

ACTS 2:42-47

ST JOHN'S, 7.5.17, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

The few verses we heard from Acts tell us a great deal about the church in the very early days, just as it's coming to terms with what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke is describing for us what the Spirit-filled church looks like:

A LEARNING CHURCH

Firstly, the Spirit-filled church is a learning church: *They spent their time in learning from the apostles . . .* (v 42). These people had just had an amazingly powerful experience, they'd been filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time, they'd spoken in the languages of the crowds in Jerusalem, telling them *about the great things that God has done* (2:11). They might have been tempted to think that they didn't need to listen to religious teaching any more – that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all the truth, as Jesus had promised he would (John 16:13), without any human intervention. But these earliest Christians still saw the need to spend *their time in learning*.

Of course, they weren't opening themselves willy-nilly to any old teaching. They were *learning from the apostles*, from the men who'd spent three years travelling with Jesus, the men who'd heard Jesus teach and preach, the men who'd witnessed Jesus' miracles, the men whom Jesus himself had appointed to oversee the establishment of the church in the years immediately following his death, resurrection and ascension. The earliest believers accepted that these men had unique

authority, which was backed up by the *many miracles and wonders* which *were being done through* them (v 43). And so they *spent their time in learning from the apostles*.

The C21 church may not be able literally to sit at the apostles' feet, but we still have access to their teaching through the writings of the NT. The members of the Spirit-filled church spend their time in *learning from the apostles*, studying the Scriptures, and seeking to live in obedience to them, both as individuals and as a church.

A LOVING CHURCH

Secondly, the Spirit-filled church is a loving church: *They spent their time in . . . taking part in the fellowship*. The Greek word which we translate 'fellowship' is *κοινωνία*, and it literally means 'sharing'. We read in vv 44-45 that *all the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed*.

No, wait a moment . . . don't rush out to sell all you own and share out the proceeds! All Scripture has to be taken within the context of the whole, and even within this passage it's clear that the believers didn't all sell everything. They used to meet in their homes, so they hadn't all sold them! Looking to the end of Acts chapter 4, we read about Barnabas selling a field and handing over the money to the apostles: if everyone was doing the same, there would be no reason for Barnabas to get a special mention. And in chapter 5, after Ananias and Sapphira have sold some property and claimed to have given the full proceeds to

the apostles, Peter says to Ananias, *Before you sold the property, it belonged to you; and after you sold it, the money was yours . . . you have lied to God!* (5:4). In other words, Ananias and Sapphira were condemned not for owning property, but for lying. There's nothing in NT teaching which says that believers must give up their private property and possessions.

But believers are called to be generous with what they have. The Greek word for 'generous' is closely related to the word for fellowship: κοινωνικός. And Spirit-filled believers can't possibly be called to do less than the OT people of God, who were to give a tenth of their crops to *the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows*. The earliest believers had got the right idea in the way they *shared their belongings with one another, and distributed money among all, according to what each one needed* (vv 44-45). The members of the Spirit-filled church spend their time in *taking part in the fellowship*, and seek to share their money and possessions with their brothers and sisters in Christ, so that no-one is left needy or destitute.

A WORSHIPPING CHURCH

Thirdly, the Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church: *They spent their time in . . . sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers*. The earliest believers didn't only share their possessions, they came together for worship. The phrase translated *fellowship meals* here literally means 'the breaking of the bread'. Jewish meals began with breaking bread; but of course, Jesus' words at the Last Supper had given this action a special meaning for his followers. In the early days

of the church, the breaking of bread was probably the first part of a complete 'fellowship' meal. But it still constituted an important part of the believers' worship. Prayer was also a vital aspect of their worship (v 42).

This worship took place both *in the Temple* and *in their homes* (v 46). In other words, they worshipped both formally, in the Temple, and informally, in their homes. The church needs both formal and informal forms of worship.

They were *glad and humble* (v 46) – literally 'in exultation and sincerity of heart' - as well as *filled with awe* (v 43). In other words, their worship was both joyful and reverent. There's always a temptation in Christian worship, either to be so reverent that we exclude any sense of joy, or to be so joyful that we forget that we're worshipping an awesome God. The members of the Spirit-filled church worship formally and informally with both awe and great joy.

AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH

Finally, the Spirit-filled church is an evangelistic church: *every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved* (v 47b). The earliest believers didn't allow their whole attention to be taken up with learning, sharing and worshipping – they were also witnessing, showing and telling the people around them about all they knew and were learning of the amazing power of God.

The Lord was adding people to the group of believers on a daily basis. Many Christians in the C21 church have ceased to expect the Lord to

add *anyone* to our group. And many have lost the sense of urgency which compelled the earliest believers to keep on telling other people all about the good news of Jesus, and how they could be saved. We need to regain that sense of urgency, pray for family, friends and neighbours, as well as for Christianity Explored, for contacts through Baptisms, etc, invite people to join us, and be ready to welcome them when they do. Members of the Spirit-filled church have inherited Jesus' mission to seek and to save the lost.

CONCLUSION

It's clear from these few verses that the members of the Spirit-filled church aren't going to have an easy time of it! The Holy Spirit drives the church forwards in learning, in fellowship, in worship and in evangelism. He doesn't allow us to stay in our familiar and comfortable ruts and niches. As we spend time learning from the apostles, he'll change us. As we spend time sharing our time, money and possessions, he'll change our circumstances. As we spend time in worship, he'll change our relationship with him. As we seek to share the good news and welcome new members into our fellowship, he'll change our church. I think there's a huge challenge for us here this morning, because it's clear that at present, the Lord is not *adding to this group those who are being saved*. The question is, why? And what are we going to do about it? That's not just the Vicar's job – it's the responsibility of every member of the congregation. Somehow, we need to work out, both as individuals and as a congregation, what we need to change to

allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, to follow the example of the earliest believers, to *spend our time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers*. And when we start to get it right, we need to know how to welcome the new members whom the Lord will add to our group. It won't be comfortable, but unless we rise to this challenge, we won't be taking our part in the Lord's ongoing mission to build his church and glorify his name.

Finish with prayer including the LyCiG prayer.