's desire for you. This message is approved by mothers everywhere.

MOTHER'S DAY HISTORY (Just in Case you wondered)

Observed the second Sunday in May, this day honors all mothers. It began in its present form with a special service in May 1907 at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia. The service was organized by a Methodist laywoman, Anna Jarvis, to honor her mother, who had died on May 9, 1905. By 1908 Anna Jarvis was advocating that all mothers be honored on the second Sunday in May, and in 1912 the Methodist Episcopal Church recognized the day and raised it to the national agenda. It has some parallels with the old English Mothering Sunday in mid-Lent, which focused on returning home and paying homage to one's mother, and with Mother's Day for Peace, introduced in 1872 by Julia Ward Howe in Boston as a day dedicated to peace.

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