

Today we continue our series on the church as both a place and a people. So far we have seen church as people designed for worship, encouraged to be disciples, passionate about prayer, filled with the Spirit, part of God's family and this week we're going to look at the church as people who share Good News. We have been referring to a poem about church and the verse today talks about new people coming to services, and then coming to faith, where people go into the community to tell others about Jesus. It seems to me there is a dynamic about that that we're missing.

The early church which had a lot of problems: read some of the letters we have in the bible – lots of it is about false teaching and wrong living.

They were new to church but they were not new to worship. Most people, whether they were Jewish or Gentile, understood the idea of worship – sometimes it involved sacrificing an animal, sometimes it involved prostitution, sometimes it involved hurting yourself - but people believed that there was someone or something they should worship to bring prosperity, health, children etc. And where there were people who worshipped there were people who made money. Jesus cleared the Temple of money lenders (Mark 11) and Paul upset the silversmiths who made images of Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19). That made it difficult for the new church because they often took patterns of behaviour from what they knew and had done before and did the same, simply substituting Jesus for who or what they had worshipped before.

That meant that they had to learn what was appropriate and what wasn't – but it wasn't like that in the beginning. The Christians in Jerusalem simply kept on going to the Temple – they were now Jews who believed in Jesus! And their worship was evangelism in itself – yes they told people about Jesus, but their worship also drew people to him.

Like the next, and subsequent generations, of Christians we have learned a certain way of doing church – we have developed a style of worship that we're fairly happy with (I'm speaking generally about churches). There are all the debates about musical styles, bible versions, robes or jeans, Pentecostal or Wee Free etc. The thing is all of these are man-made systems and arguments – What's important is what is in our heart when we come to worship.

I don't want to focus on evangelism as telling others about Jesus, although, of course, that is a vital part of it, but I think there are things that we can learn from them about worship as witness.

In our passage today I see 4 things that we can learn ...

## [1] LEARNING EXPERIENCES

vs. 41-42; 46

Preaching of the Word:

This is how it started: Holy Spirit came, Peter preached and when the crowds heard it they asked “What must I do to be saved?”

Preaching is really proclamation – Christian to non-Christian

Teaching is more explanation – Christian to Christian

The call to spread the word is heard throughout the bible in different ways.

- Abraham was to teach his household;
- Moses was to speak, write and read the words of God for the people of God;
- the Priests had the duty of teaching the law Moses received;
- the prophets applied the law to their own generation;
- wise men and women teach others wisdom;
- the disciples preach the kingdom of God;
- apostles, pastors and teachers speak the truth in order to bring people to faith in Christ and to present them mature in Christ.
- Believers have the responsibility of encouraging one another with God’s words

What can we learn? We have a mix of preaching and teaching from Sunday morning, to Messy Church and the Gathering, Young Church through to Prom Day – home groups, Alpha courses, Marriage Course, prayer course....

If you’re not growing in faith then it’s not because you have no opportunity to learn

Different people get involved in leading it

We can’t simply expect new people to know and understand what we do or what we believe – they need to be taught

## [2] RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES

vs. 42, 44-47

Early Church Ate Together A lot:

a] Good fellowship

It’s a great way of getting to know someone – it’s not just about food but relationship ...

b] Jesus set the pattern

Sets a good atmosphere to challenge one another & teach one another in a relaxed setting

Luke 7:36-50 the story of Jesus being invited for dinner and a 'sinful woman' washes his feet with her tears and her hair. Not remotely relaxing for those there – but Jesus turns it into an amazing learning experience

c] Cultural pattern

People had spent time before their Christian conversions having fellowship together in their pagan temples ... KOINONIA — FELLOWSHIP — BUT IT GOES FURTHER THAN JUST GETTING TOGETHER — This type of fellowship means “FELLOWSHIP WITH A PURPOSE”

Fellowship that bound them together to reach the goals God had given them

Discipleship grew out of this time together — they were able to easily develop others to do the same for someone else .... because they had an example to follow

GROWTH will be the result whenever we take time to teach someone else to do what we already know how to do!

Some people asked why we have food together more often than we used to – and this is why: it gives an opportunity to develop relationships and draw people to God

### [3] EXPERIENCED THE PRESENCE OF GOD

A lot of people sitting in churches in the West would have been very uncomfortable in the Early Church — God doesn't have a watch, nor does he particularly care what we sing or what we wear. God would totally mess up their order of service to move His Way during their time together

WHY?

Because you can't programme in signs and wonders – if you're listening to God and allowing him to speak and work through you then you agree to do things in His way and in His time.

That happens as people pray and we're told these new Christians devoted themselves to prayer. The more time you spend with God the deeper your relationship becomes and there were leaders in that group who had spent time with Jesus, watching him heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead – in fact they had already experienced it for themselves Matthew 10: 5 *These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8 Heal the*

*sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*

Now that they are full of the Holy Spirit and listening to God it is only natural that they would do the very things Jesus had taught them to do.

Prayer was a priority in the early church – today no one really wants to pray: many churches in Scotland have stopped having a prayer meeting because people don't come to pray

BUT if we're not praying then we're not hearing from God; and if we're not hearing from God then how can we expect to grow?

Circle: preacher (Minister) teaches; people go, "That was great" but don't put it into practice; people don't see a difference between themselves and Christians so why bother with church? Church generally is dying so Christians bemoan the state things have got to – so preacher preaches harder

In our reading it was the other way round – preacher preached and people went, "Oh, that's what I need to do, OK"; Leadership performed signs and wonders (healing and prophecy etc) so people noticed both the miraculous and the personal transformation that was happening and they were interested in what was happening. That interest translated to attending and then to faith

I think we have missed out on so much that God would have us do because of our tradition of doing things 'decently and in order'! What we've done is stifle the work of the Holy Spirit in us and through us and we need to do something about it.

We need to promote the place of prayer – 24-7 and the prayer course: great to hear the buzz of excitement and try different ways of praying – but we need to keep it up.

we need to give thanks for answered prayer

We also need to pray that God will begin to do miracles among us – be careful to get it right and do what it says in 1 Corinthians 14:1 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.....3 But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.*

The more we listen to God the more we hear him speak and the more we will be able to speak to people the message God has for them and the more we do that the more people will be drawn to God.

1 Cor 14:23 *if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your*

*mind? 24 But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, 25 as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*

How? Password; pictures

Not for everyone but for many more people than we have now!

[4] THEY EXPERIENCED GROWTH

vs. 47

*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Their worship and lifestyle attracted people to Jesus – does ours?

In our history in Scotland, and certainly in our lifetime, we have mainly experienced decline in church attendance. It has become the norm to see churches closing as numbers disappear.

It is 'normal' to have our order, and everything just so – to the point where people get so anxious about serving communion that they won't do it, just in case they 'get it wrong'! It's madness. More importantly it hasn't worked – if what we have been doing over the past 50 years was so good we wouldn't be here now!

We are doing lots of good, relevant and important things but if we're honest we could do better.

Here's my last few questions, and the first is to those of you who have families who don't go to church:

- Why don't they go?
- What would church need to be like to encourage them to come?
- What can I do to make it happen?