

Date of sermon: 10/2/2021  
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Acts 2:42-47  
Title of Sermon: The Marks of a Church  
Series: The Bride - #4

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

In the New Testament, when it speaks of this issue of the church, it has something in mind. Something different maybe than the little poem. Do you remember the little poem that at least my mother taught me -- you know, "Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door and see all the people." Do they still teach that? It's pretty fundamental stuff, you know! I mean, if you don't have THAT, how are you ever gonna graduate from the fifth grade? Well, part of that is, it's true. The church is made up of people. The New Testament knows nothing different than that. When you drive into a town, oftentimes, and -- don't feel guilty for this, it's true -- that you drive in, and you say, "Oh, there's a church," and "There's a church." But what we really know is, that's not the church -- that's a building. Because the church is not sticks and bricks and mortar, the church is you. And that church, no matter where it is, is not characterized by the people or the building that people exist in -- it's the people who go there. And frankly, many churches today don't even have buildings. They meet all over the place. They meet in the middle of the night. If they're in China, they meet early in the morning. If they're in Indonesia -- and the fact is that in various places, in all kinds of different languages, those churches meet. I've been to churches in South Africa and I've been to churches in Taiwan, I've been to churches in Singapore, and they are all different. They're different because they have different languages. They're different because they have different music. The music in some places -- our worship is somewhere, you know, 25, 35 minutes. There are some services I've gone to that -- ha! Man, that music is gonna go an hour, hour and a half! I got up one place, and I preached, and I could tell that I didn't meet the cultural expectation, and the preacher went and reproached my sermon! It was like -- um, they don't have enough Jesus in them! And he just kinda went back over the whole thing! It's like, "Well, okay. You know, he's not used to 30, 35 minutes!" Hour, hour and a half of worship, hour of preaching, and then prayer time.

The reality is, you'll drive around the world, even in the US -- churches are very different. The question I want to wrestle with this morning is -- is there something that, no matter where you go, is there a core that no matter what language you're in, no matter what building you may or may not be in, is there a core that you're gonna find in every spirit-filled church? Let me rephrase it. Is there something that you should find in every spirit-filled church? I want to go back to the headwaters of the church. A lot of people debate whether it's in Acts 9, Acts whatever the case may be. I tend to think that the church began right here in Acts chapter 2 where we read this morning. And I want to look at this as, if you will, you were to go up to the headwaters of the Metolius and say, "Yup -- this is where it starts." And if you were to take something out of the river and kind of look at and examine it, wherever you're at, say "This is the core of this river. This is the essence of this river." And if you were to do the same for the church, and you were to go back to the headwaters, what are you gonna find? The writer of Acts is giving us a picture of this thing called the church. Paul's developed it more in Ephesians, but right here at the very beginning, what are the characteristics? And I want to identify in this well, well-worn passage. We've probably looked it -- you have -- dozens of times. But candidly, this week, as I went over it, it hit me anew. It rebuked me. I'll tell you that in a while. It called me up short. It exposed some things that I'd allowed in my life. Maybe it'll do the same for you.

What does this Scripture tell us? Number one -- when the Spirit of God came upon these people, there was something that characterized them. And that is simply that they were a learning church, a growing church. Not just merely they were becoming educated, but there was a certain characteristic. It says that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." What would that look like? It means they came and they sat under the apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves to it. What does that look like? They took it seriously. They studied. They applied. They wrestled with it. But what they did is, they established something in their life that was going to be what? Kind of the standard -- that which is over them. What was it? The apostles' teaching. Why? Scripture tells us. "Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

If you go back into the Scripture, all the way back, Moses -- you're gonna see that God had three major epic times, or three major seasons, where He did really supernatural things. I absolutely believe that there is no cessation of the Holy Spirit, that there are going to be miracles today, there are healings today, there are going to be dreams and there are gonna be visions. But -- I think we need to let the Scripture carry some weight in the sense that, like the first time when Moses was giving the revelation of the law, there was supernatural evidence that God was bringing this. He had a stick. I've got a number of sticks at my house. I've yet to throw one of them and have it turn into a snake. I've never had one of the sticks on my property go down to the Willamette and turn it into blood. The fact is, Moses was entrusted with a supernatural power by God for -- what? The proclamation or the revelation of the ten commandments in the Word of God.

