

Title: All In, pt.3
Text: Acts 2.42-47
Theme: How the gospel shapes the life of the church
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The gospel creates, shapes and fills the life of the church.

Read Text:

Slide

Does anyone know when we, as a nation celebrate Independence Day? (July 4 [1776])

Does anyone know when we, as a nation celebrate Constitution Day? (September 17 [1787])

The Jewish Passover celebrates the serious, terrifying, yet incredible deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt under the direction of Moses. Leaving Egypt is one thing. But just because you can break the bonds of slavery does not mean that you can live as a free people. How does a nation of slaves live together? Think about that! These people have never known freedom and are now free. What was it that held them together? Why didn't they all just say, "hey thanks for the jail-break Moses, were out of here? The Old Covenant people of God (Israel) pre-figured the New Covenant people of God (the church). We are not Israel, we are the church. But, we stand on their shoulders. The church was born in Jerusalem. Our roots are Jewish roots. We learn a lot from Israel history. For example...

50 days after the exodus from Egypt, Moses, after leading the nation of Israel to Mt. Sinai, (the same place where he witnessed the burning bush), received from God, the 10 commandments and the rest of the law. The law was the constitution for the people of God. Passover was their redemption and their deliverance. Mt. Sinai was the formation of the people into a nation.

In the OT law, the nation was given holidays (Holy days) to remember and to celebrate. It is fascinating and fitting to read all about the original Passover in Egypt and see how that event not only delivered the nation, but how Passover pointed forward 2,000 years to Christ. But, there is another holiday that Israel was given to celebrate. It was called the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23.15-16). This festival was celebrated 50 days after Passover and it was designed to thank God for the spring harvest and it became a time to thank God for giving them the law.

As the Greek language became commonplace in that part of the world, that holiday called the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot became known as Pentecost since that word comes from the Greek word for 50. Once again, the parallels are striking. Just as the original Passover was the occasion for the OT people of God to be delivered (Independence Day), and Pentecost remembered their receiving of the law that formed them and forged them into a nation (Constitution Day), so in Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection at the Passover time was the occasion for the NT people of God to be delivered, Pentecost was the time when the NT people of God were formed into a new people and forged into a new nation called, the church. Do you see the point? We are brought together, formed together and held together by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. The word of God forms the people of God. The word of God gives us life. It makes us alive and

it keeps us alive. What kind of a life is it? We are given eternal life and life together. They are one and the same. Eternity is not you sitting by a pool all by yourself watching Netflix or reading mystery novels. This life from God is a life that we share with each other. Acts 2 (and the rest of the book for that matter) tells us how we are supposed to live as the re-constituted (New Covenant) people of God. Christianity is a team sport. And the Bible tells us what life in the family (or on the team) looks like. As we have seen, the life of a believer has devotion and definition. (review) We are devoted to the Word of God. We are devoted to the fellowship. The Word of God creates the people of God who live as a people and their life together is marked by eating together (spending time together) and praying together. This summary by Luke (42-47) says a lot. Yes, this is a large group of people. The early church was a very large local congregation that was committed to caring for each other and were doing it. People were not being neglected. People knew about the needs of one another and were helping one another out. People were inviting other people over to their homes in order to feed them. What was true formally (believe, then belong) was a reality that the people experienced. They really belonged because their brothers and sisters mattered to them.

The specter of persecution was present. The disapproval and threats by the authorities were serious (as we will see in the next chapter). Getting baptized was going public with your faith in Christ. When you get baptized you put on the jersey of Jesus and if you ever look at the back of the jersey, there is a target on it. Every believer was taking a risk. But, it was more than the threat of persecution that forged a comradery, it was the glue of the gospel mediated by the Spirit of God that made them a sticky family.

I. **The Church is ordinary people living extraordinary lives as if it is ordinary.** (42, 44-47a)

So, these almost 3,000 people in the city of Jerusalem hear Peter's sermon on the gospel and they believe it. They trust in Christ and then get baptized. They are now initiated into the group. Now what? Is there an ABF to attend? A series of classes to take? A notebook, or on-line program to sign up for? A small group to connect with? A ministry to volunteer for? What? What is described in these verses is ordinary people living out the implications of the extraordinary gospel. Therefore, these ordinary people live what appears to be extraordinary lives and because they keep doing it, these extraordinary lives appear to be ordinary life for the church. This is how the people of God are to live.

The signs and wonders of the apostles fade with time because over time, the apostles die. What is not supposed to fade is the extraordinary life of the people of God. This is the church. This is the New Covenant people of God. They spend time with one another. They are in a community of believers. They come together and they keep coming together. They gather together and they keep gathering together. They eat together and they keep eating together. They pray together and they keep praying together. Look at v.44. "*And all who believed were together.*" And right here from the very start, we see that the church is people.

