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Becoming Together - I
Acts 2:42-47
February 19, 2017, Jeff Germo

Last week we finished our series on Jesus' *Parable of the Soils*. In our preservice prayer meeting last Sunday, Lou Anderson, one of our elders, reminded me that in the Gospel of Mark, when the disciples asked Jesus what the parable meant, he replied,

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Mark 4:13 (NLT)

¹³“If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?”

Lou commented that Jesus was saying that this parable is foundational to all his other teachings and is key to understanding everything else he taught. I was glad he said that because for some reason that had slipped right by me.

“If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?”

In this parable, Jesus was teaching about how the process of growth works. It is foundational to everything else. The main thrust of Jesus and the Apostles's teaching was about growing in the fruit of the Spirit. That is what discipleship is all about.

Today we are starting a brand new series called *Becoming Together*, based on Acts 2:42-47. The book of Acts falls immediately after the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Gospels (Good News of Jesus) are accounts of Jesus' life to prove that he was, in fact, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Matthew and John were two of the twelve closest disciples of Jesus. Mark was an apprentice of the Apostles Paul and Peter. Luke was a companion of Paul on many of his missionary journeys. In Colossians 4:14, Paul called Luke a doctor.

And it was Luke who also wrote the book of Acts. Acts begins the same way Luke ends. Let's read the ending of Luke to help us set the context.

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Luke 24:45–53 (NLT)

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷ It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of all these things.

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⁴⁹ “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.” ⁵⁰ Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. ⁵² So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. ⁵³ And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

Here's the beginning of Acts. Notice the similarities.

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Acts 1:1–9 (NLT)

¹ In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. ³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

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⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

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⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.

So, Luke *begins* the book of Acts the same way he *ended* his Gospel account. Jesus tells his disciples that they should wait in Jerusalem where he would send the Holy Spirit who would come on them in power, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit they would be his witnesses. And then Luke says Jesus ascended to heaven, taken up into a cloud while the disciples watched.

In Matthew’s Gospel account, the last thing Jesus told his disciples before he ascended to heaven was this:

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Matthew 28:18–20 (NLT)

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I imagine this would have been a very surreal time for the disciples. They had just spent every day with Jesus for three years. He trained them to carry on his work. They watched him perform miracles. They listened to him teach. Then he gave them authority to do the same, and *he* watched them minister to others. Then they would regroup and debrief and he would give them feedback about how they were doing. Then he would send them out two by two to go to various towns and villages without him. And they would return and debrief again and he would teach them again.

They did this type of training with Jesus for three intense years. Near the end of their time with him he began to tell them that he would soon be arrested and tried and ultimately crucified, and then raised from the dead on the third day. He told them several times, but each time it went over their heads. When it finally happened they were dumbfounded. It was like they had never heard it before; until they saw him go up into the clouds.

It’s always good to try to put yourself into the shoes of the disciples. What would it have been like for them? Jesus had just been crucified. Three days later he rose from the dead and over the next forty days he spent time with various of his disciples teaching them about the Kingdom of God, Luke said.

That time must have been surreal for them. I imagine, even more than before he had died, they would have hung on his every word.

He then tells them that *they* had to continue on his work of making more disciples. Then they watch as he floats up into the clouds. Luke said they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit to show up.

There were about 120 of them waiting in a room in Jerusalem. This was the first church plant after Jesus had been crucified. The disciples were afraid and hiding out. And then while this church was meeting one day the Holy Spirit fell on them with power and they all began to praise God loudly in many different languages that were unknown to them. The noise of them all speaking together at the same time was so loud that it drew a crowd from Jerusalem who came to hear what was going on. Their hiding days were over.

Thousands of people gathered around, amazed because what they heard was all these people speaking in their own mother tongues; several different languages. The people asked what was going on, which gave Peter, newly empowered by the Holy Spirit, the opportunity to preach his first sermon since Jesus rose from the dead.

