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Becoming Together - II
Teaching the Word
Acts 2:42-47
February 26, 2017, Jeff Germon

Last week we began our new series looking at the first church just after Jesus ascended to heaven following his resurrection. If you weren't here last week make sure you go to the website and watch or listen to the sermon because there is a lot of foundational background necessary to really understand what was going on in the text we are looking at in Acts 2:42-47.

Let's read our text again before we go on. Just as a reminder, Jesus has been crucified. He rose from the dead three days later. He then spent forty days with his disciples teaching them more about the Kingdom of God and reminding them what their purpose as his disciples was. And here, Luke describes what those first disciples focused their lives on. There are over three thousand of them at this point.

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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.

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So, over the next few weeks we are going to look at each of the things Luke says the first church devoted themselves to: **1. Teaching; 2. Fellowship; 3. Eating together; 4. Prayer.**

Today we are going to focus on the first thing they devoted themselves to, ***the apostles' teaching***. The obvious question for us here as we dig in should be, what did the apostles teach? This should be key for us because we need to focus on the same things the apostles were teaching. The apostles, here, refers to those close disciples who had spent time with Jesus while he was alive; his inner circle of apprentices.

Now, of course, Paul was later called an apostle. He did not hang out with Jesus before Jesus rose from the dead. But, he was specifically called by Jesus on the road to Damascus after Jesus' resurrection and given the mandate to reach out to the Gentiles with the Good News of Jesus. So, what teaching was this first church devoted to?

Likely the first thing they taught was the same thing Peter taught in his first sermon in Acts 2. They would have taught from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was really the Messiah, and that John the Baptist was a forerunner preparing the way for him, and that according to Scripture the Messiah would suffer and die. That was the elemental teaching that initially pierced the hearts of the crowd, of mostly Jews, when Peter preached and led 3,000 people to believe and be baptized on that one day. So, they already know that. Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. What else do they need to learn?

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Remember, prior to this, Jesus spent forty days with the disciples between his resurrection and ascension, teaching them about the Kingdom of God and what he wanted them to focus on. He told them in **Acts 1:8** to wait in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit would come on them in power to be witnesses who pointed to him. And if you recall from last week, Jesus wasn't giving them a command to go and be his witnesses. He was telling them what would happen when the Holy Spirit came on them in power.

At some point during this same time he told them the mission statement for the church. These were their marching orders. This is what they were to be about. Listen closely.

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Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

19 "...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."

So, the thing they were supposed to be about was what? He said that they were to be about making disciples by teaching them to obey Jesus.

What did Jesus command them to do?

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John 13:34-35 (NLT)

34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Okay, so this is the big key right here.

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Jesus said, in Acts 1:8 that when the Holy Spirit came on them in power they would be witness of Jesus. In John 13:35 he said that their love for each other would prove to the world that they are his disciples. If you add these two together, what do you come up with?

The way to point to Jesus is by loving each other. The only way we follow Jesus is by becoming better at loving others. There is no other way.

One of the religious leaders once asked Jesus what the most important command was. Look at how Jesus responded:

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Matthew 22:36-40 (NLT)

36 "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" 37 Jesus replied, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

"The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

How many of the laws does Jesus say are based on these commands? All of them. There is no law that does not hang on these. They all do. Every single law.

Look at what the Apostle Paul says:

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Galatians 5:14 (NLT)

¹⁴ For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

This seems to contradict what Jesus said. Jesus says two commands, Paul says one. Why the difference?

Remember in Matthew 25 when Jesus said that in the end he is going to gather all the nations together and he will separate them like a farmer separates the sheep from the goats.

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Matthew 25:33–40 (NLT)

³³ He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. ³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

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³⁷ “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? ³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’

So, how do we love God? We love God by loving each other. That is how people will know we are disciples of Jesus.

Let's put all this together. What did the teaching of the apostles focus on in the early church?

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The main focus of their teaching was on how to love each other. Why? So, that others would see Jesus in them and join them on their journey.

That is the mission of the church. It is what Jesus has commissioned us to do. We must never forget this. We have to keep this front and centre at all times. Every ministry of the church must have this as its ultimate purpose or it is not a ministry of the church.

This is why we have our Growth Groups. Our Growth Groups are designed purposefully to teach us how to love each other better. We are a bunch of broken people just like you, who get together and look at what God's Words says from what we studied in the sermon on the previous Sunday. We do this because Jesus commissioned us to make disciples who love each other. He did not simply tell us to gather on Sunday morning to listen to a talking head and then go home and feel good about ourselves because we fulfilled what we think is one of the commandments to meet together on the Lord's Day.