Another time, if you go -- a little further -- you're gonna see a season where all kinds of miraculous events were happening through Elisha and Elijah, through the prophetic section of the Scripture, where these individuals were given supernatural power to do things that just ordinary people, ordinary people of faith weren't given. Now we come to the third time, and that is the season of Jesus or the apostles. Now, what's this season for? Paul, who was drafted late in this version, says in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you." What's the rationale? What's the basis? What is he saying? He's saying that you can take my words as something other than just a wonderfully written little narrative of a man who walked around planting churches. No, in fact, he told the Thessalonian church -- he commended them, and he said it this way: "You receive my words not as the mere words of men, but" -- what? "As the very word of God." Why would he ever say that? How audacious! That a man would say, "What I'm writing for you is the Word of God." Why would he say that? Because -- the signs of a true apostle were performed among you. Why's it important that he's a true apostle? Because he's gonna be writing the Word of God. There's a reason why I don't believe that there are new apostles today. I would give you the adjective -- there's apostolic ministry -- but are there apostles in the sense of Paul, in the sense of James, in the sense of Peter? Are they in existence today? I wouldn't suggest that they are. Why? Because we'd be writing Scripture. Because what these individuals did is, they brought and they devoted themselves to what? To the apostles' teaching. Why? Because, my friends, they were speaking the Word of God. And what was at the heart of this church was this -- they recognized and believed that God had given them a revelation, and they needed to submit to it, surrender to it, honor it, follow it.

What's our application today? Well, it's the same. We sit -- not necessarily at my feet, please don't do that. But we do sit at the feet of the Scriptures. And the succession that is handed down to us is not through a pope, it's not through a church, it is the succession of what? The apostolic teaching that comes to us in the living Word of God. And a Spirit-filled church is always going to mark that. They hold the Scriptures up as the authority over all things. The Scripture is the final author, if you will. And that's why we don't believe that there are new apostles, because there would be new Scripture, and the Scripture seems to be pretty clear that -- what? It's been sealed. God has said what He's going to say. And it is our belief and our practice that to be a Spirit-filled church we have to esteem the Word of God. We have to teach the Word of God. We have to revere the Word of God. And we have to obey the Word of God. Because when we do, the Spirit of God works in us.

There's another characteristic in this church, and that is, they were an incredibly loving church. Would you move down in verse 46 -- it makes this statement: "All the believers were together and had everything in common." The concept, or the word, is *koinonia*, the fellowship. The term "koinonia" comes from the root word of "to be in common." "To share something in common." These individuals, it

says, "All believers were together and had everything in common." It goes on to this, and it says, "They began to sell their possessions and goods, and they met anyone's need that came to them." They were loving. Not because somebody mandated it, not because they wanted to fulfill some quota. It's because they were filled with gratitude. They had been touched and blessed by God. And the first thing I want us to note is their inward love for each other. They had everything in common. Meaning, the things that mattered most to them, they agreed upon.

In 1 John chapter 1, verse 3, it says that "...our fellowship is with the Father, and our fellowship is with the Son." And what John is arguing for is -- that which binds us together is stronger and more definitive than anything else that might separate us. Paul in Ephesians 4 is telling them, "I urge you, brothers -- I urge you -- as a prisoner of the Lord, to walk worthy of the calling that you have received." What's that calling? It's given to us in chapter 3, verse 11, to be the church. This church that reveals the manifold wisdom of God. And he goes on to say, "I urge you to preserve the unity that has been given to you" -- not that you create. You don't come in and say, "Yup. I got a motion. Let's vote on this." No, that's not what he's talking about. Paul says, "I've got a motion. You are in one faith, one baptism, and one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That's what defines you. That's what unites you. And this very table is the only reason why we're here." Here's the difficulty. Sometimes people in the body of Christ just tick me off. They do! They come up with knucklehead decisions. They have views that differ from mine. And then, I'm stuck. I truly am. How do I see them? Do I see them as a person who lives differently than me, or do I see them as a person who has Christ in them, therefore making them my brother and sister in Christ?

See, one of the things that marked this church and that marks every Spirit-filled church is that they are willing to allow that which calls them together to become more distinct in them than that which separates them. They're willing to look at each other more with this conviction that we have Christ in us. We have the Holy Spirit in us. And therefore, the color of our skin doesn't really matter. Our gender really doesn't matter. Our history doesn't matter. Our economics don't really matter. Not if Christ matters. Not if Jesus matters most. The Spirit-filled church is a loving church. And their love for each other is unmistakable, because they see Christ in each other. And that matters more than anything. But also, it says that they loved outwardly. They were selling their possessions and goods and they gave to anyone as they had need. A lot of people have terribly abused this text. And they've come to this text and suggested that, "Ah, here it is. Here's Christian communism. No one should own private property." Or, "Here's Christian socialism. We ought to gladly give up everything that we have to serve and love the poor." There's a problem with this -- what is the problem? Verse 46: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes." Whoops! How do you sell everything that you have and still have homes? You don't. You see, there's no Marxist mandate in this text, my friends. None. There's simply the move of the Holy Spirit that turns self-centered individuals into very generous people who are more than willing to look around, un-coaxed by a government, not mandated by anyone, but driven by the power of the Holy Spirit to say, "You know what? I'm gonna look around my neighborhood. I'm gonna look around my family. I'm gonna look around my church. And I want them to have what I have. I want them to live in security. I want them to have the benefit of a roof over their head." The fact is, the Spirit-filled church is someone and people who are moved to meet needs in other people. Not because somebody tells them -- other than the Holy Spirit in them. It is a group of people who voluntarily and generously love folks, and it really doesn't matter how much you have.

