

Title: All in, pt.2  
Text: Acts 2.42-47  
Theme: Life in the church  
Series: Acts #?  
Prop Stmtnt: The gospel (word) shapes and influences the life of the church (which means the lives of believers).

Read Text:

Karaoke isn't very fun all by yourself. If you want to travel alone and go when you want, and where you want, get a motorcycle. Head out for the highway, open 'er up and roar. It's the American persona. Freedom, open road, no helmet, no seatbelt, no restraints, wind in your face, bugs in your teeth – just freedom. It's all of that, but it doesn't work too well if you like karaoke, or if you want to play Euchre. Traveling by bus with 30 other people takes more time. People have to go to the bathroom. Not everyone gets to have the final say on where you stop for dinner. You do not always get to pick what seat you get. Traveling as a group has its limits, but what happens if you are all by yourself and you get sick? What happens if you are all by yourself and you want to sing with others? What happens if you are all by yourself and you want to cook a meal for someone else, or eat with someone else, or watch a movie or a game or a concert with someone else, or share the awe and glory of the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls with someone else, play euchre or sing karaoke? It takes two people (man and woman) to make you. The family is a little community because we are created by our Triune God for relationship and relationships.

Christianity is a team sport. You win and lose as a team. It all starts with God. God is a team. We call it Trinity. That is why God is love. If God were a single God, he could long to love, he could learn to love, but he couldn't be love unless there was another one that he could actually love. From eternity past and in the eternal present, the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, the Father loves the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father, the Son loves the Spirit and the Spirit loves the Son. God is love. God is a community. God made us to be in relationship with him a relational, supernatural being. Our relationship is designed by God to be a community. When you come to faith in Christ, you are brought into, drawn into, placed into the fellowship of this three-person life, but you aren't the only the one there. You are there, with all of the other believers. We're all on the bus.

Here and now, that brings challenges, because while we are already in Christ positionally, not yet have we finished our process of sanctification (being conformed into the image of Christ). In fact, we have a long way to go. So, what happens when you put a bunch of people who are supposed to look like Jesus, who will, one-day look like Jesus, but who don't yet look exactly like Jesus all get on the same bus together? It's fine for the first couple of miles, but, give it a little bit of time and someone starts talking too much and problems can arise, in fact, they do.

This is precisely where people love to point out how the church is full of hypocrites. But hold the phone for a second. Wasn't it the Beatles who wrote and recorded, "All you need is love" (1967) just before they broke up in 1969 because they couldn't stand each other? Does anybody not find that the least bit ironic? My point is this: Anybody can come together for an event, but to stay

together and love each other and grow stronger together is supernatural. This is what God has called the church to be and do.

## I. Devotion and definition describe the church. (42)

Look at the four areas of devotion (commitment) that defined the early church. Each area is marked by the definite article “the”. The apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, the prayers, which means that these are defined. The apostles teaching speaks of the doctrines that the apostles taught which became identified as the word (logos) of God. The fellowship was not a generic, loose-knit, fuzzy gathering of people who came and went. It was the fellowship. It was defined. Just like the apostles teaching was substantive and specific, the fellowship was identified and defined. You knew who was in and who wasn’t (which by the way, this has always been the case with God’s people. I will be unpacking this more and more as we go through the book of Acts. But, right here at the outset, Luke gives us a summary of what happened. Luke does this over and over in the book of Acts. At the end of each section he gives a summary. Two ideas stand out in this summary: 1) Devotion and 2) Definition. Devotion and definition describe the life of the early church. In fact, devotion and definition correspond to one another. Definition fuels devotion. Let me explain.

Perhaps you have heard of the term “ghosting.” Ghosting refers to the sudden disappearance of a person without any notice or warning. The WSJ did an article on this recently because businesses are discovering that an employee will simply not show up for work. They simply quit, moved on and did not tell anyone because it would have been awkward and they didn’t want to go through that, so they got another job and were gone. Calls are blocked, emails are blocked, social media accounts are blocked. Poof! They are gone. It happens in relationships. You are dating a guy, you think things are going well, then poof! He’s gone. No warning, no “hey, I’m sorry this isn’t going to work out, I really don’t like you” just poof, gone. Your texts are blocked. Your calls are blocked. It’s as if he doesn’t exist. Btw, ghosting is not a new social phenomenon; it is just being a jerk. But, sociologists look at this and conclude that people are commitment adverse. They don’t like to get pinned out and have their options removed, as if that is rocket science. But, it sure is difficult to get anything done. So, in response to this cultural ambivalence, companies are making job offers and then saying, “you have 24 hours to accept or the offer is gone.” They are simply trying to force people to actually make a decision.