Nor did he tell us to simply study the Bible or theology or doctrine so we would have more knowledge *about* the Bible or *about* God. His mission is clear. Make disciples by teaching them how to love each other so that others would see Jesus in us and want to join us on our journey towards the heart of God.

So, these early disciples of Jesus, in the first church purposefully gathered around the mission of Jesus. They devoted themselves fully to it. They were persistent, active participants in the mission of Jesus.

Two or three weeks ago we took a look at *The One Anothers* from the New Testament. The *One Anothers* are all those places in the New Testament where Jesus or the apostles taught us either how to behave towards one another, or how *not* to behave towards one another. One of our Growth Groups took that to heart and they were brainstorming together about how we could use the *One Anothers* to encourage each other to put these things into practice. In the end what was decided is that we would use some photos from some of our photographers and post some weekly FB and email reminders to help us to remember to practice loving each other.

What a great idea! These are the kinds of things we need to be devoting ourselves to.

The writer of Hebrews wrote this:

[14]

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NLT)

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

Let's think of ways to motivate each other to love better. What other creative ways can we do this?

25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

As we said last week, the times are even more urgent for us today than they were for those first disciples. We are closer to the second coming of Jesus than we ever have been.

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How can we encourage each other to love better? What creative ways can we reach out to our community?

When the early church met together this is what they talked about. This was the business they were in. They met together often to plan and brainstorm and train each other how to lovingly reach out to their community with the Good News of Jesus.

After each of our services for this sermon series we are going to do the same. Last week we had an amazing time of fellowship and eating together. I was so encouraged by what I saw. I chatted with several couples who had stepped out of their comfort zones to come to and have lunch with us. Some of us have a hard time socially. Many of us are a bit socially awkward and doing these kinds of things does not come naturally to us.

That is why we need to practice. So, what I want to encourage you to do today is to move towards someone you don't know. Sit with another family you don't normally socialize with. Don't follow the path of least resistance. We all need to practice this because we don't naturally do it well.

After we eat together today we are going to look back and celebrate what we saw God do in and through CRBC in 2016 and we are going to look forward in faith to what we believe God wants to do through us in 2017. This is one of our regular annual meetings where we look at our financial statements from the previous year and our budget for the upcoming year. When I say it like that it sounds boring. It's not. It is very exciting to talk about the mission of Jesus. That is what the early church did every time they met together and that is what we are going to do today. We want you to remember and celebrate and dream with us.

Last week I encouraged you to use your imaginations and ask yourself what God could do through us if we let him work.

Remember what Paul said.

[16]

Ephesians 3:20 (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.

Jesus lives in us. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead and created the heavens and the earth lives in us and he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

The purpose of our business meetings should be to imagine together what God could do through us if we let him work. We should remind ourselves of the *One Anothers* every time we meet together. Every word out of our mouths at our business meetings should be like what the writer of Hebrews said.

[17]

Hebrews 10:24 (NLT)

²⁴ Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

Imagine what God could do through us if we lived like this.

Two years ago Pastor Steve took a team of young people to New York to work at Metro Ministries, the largest Sunday School in the World. Each week they take the love of Jesus to thousands of children in New York's roughest neighbourhoods. Steve has shared about this before. Metro started from the imagination of one man named Bill Wilson. Here's his story as told from the Metro's website:

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Abandoned on a street corner by his mother at the age of 12, Bill sat and waited for her at that corner for 3 days. She never came back. A Christian layman who was on his way to see his son in the hospital stopped and picked him up. Anybody could have stopped, but it was the Christian man who stopped. After getting him a hot meal, this gentleman paid for Bill to attend a Sunday School camp, where he gave his life to Christ. This was the start of his incredible walk with God – one that would change thousands of lives.

When no one would pray for him at the altar in that camp because of how he looked, he told Jesus "My mother doesn't want me; the Christians don't want me. If you want me, here I am." He never forgot the promise he made. Bill developed a heart of compassion for suffering children everywhere and he knew from his own experience that the emptiness and pain could only be filled by the love of Christ. Starting with a van full of needy children in Florida as a teen, Bill eventually conceptualized and developed several bus ministries in the United States. Every week, thousands of needy children would be picked up and brought to church to participate in a unique Sunday School program that incorporated music, games and most importantly, the Gospel.