A. **The church is people.**

There is no church building. They come together in the temple courts and in their homes. They do not have a building. They do not have a nursery. They do not have a youth group. They do not have a choir. They do not even have a personnel committee. How can you have a church without a personnel committee? Inconceivable! They do not have a softball program. They do not have summer camps and winter advances. They are just people who, in the shadow of the cross and under the threatening and terrifying watch of the Sanhedrin, risking rejection from their families and excommunication from the synagogues, they declare allegiance to Christ. And they gather together. For some, it is because they left their people to become his people.

Have you ever wondered why is this group so needy? Don't they have jobs? Are they homeless? What is the deal? Some of them (according to verses 9-10) were from out of the country and probably stayed longer than they had anticipated and needed some extra accommodations. But, I am guessing that something else is going on. I speculate that for many of them, when they went home and told their families that they were followers of the crucified one, they were thrown out of their homes! To be associated with Jesus was to identify yourself with the plague and with a criminal who was an enemy of Rome and the Sanhedrin. If you associated yourself with Jesus, you might as well give the authorities your address to come and arrest you and harass your family. Your dad could not afford to lose his business contacts. Your mom could not stand the shame in the market. For some of these believers they probably gathered together all of the time because they had nowhere else to go. This is the church. This is how she was birthed.

Let's chew on this for a minute because Christianity has gotten itself into all sorts of trouble when it has forgotten or dismissed this point. If we replace the church as people, with the church as a building, then we will attempt to substitute the awe of the lives of the people with the awe of a building. I've been to some incredible buildings that call themselves a church. They are designed to awe, overwhelm, impress and in many cases, intimidate. So, when you walk into one of these places with ginormous ceilings, incredible architecture, resonating acoustics, phenomenal craftsmanship, it is impressive. And you feel small. You have come into the church – or have you? Actually, you haven't. That building doesn't know your name. It doesn't know your story. It doesn't know who you belong to. It doesn't know your fears, insecurities, losses, hopes, dreams and failures. That building cannot take you out for some coffee, listen to your questions, give you something to eat, place an arm around you and pray. That building cannot read the Bible to you. The building can provide a place where the church can gather. It is nice, but not necessary when the building reflects the gathering. The building is not God's house. The people are. We are the body of Christ. And this response by the people came from the people. It was not yet organized, it was a groundswell that later on needed organization. But this is the heart. You can do something that no building can do. You can talk to people. You can learn their name. You can pray for them and with them. You can invite them to eat with you. You can give attention and affection to the souls around you.

B. The life of the church appears to be extraordinary.

What is so extraordinary about these people? They immediately began to take care of one another. They were together. They ate together. They got to know one another. They learned about the problems that people were facing and they set out to help address them. People needed food, this takes money. So, people bought extra food and (when and if they needed to and

wanted to) they sold things on craigslist and NextDoor that they didn't need in order to have money to pay for things that people needed. It was probably a bit chaotic and disorganized, but as time goes on (as we see in chapters 5 and 6) a little more organization comes into play, but these believers were all in. When you became a follower of Christ you became part of the followers of Christ and their needs were your needs. This was a community of believers who really cared for one another.

Verse 46 adds a little bit more detail. The people gathered daily in the temple courts. They ate together in their homes. The homes of the believers became outposts for ministry. The kitchen tables became Sunday school classes and small group meetings. Life was not compartmentalized into school, church, work and home. It was all one life in Christ and with the people of God. And no, this was not socialism or communism. Communism is when the government takes everything from you, keeps most of it for itself and then distributes what is left to those it thinks should have it. Here, no one said that you had to sell stuff and buy food. It was a matter of the heart. They loved one another. They wanted to do this because other people mattered to them. Look at v.46. I love v.46. *"they received their food with glad and generous hearts."* This is beautiful!! There is no entitlement here, is there? The people who had, shared with those who didn't have and who needed it. Those who received it, were grateful. They were the recipients of grace. They received it with glad and generous hearts, meaning, they were looking out as to how they could be a blessing as well. This is what the gospel does to people.

The heart of the gospel is the concept of grace. We were the enemies of God. We were rebels who rejected his rightful rule over our lives. God had every right to condemn us. In fact, God's justice demanded that our sin be punished and the logical expectation was that we would be punished for our high crimes and treason. But, instead of crushing us with his terrifying righteousness, God sent Christ who was crushed in our place. *"he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed."* (Isaiah 53.5b) He received the crushing. He received the chastisement. He received the stripes and we are given peace. We are given wholeness. We are given righteousness. Look at what he got and look at what we got. Look at what he deserved and look at what he got. Look at what we deserved and look at what we got. That is extraordinary. When you come to faith in Christ, Christ takes your sin and credits you with his righteousness. He takes the debt of your sin and gives you his infinite righteousness.