A number of years ago I was in Mozambique, and there was this lady teaching on tithing. And she was teaching to a group of pastors who were very poor, every one of them. But she understood that if you can't tithe when you're poor, more likely than not you won't tithe when you're rich. If you can't tithe when you have nothing, you're never going to learn to teach your congregation that you lead to tithe on whatever God gives you. And oh, with a spirit of deep love, she challenged them. "If you have ten tomatoes, one needs to be given to God." "If you have 15 pounds of cashews, you know, 1.5 of it needs to go for the kingdom of God." And she just went down every level that these gentlemen and ladies lived at. Why? Because what marks the Spirit-filled church is not tight-fisted selfishness, but open-handed generosity. And my friends, trust the Spirit of God. Trust the Spirit of God that that's what He longs to do in our church and in you. You don't need a mandate. You just need to be filled with the Spirit of God. The Spirit-filled church is, thirdly, a worshipping church. It goes on to say, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts." That's what they were doing -- they were worshipping. They went there

even though it was a synagogue. They went there to worship. And then they came home, and "They broke bread in their homes and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

There's a balance in their worship in two different areas. I want to share both of them with you. Number one, there was a formal sense to their worship. They went to the temple courts. This continued for a long time. You say, "Well, Christ wasn't at the temple courts. I mean, they kicked Christ out." No, Peter and James and the rest of the boys, they still went and worshiped in that place, much like what we do. We come here, and there's somebody who teaches or reads the Word of God. There is worship. And they went there in that setting. They didn't abandon it. They didn't say, "I don't need the church. I'm gonna go out on my own. I got Jesus." No. No, when Jesus saves you, He saves you to the church. It says right here in the text. He saves you and invites you into the church, and so, these dear brothers, they continue to go to the temple courts. They continued to authenticate the reality that the church gathers. It is not just the called-out and away from. It is the called TO each other. What happens in this place? The preaching of the Word. Formal worship. Public readings. Corporate prayer. Those are all essential to the Christian life.

But notice there's an informal aspect. What happened is -- yes, they went to the temple courts. And they also went in their homes where a small group would gather. See, there are things that can happen in the home that just can't happen here. If you're gonna come to our house on a Wednesday night, you're gonna hear people share about things that they're facing, and challenges. You're gonna hear us celebrate things that we've seen God do in each other's lives. That doesn't happen here. People mock the church sometimes. "Yeah, have to go to church. You ask people, 'How are ya doing?' They say, 'Fine.' That's just the way it is in the church." Well, on Sunday morning, yeah! You don't have a ton of time. I don't have a time to tell you -- if I were to tell you what I faced this week, I'd need an hour. You got it after...I'm free from 12 to 1:00 today. No, don't put that on the church. That's not the forum that happens here. You sit, and you're listening, and we worship together, and we pray together. But *koinonia* and fellowship doesn't happen a lot on a Sunday morning in this environment. Maybe in the community groups, but often in the home groups, where -- what? We have time. We listen to each other. Sometimes we even close the book after we've spent some time in it, and we just, "Tell us how we can pray for you. Your heart looks heavy today. What are you facing?"

You see, the church that is vibrant, the church that is living, the church that is filled with the Spirit -- it's gonna have both of these. A time where we formally worship, and a time where we experience fellowship. But there's another balance that I see in this text, and that is, this joyful/reverent balance. Go back, look in verse 43, and it says that "Everyone was filled with awe." That's a beautiful place. "Everyone was filled with awe." Of what? Each other? No. Of God. They came into the church and they were aware of the greatness of God. Just like what Jamie was praying this morning. On the contrary to that, not in contrast but alongside of that -- "Every day they continued to meet together. They broke bread in their homes...and they were praising God." Exuberantly. With sincere hearts.