Pastor Bill established Metro World Child (formerly Metro Ministries) in 1980 in what was one of Brooklyn's roughest neighbourhoods, most commonly known for its history of gang violence, crime, drugs, and poverty. Bill has been beaten, stabbed and shot in the face. Despite everyone telling him this could not be done, through all the difficult times, he persevered and refused to leave the area or give up on the children growing up in such an environment.

[Metro's] unique concepts of outreach and Sunday School programs, along with training courses and curriculum development, are now replicated globally. This ensures that as many children as possible come under the sound of the Gospel and experience the love of Christ as he did. What started in a small church on a corner in Brooklyn has now grown into an

international ministry that reaches over 150,000 children every week around the world in missions such as Kenya, the Philippines, South Africa, India, Indonesia and Haiti [and may I add, Campbell River].

Due to the success of Metro's influence, President George Bush, Sr. appointed Pastor Bill to serve on the National Commission on America's Urban Families in 1991. Metro's influence was also identified as a factor in the noticeable reduction of crime in the Bushwick community and the organization was featured on ABC's Nightline.

For the past two years, Steve and Adrian have been leading teams in Campbell River who are doing the same things in our neighbourhoods. They are taking the love of Jesus to people who normally don't go to church. In less than three weeks Steve is taking another team of young people to New York to be trained in the ministry and he and Adrian have a vision to send more teams in Campbell River to other sites so more people can hear about the love Jesus has for them.

That is only a small part of what God is doing in and through us at CRBC. Each of the ministries are moving forward in faith, trusting God to do infinitely more than we can dream up on our own.

What else could God do through us if we let him? Put your imaginations to work. Practice imagining. Practice dreaming. And then take some steps of faith and watch God work.

I want to encourage you again, if you are not yet in a Growth Group, talk to Adrian. He is going to have a table set up at the potluck in the gym after the service so you can ask him some questions and find a group that would work for you.

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In our Growth Groups we devote ourselves to the same things the first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to: **Teaching; Fellowship; Eating together; and Prayer**. All of these things are done purposefully to lead each other to become more like Jesus so others would see him in us and want to join us on our journey towards the heart of God.

In Paul's letter to Titus he said this:

[20]

Titus 1:1 (NLT)

1 ...I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives.

That's pretty clear isn't it. That is what the apostles taught in the early church. And that is what we teach every Sunday morning. That is what Steve teaches the youth, and what Leora teaches the kids, and what we put into practice in our Growth Groups.

One more Scripture before we close:

[21]

2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

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Everything we do at CRBC is for that purpose, to **lead us to become committed followers of Jesus Christ so that others would see Jesus in us and join us on our journey towards the heart of God.**

We would love everyone here to be a part of that great mission of Jesus. To be actively and persistently involved in that greatest mission on earth. That is what we are going to be talking about and celebrating today at what we call our “business meeting”, but is much more than that. Adrian mentioned this in one of his sermons a few months ago. These congregational meetings we have are more than business. They are celebrations of what God has done and what we are believing him for as we look forward with eyes of faith into the coming year. I hope most of you will join us as we eat together and celebrate the goodness of God and the mission of Jesus.



Becoming Together - II
Teaching the Word
Acts 2:42-47
Week of February 26, 2017

Objective of this study: To discover what teaching the early church devoted themselves to and hence, what we should be teaching each other.

[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 **Psalm 40:1-8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Math, English, Science, Social Studies, Gym or Art?

[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 Acts 2:42-47. Over the next few weeks we will zero in on each of the things the early church was devoted to. Today we will look at **"The Apostles Teaching."**
 1. In order to ascertain what was being taught in the early church we must have a clear idea of Jesus' mandate for the church. Divide up the following passages in smaller groups or pairs and ask what was the point of the teaching in each. Then regroup and debrief. Matthew 28:18-20; John 13:34-35; Matthew 22:36-40; Galatians 5:14; Matthew 25:33-40; Hebrews 10:24-25; Titus 1:1; 2 Timothy 3:16; John 15:1-17.
 2. In light of all the above passages, what should the focus of our teaching be?

Work (30-45 minutes)

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

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NLT)

²⁴ Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

1. Share together what is going on in your lives right now. Are there ways you are struggling with loving?
2. Take some time to brainstorm and dream about what we as individuals and as a church could be like if we allowed the Holy Spirit to change us. How could that impact our community? **What creative ways could we reach out to Campbell River?**
3. Take the remainder of the time to encourage one another by praying for each other.