He told them how Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

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Acts 2:37–41 (NLT)

³⁷ Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" ³⁸ Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" ⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

So, now that small church of 120 becomes an instant mega-church. Three thousand people were baptized on that one day. That must have been quite the celebration. And it presented all kinds of problems that happen when you get a bunch of people together and try to get them on the same page. So, they started to organize themselves. Here's the main passage we are looking at for the next several weeks.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

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⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

So, Jesus had been crucified. He had risen from the dead. They watched him ascend to heaven. They received the power of the Holy Spirit. Business could not go on as usual. Just imagine how single minded they must have been. They had a mission from Jesus. They were to be his witnesses on earth to make more disciples. Everything they did revolved around that mission. Their businesses, their school, their interactions in the community, everything was about the mission. They saw all of life through the lens of the mission of Jesus. For those first disciples, the mission to reach lost people for Jesus was worth giving up everything for.

This is exactly how it should be for us as well. The mission is no less urgent today than it was then. As a matter of fact, it is even more urgent. If those disciples were living in the last days, 2,000 years ago, we are more so.

Notice Luke says those first disciples **devoted** themselves to four things, it says in verse 42.

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The Greek word for “devoted” (*proskartereow*) means “to actively and persistently participate in something.” They actively and persistently participated in four very important things: **1. The teaching of the Word; 2. Fellowship with each other; 3. Eating together; and 4. Prayer.**

How many of you are Canucks fans? How many of you would call yourselves “devoted” Canucks fans? How many of you have travelled to Vancouver to attend a game? How many of you own a Canucks jersey? I have one that someone gave me for Christmas one year. I’ve never been able to get myself to wear it. I’ve never even tried it on. I am not a devoted Canucks fan.

I am sort of a Calgary Flames fan. I rarely watch a game. I check the standings every once in a while to see how far ahead of the Canucks they are, and how far behind the Oilers - this season. I have a two foot high plastic Calgary Flames player in the window of my office, not so much because I am a devoted Flames fan, but simply to bug Adrian and Jackie who are Oilers fans, and Steve and everyone else who are Canucks fans.

I’m more of a Toronto Raptors basketball fan. Ruthie and I record their games and watch them as we have time. But still, I wouldn’t call myself a devoted fan. I wouldn’t sacrifice much for the team. It sort of makes me feel good when they win and a wee bit bummed for a mega-second when they lose, but it doesn’t *really* matter to me. I don’t contribute financially to the Raptors franchise. I don’t travel to see any of their games. So, in the sense that Acts 2 talks about being devoted, I am nowhere close. I am quite a passive fan.

But even if I was a very devoted fan and I traveled to games and wore their jersey and ball cap and waved their flag, I could do all that and it wouldn’t contribute one bit to whether or not they won or lost. The only way that I could contribute like that is to play the game with them. The problem is they won’t let me. I haven’t asked them. I am just assuming that to be the case for too many obvious reasons, the main one being that I would contribute more to them losing than winning.

Friends, God is not calling us to simply be devoted fans of Jesus who come to church and sit in the pews and cheer like we would go to a hockey game, sit in the stands and cheer on our favourite team, however misguided our choice of team might be. He is calling each of us, as followers of Jesus, to actually get in the game and actively and persistently participate in the greatest mission on earth. And unlike with the Canucks, or the Raptors, or the Flames, nobody gets rejected from the mission of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has gifted and called each of us to participate.

Over the next few weeks we are going to take a closer look at each of these things the first disciples devoted themselves to: **1. The teaching of the Word; 2. Fellowship with each other; 3. Eating together; and 4. Prayer.**

That sounds like a Growth Group doesn't it? Many of you are in Growth Groups and you have experienced these things first hand in a very real way. Some of our Growth Groups have divided at least once, and some more times, and have planted other groups to make more room for more seekers and followers of Jesus.

If in our Growth Groups we devote ourselves to the same things the early church devoted themselves to, we will grow.

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Just look at what happened in the early church.

45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Each day more people were added to the kingdom. Why?