For years now, churches have gotten themselves into a dangerous habit. They have looked to the culture for its trends and have tried to wrap the church with the trends of the culture. The idea is this: if we are going to be relevant to our world, we have to get out in front of what they want so that we can provide that. Well, the culture does not want commitment. So, I am told, if you want to “grow your church” do not place commitments on people. It will scare them off. People go to Wendy’s for the shakes, to McDonalds for the coffee, to Burger King for the Fries, to Chik-fil-A for the sandwiches, to Taco Bell for the Burritos, etc. If your church is going to survive, you have to offer some attractive menu options that will entice people to come. Don’t expect them to commit, but you can at least entice them by this or that. Do you see the fatal flaws of that? 1) There is nothing supernatural about attracting a crowd by entertaining them and giving them what they want. 2) Since when do we surrender the calling and message of the church to the expectations of the culture? You can build a crowd on giving people what they want in the

moment, but you cannot build a church on it. What happened when Jesus fed the 5,000? They were thrilled! They were attracted. They were excited. This was fun. But, then Jesus said that if you want to follow me, take up your cross, every day. Your mom and dad will most likely reject you, and you have to be ok with that because I am worth it. Your world will most likely hate you, but you have to be ok with that, because I am worth it. You will most likely be persecuted, lose your job, friends, home maybe, but that's okay, I am worth it and my Father will take care of you. What happened then? "Hey, thanks for the fish, Jesus. And that bread? Wow, great touch on the bread, it wasn't too hard, or too doughy, but I gotta go, you know, I'll catch ya later." They ghosted Jesus, right? The early church was not built because they tried to attract people with the benefits of the gospel, it was built because they demanded devotion to the gospel.

We are counter-cultural! We are the embassy of the eternal kingdom in this present dying kingdom. We are an aroma of life in the mausoleum of this culture. We do not get our marching orders from sociological studies that observe that people do not like commitment. We are people of commitment. They devoted themselves. We devote ourselves. We do not hold back. We are all in. But, what we are devoted to has definition.

## II. They were devoted to the Word.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching." Look at that word devoted. That is a participle. It is an adjective (description) that is formed from a verb (action). This participle is a present active participle which means that it has the idea of persistence and continual action. They persistently and continuously committed themselves to the apostles teaching. What the apostles are saying is called, "the apostles teaching" here. (SLIDE) But, in 4.31; 6.2, 7; 8.14; 11.1; 13.5, 7, 44, 46; 16.32; 17.13 and 18.11 it is called the Word of God. Do you see what is going on? The book of Acts tells the story of the spread of Christianity by telling us the story of how churches are popping up from Jerusalem to Rome. But, the formation of and raising up of churches is the result of the spread of the Word of God. The Word of God forms the people of God. That means that Word of God defines us. It also means that the Word of God is itself defined. The Word of God is not my word, or your word. The Word of God was what God spoke to the apostles who said it and recorded it.

The message of the church only has authority to the extent that she says what God says. The church fails when she asks people to be devoted to something that the Word of God does not speak to. The church also fails when she does not ask people to be devoted to that which the Word of God does speak to. This is something that you hear regularly in our church, so I am not going to beat this point to death. But, I want to tease out a bit this idea of being devoted to the Word by leading us into thinking through, what does it mean for us to be devoted to the Word? What can we do to be people of the Word?

Embrace the priority of the Word. We expect the men who preach in this pulpit to be prepared to speak. We expect them to study, to be accurate, to give us a formidable dinner to feed us and sustain us. We expect them to give careful attention to the meaning of the word, the meaning the phrases, the context and to speak to our hearts. We expect them to pray, to be real, to be surrendered to the text. Everything that we expect of the preacher, we need to expect of the listener. If you expect me to show up, you need to show up. If you expect me to preach well, you

should be prepared to listen well. If I need to work on eliminating things that are distractions to the Word, so do you. If I need to give priority to the sermon through careful preparation, then you need to give priority to the sermon through careful participation. It takes energy and focus to deliver a good sermon and it takes energy and focus to listen. In other words, go to bed on Saturday night at a decent time so that you have the energy to listen. It takes energy to remain focused to a sermon especially to be engaged with issues that often force us to grapple with things in our hearts. Guard what you do on Saturday night and Sunday morning. If you spend the evening, entertaining yourself to death and the morning watching TV, the news, Sports Center, YouTube, etc., then you come with a mind already cluttered with a lot of stuff, much of which is unnecessary and frankly, unhelpful. Some of you “have a hard time paying attention” because you have already given your attention away. Imagine going home this afternoon and turning on a football game and finding it difficult to pay attention to the game because the Word has so dominated your thinking!

Another idea, bring your Bible. Seriously, bring your Bible and read the text with me. Here is not a rule, but a suggestion for you to consider. Many of you have the Bible on your phones. That can be a good thing. For some of you, that may not be a good thing. For example, if your phone is constantly sending you important Facebook notifications that your friend Michelle just bought a sushi roll at Kroeger, or your weather app is warning you that a snow flake was just spotted in Brighton, or your Detroit News app just warned you that traffic is slow around the airport, all of these things are interruptions that take you away from the Word. Thomas White is the president at Cedarville University, a wonderful Christian college. They have chapel every day of the school week, where over 3,000 students gather, M-F to sing and hear the Word. Dr. White suggested to the students that they turn off their phones and simply bring their Bibles.

Another idea. Write down one line from the sermon that was challenging and helpful to you. Then, after the service, share that with at least three other people. If you just found that line to be challenging and helpful, then write it down and share it with 3 people. What happens when you talk with other people about the Word that y’all just heard together? What happens is that Word is informing your conversation. The Word is informing and driving your fellowship.