Church should never look like a dirge. And church should never be flippant. It should never be so casual and so familial that we walk around thinking somehow God is just a half a step above us. There were moments in the Old Testament God opened up the earth and swallowed whole nations. That God in the Old Testament is not different than the God in the New Testament. He's holy. He's just. He's pure. And the Scripture says the beginning of wisdom is to have a healthy respect and fear of God. I hope that affects every moment of your worship. That when you sing these lofty and beautiful songs to God, you're not singing them to a Santa Claus of which you're trying to manipulate to give you good things. But that you have a healthy reverence for Him. But because of that, the church, it says, "They came together with glad and sincere hearts, and they exuberantly -- they were praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." In other words, when you walked into the church, it was a buzz. I mean, it was just popping! It's like, "Man! What are they -- are they giving away free money in this place? What's going on? Everyone's excited!" Why? Because they met Jesus. Because their sins were forgiven. Because their uncle who just died just graduated into Heaven, and they're gonna see him again! You see, the entirety of their church was touched by what? The resurrection. The Spirit-filled church is worshipping. And lastly, the Spirit-filled church is growing. I want you to notice three things that Jesus gives in this text. This is what hit me this week. It really did. Three things it tells us. They were "praising God and enjoying the

favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Three things I want you to notice in this text. Number one, God added. Salvation is not a work for you and me. You do not have the power of the Holy Spirit, you cannot convict a person, you do not need to come to the final albeit conclusive amazing answer as to what happened to the dinosaurs. You do not need to prove absolutely without question the existence of God. You do not have to have the iron-clad answer for the effect on the earth of the Noahdic flood. There's a thousand things, like "I can't answer that. I don't know about that. I have no idea about those people who live in tribes who have never heard about the gospel. Is God gonna condemn them? I don't know. And so, therefore, I should never share the gospel, because I can't answer everything!" You don't have to. God added to their numbers. Oh, they preached. They talked about the resurrection of Christ. They talked about the purity of Jesus. They talked about His death on the cross. But I guarantee you, Peter didn't know what happened to the dinosaurs! Guarantee you! Peter, sorry -- if I get to Heaven and you did know, I will repent. No! God added to their numbers. But look at this -- it's God added, but He added to what? "He added to their numbers." In other words, when Jesus saves, He saves them to Christ and into the church. The idea that you can trust Christ and not join the church is foreign to the New Testament. Foreign. The idea that all you gotta do is bring a person to Christ and you're done has nothing to do with the Bible. "Christ added to their number." And they came together, and what did they do? They gathered together, they devoted themselves to the disciples' teaching. They worshiped together. They gave together. They started operating like a unit. Why? Because that's Christ's vision. That's His passion, is that we would be the church with Christ as our head. It is inconceivable that you would lead people to Christ, who is head of the church, and they would forever be disconnected. "Christ added to their number." And He did it daily.

I had to confess this week. "God, I don't expect that of you. And I'm sorry. I don't live with that anticipation. I don't live with that." I'm told every day that we live in one of the most unchurched if not the most unchurched population in the United States. We live in a place where less than 10 percent of those who live in this valley and this city have any kind of association and regular attendance in a local church. We live in a place that is -- they call "Babylon." We live in a place where our leaders are openly immoral. And the next thing you know, I have to confess -- I began to reduce my expectations of God. He's the one who said it. He added to their number daily. And a Spirit-filled church is going to be marked by this. They are gonna be a growing church where Christ is adding to them, and it may not just be in your relationship but in our city, I don't live with that, and I ask the Lord to forgive me. And I want me and our church to change our expectation. That I awaken every day to this conviction -- God, you're gonna save people. And I get to be a part of it. God, you have people that you're drawing to yourself. You have people that you're gonna convict. And I get to be a part of it. And so, when I go to the store, when I go to the gas station, do I go there with the anticipation that God might be -- this might be the very moment. Am I ready? Or am I so driven by my schedule that I've got to get in and get out, and some poor guy says, "Hey, I wanna saved." "Ah! I'm a Calvinist. You're gonna get saved whether you like it or not." Is that what I say, or do I pause for a moment, and just say, "I don't care what the rest of the day is -- unless it's my wife. I've got time for you." Because God wants to add to the church daily. And He wants to bring people into a flock where they can learn and they can worship and they can love and they can grow.

Philip Yancey, in one of his great books, *Church: Why Bother?* -- it's kind of the reflections of a church cynic. And he makes this statement: "After years of cynicism, I finally realized that the key was not finding the right church, but understanding the church properly." That's so good. "After years of cynicism, I realized that the key was not finding the right church, but understanding the church properly." Our church, by God's grace, will always look inward. We will. We will seek to love each other. We will seek to grow together. And we will look outward because we've been planted in a city that needs our love. We will look upward because it is only God who can sustain us. And we will look onward because the Spirit-filled church expects to grow. Not because of us -- because God has that intention even in the Northwest.

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