What was happening here is that the disciples, over 3,120 of them by now, were out in the community loving on people around them. They were spreading the love of Jesus to whoever crossed their paths. They were using the gifts God had given them to meet the needs of their community. And look what happened!

And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Let's put our imaginations in gear. Look with eyes of faith a year down the road. What do you see? What do you see God using you for? What does CRBC look like a year from now? Remember that God is able to do far more than we can ask, think, or imagine, so imagine big.

Look further down the road. What about five years? As we learn how to love each other, as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit and as others in our community see Jesus in us, what's going to happen? How could God use us to impact Campbell River with the Good News of Jesus? What kinds of community things could we be involved in that would take the life changing message to our city? Will the Lord add to our number daily those who are being saved because we are all faithfully doling out his grace, mercy, kindness, and love to our community?

Now, I know as some of you are trying to use your imaginations it is not inspiring you at all. Some of you can't even go there. Some of you are scared, and feel inadequate. Some of you are skeptical. You are not alone. I would say we are all there to a greater or lesser degree. None of us is adequate. God is not calling us to go out and hit people over the head with our Bibles. He is calling us to be his witnesses. We've talked about this before.

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Acts 1:8 (NLT)

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

If you are a follower of Jesus, if you have received the forgiveness of God through the cross of Jesus, you have his Spirit living in you. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead resides in you. Think about that. It's crazy.

Look at John 1.

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John 1:1–3 (NLT)

¹ In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He existed in the beginning with God. ³ God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

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So, we can see here that Jesus, as part of the Triune God, was the creator of the universe. That is a ton of power.

Travel back in your imaginations to the beginning of time, in Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning there was nothing but God – nothing. Try to imagine nothing. I would dare to say you cannot do it. If you try to imagine nothing you will think of darkness, but darkness is not nothing. It is something. It's impossible for us to imagine nothing. Our human minds cannot do that. But, the Bible says that in the beginning there was nothing but God. And then out of that nothingness he created everything that is.

“Let there be light.” Poof! “Oceans.” Poof! “Sun, moon, stars, trees, vegetation, birds, fish, animals, and his crowning glory, humankind.” Poof! By his Word, it was all created. He spoke it all into existence. Can you imagine that kind of power? No you can't. It's too awesome to comprehend.

Now, here's where it gets even crazier. There are a whole bunch of verses in the Bible that tell us that Jesus lives in us.

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Romans 8:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.

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Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

²⁰ My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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2 Corinthians 4:6–7 (NLT)

⁶ For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

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2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you...

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Ephesians 3:17 (NLT)

17 Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

That is just a sampling of the Scriptures that tell us that Jesus lives in us. Think about that. The same power that created the heavens and the earth lives in you.

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We have a very small vision of what God can do through us. **Just think for a minute what God could do through us if we let him.** Let your imagination run wild. What if we were all in the game? Our problem is that we have very small imaginations. God wants to increase our vision of him so that he can do the impossible through us.

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The same power that created the heavens and the earth resides in you. Don't let that truth slip by without weighing the implications of it. What does that mean for you and me?

Look at how Paul continued in Ephesians 3.

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Ephesians 3:20–21 (NLT)

20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

What do you think God wants to do through you? How could God use CRBC to bless Campbell River so he gets the glory? He is able to do infinitely more than we might ask for or even think. He wants to change Campbell River through us, one person at a time.

When you think of all the people that come across our paths as we walk through our lives, how many opportunities do you think we miss for various reasons? This stuff isn't rocket science. What Jesus wants to do in us is to so change us ***so that*** as we are living our lives at work, at school, and in our communities, others would notice the change and see Jesus in us.

Try to imagine what would happen if each of us here really asked God to open our eyes to what he was doing around us and then joined him in that work. Use your imagination. Let it run wild. Whatever you are able to imagine is a pittance of what God wants to do.