### III. **They were devoted to the Fellowship.**

These peoples were persistently and consistently devoted to THE fellowship. THE fellowship had definition. Again, this was not a loose-knit, undefined blob. There has always been definition for the people of God. In the OT, there were people who were in the camp, and who were out of the camp. There was circumcision that identified which men were in and which ones weren’t. That same concept is found in the NT church. Those who were baptized were baptized because they believed. They believed, then they belonged. Believe, then belong. What does it mean to belong? It means to be devoted to the Word and to be devoted to the people of the Word.

#### **A. Their devotion to the Word was evidenced by their devotion to the Fellowship.**

People who follow Jesus become part of the church. They are persistently and continuously committed to the other followers of Jesus. We will see what this looks like in the coming verses

and chapters. This mutual commitment, this bond is threatened by hypocrisy and deceit. But, these believers were devoted to protecting the fellowship, by fighting for the fellowship, by pursuing the unity of the fellowship and seeking to stand guard against the things that would threaten the fellowship. A person who is devoted to the Word is going to be devoted to the Fellowship. At the same time...

**B. Their devotion to the Fellowship was informed by and driven by their devotion to the Word.**

The Word of God tells me that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. The Word of God tells me that people from an immoral background, moral background, and religious background are all in equal need of Jesus. A Jew does not have an inside track and is no better than a Gentile. A male is not more valuable than a female. The wealthy business owner does not have a higher standing than a high school dropout. In the church, the 5-star general stands level with the private. Our fellowship is informed by and driven by the Word and that makes us radically different. In the early church, the prostitute who had turned from her sin and washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair (Luke 7) stood next to and equal to Nicodemus who was the Teacher of teachers to the Pharisees. That woman was forgiven of her sexual immorality and Nicodemus was forgiven of his self-righteousness. How much grace did it take for the woman to be forgiven? An infinite amount. How much grace did it take for Nicodemus to be forgiven? An infinite amount. Both were in the church by grace. Both were amazed by grace. And the fact that they could stand together and sing together and together enjoy this grace would make their world shake their heads in disbelief because the supernatural word of God forms and shapes the supernatural fellowship of the people of God.

Some people have a skewed view of this. They have this idea that they can study the Word and be informed as to the content of the Word without actually being part of the people of God. What would it look like for people to only be devoted to learning the Word and not to the fellowship? In other words, I will attend church because I like to listen to the sermon, but I have no interest in actually applying it and obeying it? That is hypocrisy. And some of you need to really muse on this. Do not deceive yourself. If you are going to be devoted to the Word, then you are going to be devoted to the fellowship. The Word has definition and so does the fellowship. There is a definition, there is a means of identifying what a church is and who is in it and who is not.

Conversely, what would it look like for people to only be devoted to the Fellowship, but not to the Word? Hey, these are great people to hang out with. They are kind, compassionate, friendly, honest, etc. But what happens is the glue that holds the group together is not the Word of God mediated by and applied by the Spirit of God. The glue of the gospel, the glue of the Word of God is supernaturally sticky and it will hold a Jew, Gentile, old, young, 5-star general, private, rich, poor, male, female, republican, democrat, even wolverine, spartan and buckeye in a bond that cannot be torn apart. No other glue is sticky enough.

**C. The Fellowship is the Congregation.**

At this point in the history of the church, the universal church and the local church were the same thing. The local church in Jerusalem gathered together as a group to hear the Word of God and

they gathered together in groups to fellowship. The fellowship was a group that was so defined and so marked by how they treated each other, that the noun (fellowship – koinonia) ended up being a verb (to fellowship). The congregation is the church and the church (the fellowship) is the focal point of God's plan on this earth.

Now, I am going to stop here for this week and finish the last two points next week. But I want to leave you with a final thought that I think will encourage and challenge you. What happened here in Acts 2, was a powerful miracle from God that caught the attention of the people so that they would listen to the Word of God. This same sort of thing happened in Samaria, then in Lydda, Joppa, Cyprus, Iconium, and Lystra. But, when we revisit those cities. When Paul ends up going back to these places, Luke does not talk about miracles that keep happening, but the preaching of the gospel keeps happening and the church continues to be strengthened and people continue to be reached. The miraculous signs give way to the miraculous life of the church. In other words, a local church, gathered by the Word of God, held together by the gospel and the Spirit is now the miracle. When people who are natural enemies belong together in a family that loves one another – that is supernatural. I think that is what Jesus was talking about when he said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13.35)

If you really love Jesus, you will love his church and if you love his church then you will have affection, concern and commitment to her.

#### IV. **They were devoted to the breaking of bread.**

- A. Their fellowship was expressed by time together.
  - i. The challenge of food (eating) prep, preference, etc.
- B. Their fellowship centered on Christ.
- C. The word told them what kind of people they were, who they were part of, and how to be a family.

#### V. **They were devoted to prayer.**

And that brings challenges. But, those challenges are designed by God to help you look like Jesus.