The gospel is extraordinary because grace is extraordinary. If you have truly experienced God's extraordinary and lavish grace and have come to faith in Jesus, wouldn't your life look extraordinary? Wouldn't the life of the people of the gospel, the people of grace, the people of the church look extraordinary? There is nothing supernatural about only talking with people you already know. Anybody can do that. There is nothing amazing about hanging out with people who are your age, who look like you, think like you, make you feel important, or safe. Anybody can do that. There is nothing unusual about feeling lost in a crowd and feeling as if no one really knows you and that you really don't know anyone else. Anyone can feel that. And many of you do. So, what are you going to do about that? Are you going to wait for someone else to make the first move? There is nothing unusual about that. You don't have to rely on God's Spirit to give you grace to get out of your comfort zone if you always expect other people to meet you and come to you and make the first move. Do you know the names of the people in row in front of

you, behind you, or around you? Do you have any idea how you can pray for them, encourage them, bless them? Do they have any idea of how they can pray for you, encourage you, or bless you? You are invited to put your requests on the communication card so the staff can pray for you. But, what if, before you left today someone asked you if they could pray with you and you with them?

II. **The ordinary, extraordinary life of the church attracts people to the extraordinary gospel of Jesus.** (43, 47)

Awe came upon the people. Awe came upon every soul. I love how Luke puts that! Their care for one another was noticed by the people around them. Even those who were hostile to Christ and the gospel were impressed by this care and the way Luke writes it, it sounds like this care was leveraged by the Spirit of God to cause many more people to investigate Christianity and then believe the gospel. How did the church reach so many people? By being the church. It was not a massive marketing campaign. The ordinary life of the church was extraordinary because it echoed grace.

Right now, China has launched a wave of persecution against Christians. Churches are being closed, leaders are being imprisoned, and Christians are being interrogated. It appears to be pretty systemic. We are right to be concerned for our brothers and sisters in Christ and to pray for them. But while I am concerned for my brothers and sisters, I pity the Chinese leaders because they have chosen a war that they cannot win. China is a very old nation and should know her history. She has tried to eradicate Christianity before, it doesn't work. Truth cannot die. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. She will live but she lives by extraordinary means. How does she live when all of the political forces are against her? She lives because the church is the church and God uses that. Let me give you an example from history.

The Roman Empire had a problem. How do you get all of these nations and peoples that you have conquered to work together and be unified? You conquered them. It's not as if the nations like you. That is why running an empire is like playing whack-a-mole. There is always a rebellion to address. So, taking a page out of Nebuchadnezzar's playbook, Rome decided to organize everyone around the same religion. We will all worship, Caesar. Well the Christians said, "Uh, no-can-do, sorry." Well, we can't have that since if you let one group not join in, then everyone will want to be exempted, so persecution broke out against the Christians. You have to worship Caesar! This ebbed and flowed depending on who was emperor. But while the Roman emperor was trying to control the worship life of the empire, there was something he could not control. He could not control plagues. The first major plague to hit the Roman Empire did so around 165 and a second one came around 251. It was quite likely smallpox. The first plague lasted around 15 years and probably killed between one fourth and one third of the population. The second one hit around the time the emperor wanted to persecute Christians. But here's what happened.

Since there were no vaccines or medicines to fight the diseases, the doctors, the officials and about anyone who could, got out of the cities in order to avoid contact with the diseased. If you went to the local god or goddess temple to pray for the sick and get comfort from the priest, you would find that the priest was gone. People were in a panic. At the first sign of the disease, the

sick would be abandoned for fear of others getting it, except for the Christians. The Christians would not leave their own. At risk to their own lives, they cared for their own. And yes, some of them got sick and died, but many did not. And the result was, when the plague was done, not only did most of the Christians live (which meant that percentage wise there were many more Christians), but many of the sick who were abandoned by their families were cared for by Christians and then became Christians themselves. Awe fell upon the people. They thought that the Christians had some sort of medical magic. They had love, care, and of course, much prayer. Some of the emperors before Constantine attempted to stomp out the church, but it was the empire that got stomped. No war can destroy God's love.

As I prepared this sermon this week, so many of you came to mind. I know that we can improve in this, but I also know there are many of you who get this and you live like this and it shows. I am so grateful to be your pastor and to call you brothers and sisters. The meals you make for one another, the way you help each other get to doctor's appointments and find places to live, and get your stuff moved, and watch the kids while someone runs errands, etc. It's good. For others...

Have you ever considered making some extra bread and extra soup on Saturday night so that you can intentionally invite someone over to your home after the service? Have you ever considered putting some extra money aside so that you can ask someone to join you for lunch (if you like to go out) and pay for their meal so you can get to know them?

Have you ever considered not filling up your Sunday afternoons with other things, so that you can spend the Lord's Day with the Lord's people? This is not ordinary stuff, is it? I know that. But Jesus is not ordinary and grace is not ordinary. Therefore, his people (the church) is not to be ordinary. Take a step today. One step. Find someone whose name you do not know and introduce yourself to them before you leave.

Conclusion: Christianity is not an app, it is an operating system