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In **Acts 1:8** when Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witness when the Holy Spirit came upon them, he wasn't giving them an order. He was telling them what would happen. "When the Holy Spirit comes on you, **you (the church. not you on your own) will be my witnesses.** You won't be able to help it. My Spirit will produce so much fruit in you that others will stand up and take notice of Me." They will know by how we love each other, Jesus said. That is why all our efforts must be on practicing how to love each other better.

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As we live out our lives with Jesus, **God is going to give us divine appointments.** He wants us to **keep our spiritual eyes open** so that we recognize his hand at work and then **join him** in it. He wants to change Campbell River through us, one person at a time.

At this point you may feel a little scared and inadequate. You may be thinking, "Who me? I am not a very good Christian. I am fearful. I never share my faith. I don't have any gifts to speak of. How in the world could God use me? I'm just going to keep my eyes looking at my feet so I don't get tripped up and make a fool of myself. I'm going to busy myself building my own empire so that I can justify my existence on this earth."

If you are feeling like that you are in the ranks of the normal. Don't worry. That is exactly how the disciples felt before they received the Holy Spirit. They couldn't even get along with each other, let alone with anyone else. They were fearful and hiding behind closed doors, afraid of getting persecuted. After Jesus rose from the dead he told his disciple to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them in power and that would change everything. And it did. You and I are sitting here this morning because they obeyed.

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This is why we have our Growth Groups — because we cannot do this alone. We cannot grow in isolation. If you are not in a Growth Group yet and if the Holy Spirit is prodding you, I would strongly suggest that you talk to Adrian after the service and find one to join. I can guarantee you, life will take on new meaning for you.

Today after the service, we are going to practice having community together. We have asked you to bring a bag lunch for yourselves and hang out. We will meet in the Fellowship Hall and room 101 and we will have the gym open for anyone who wants to play in there. As we eat together let's brainstorm about what God is doing at CRBC and look forward with eyes of faith to what he could do if each of us stepped out in faith.



Becoming Together - I
Acts 2:42-47
Week of February 19, 2017

Objective of this study: To understand our lives through the lens of the mission of Jesus.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalms 51:7-13** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

What is a favourite club you have been in? What did (or do) you enjoy about it?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Luke 24 and Acts 1-2 looking for some similarities between how Luke 24 ends and Acts 1 -2 begins.
 1. There was a question at the beginning of Acts 1 that the disciples asked Jesus. What was it? He didn't answer it. Why do you think he didn't answer it? What did he tell them instead?

Work (30-45 minutes)

(Be careful not apply this next part to someone else)

Sermon Quote: The early disciples "saw all of life through the lens of the mission of Jesus."

1. Read the following sermon quote and brainstorm about the questions. Try and be as specific as possible.

Sermon Quote: "Let's put our imaginations in gear. Look with eyes of faith a year down the road. What do you see? What do you see God using you for? What does CRBC look like a year from now? Remember that God is able to do far more than we can ask, think, or imagine, so imagine big.

Look further down the road. What about five years? As we learn how to love each other, as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit and as others in our community see Jesus in us, what's going to happen? How could God use us to impact Campbell River with the Good News of Jesus? What kinds of community things could we be involved in that would take the life changing message to our city? Will the Lord add to our number daily those who are being saved because we are all faithfully doling out his grace, mercy, kindness, and love to our community?"

2. Read the following sermon quote:

Sermon Quote: “As we live out our lives with Jesus, God is going to give us divine appointments. He wants us to keep our spiritual eyes open so that we recognize his hand at work and then join him in it. He wants to change Campbell River through us, one person at a time.”

3. When you live out your day, do you have your eyes open to the people around you and what God is doing?
4. Are there people in your life right now that the Holy Spirit is nudging you to share the love of Jesus with in some way? It may or may not be with words. Perhaps there is a practical way God wants to use you to love someone.
5. When you think about being this kind of Jesus follower how do you feel? Afraid? Anxious? Excited?...? What could you say to “encourage one another”?
6. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other and also for the people God has put on your hearts.