

Quasimodogeniti
April 28th, 2019
Pastor Matthew Ude

Acts 5:12-31 ¹² And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. ¹³ Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. ¹⁴ And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. ¹⁷ Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸ and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. ¹⁹ But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

The result of Jesus resurrection is that the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, and that whereas before they hid in fear now they went with boldness proclaiming the name of the Lord. Through them the Lord did many signs and miracles, but more than this the Word of the Lord was preached and many were added to the church.

The church in Jerusalem as it is described here is one that we might well be jealous of, like the priests and elders of the people. Yet let us be jealous without sinning. That is to say we ought indeed to look at the description of this church and desire that we should have what they had. We should desire to be worthy to be called their successors. There is much about this church that we ought to desire to imitate.

For one thing "they were all with one accord." They were all with one mind and in love agreed together. They didn't get angry and argue about, stain glass windows, or the time of service, or the liturgy, or the hymnal or any of the other things that so often cause strife and division not just among the people here at Faith but indeed in most of our churches. No they all meet together joyfully with one accord.

Or again they were held in high esteem by all the people. Even though many people were afraid to join them because they feared the rulers. Nevertheless they saw their faith, their dedication to God, their love for one another and they highly esteemed them. Wouldn't that be a great thing if even those who didn't believe and disagreed with us, nevertheless held us in high esteem because they could see our devotion to God and love for one another?

But probably most important of all, believers were “increasingly added to the Lord.” Wouldn’t that be great if we could say of our church “believers were increasingly added, multitudes of men and women.”

So, yes, there is much to be envious of in this early church. Not envious in the way of the chief priests where we try to bring them down to our level. Rather we ought to rejoice in what God did through them and desire that he would do the same through us.

This is of course a common sentiment in our day among many of the evangelical and independent churches. I just met a pastor the other day who told me, "we all just need to go back to doing things the way they did in the early church."

There is also a Lutheran church body called the “Apostolic Lutheran Church in America,” which claims this as its mission. The problem with the ALCA and many of these other pastors and churches is that they are not discerning in the manner in which they attempt to emulate the early church.

Let us say for example that Mike and Matt Dumke desired to be just like their Dad Lynn. Certainly a worthy goal. But how to accomplish it? Should they find old photographs of Lynn and make sure to cut their hair the same way he did in college? Should they go to GoodWill and buy plaid suits with bell bottom pants? Should they try to find the same car he drove as a young man and buy it? I think we can all agree that would be very amusing for the rest of us but it isn’t going to turn them into good men, good husbands, and fathers.

Unfortunately this is exactly the tack that many take when they talk about being “like the apostolic church.” They focus on the superficial. We have to worship in plain buildings. We need to use simple or no instruments at all. Our ministers need to be common people who show some sign that they are chosen by God. We ought to use no liturgy or a very simple liturgy.

Martin Luther understood very well that these were superficial attempts. They are like haircuts and clothing. Music and liturgy are going to change from age to age. Luther indeed sought to reform the church. He also sought to get back to the Church of the apostles. What does “reform” mean it means you take the playdoh and you squish it down and reform it again. But he understood that it wasn’t the type of music or building that matters.

We pray that the Holy Spirit would guide our hearts and minds this morning that we might look beyond that which is superficial to see the true strength and heart of that early church. We pray that being filled once again with the Joy of Christ’s resurrection we might grow into Christ, in unity, love and forgiveness.

So what is it that at the core made that church what it was? Luke tells us that in Acts chapter 4.

Acts 4:31 ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

The thing that made all the difference was this that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. We see that on the day of Pentecost as well. Before that they were just a group of men hiding in fear, but now with boldness they proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord.

The thing that made that church what it was, was not the type of music or liturgy, but this that they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Many of our Pentecostal friends will at this point say, "AHA it is the Holy Spirit and we have the Holy Spirit and you do not. You see the proof in this that we do miracles and speak in tongues." They may even point to our very text and say, "see the miracles of healing that characterized the early church."

And that is of course exactly what many in the ALCA or the evangelicals or the Pentecostals are going to immediately latch on to. If we are really the church of the Apostles why are we not doing great miracles like they did? If we have the Holy Spirit why are we not healing people like they did? And indeed would not that bring in the crowds? If even the shadow of our called workers or elders would cure people surely the church would be filled to bursting in no time?

But once again they err substituting the lesser for the greater, the superficial for the core.

The truth is that miracles and healing are only the symptom and not the substance. To think miracles will prove to everyone that Jesus is Lord, is to think like a man and not like God. Notice what the angel says to Peter and the apostles. He does not say, "Go and heal," but he says, "Go, and stand and speak the words of life."

And also what the apostles says to the council, "we are His witnesses and so is the Holy Spirit." Notice they did not say, "we were sent to heal," but "we are His witnesses."

Both the gift of healing and the boldness to witness to Christ are symptoms or gifts from the same source. They are outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:31 ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

It was that fullness of the Spirit which gave them first the boldness to speak the word of God, and then only secondarily the gifts of healing and miracles.

John 14:26 ²⁶ "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

The goal and purpose of the Holy Spirit is to witness to Christ, not to give gifts of healing and miracles.

1 Corinthians 12:4-9 ⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

Notice that the gifts of healing and miracles are again secondary. These are way down the list. What is most important is the gifts of knowledge and wisdom and understanding the Word of the Lord.

Numbers 11:29 ²⁹ Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"

What does Moses desire? That being filled with the Holy Spirit all the people of God would stand and proclaim His praises.

Miracles, speaking in tongues, and gifts of healing, will come and go, as God sees fit according to His will. And indeed I have seen the Spirit perform miracles through His servants, although never in the flashy way that the Pentecostals claim. But these are secondary. The primary gift of the Spirit is the boldness to proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity. Primarily that Jesus is risen from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is preached in his name.

Therefore if we are jealous of the church in Jerusalem and wish to be like them, let this be part of your daily prayers, that the Lord would fill with His Holy Spirit, first your called workers, second the elders and leaders of the church and third all the members. Pray that being filled with the Holy Spirit we all may be bold to "go and stand, and teach" the Word of God in its truth and purity. Primarily that Jesus is risen from the dead and that he gives repentance and forgiveness of sins.

As we do indeed pray every Sunday, when after the sermon we sing, "restore unto me a right Spirit."

It is the Spirit that gives life. It is those who are filled with the Spirit that may stand and teach the wonderful message. Christ is risen from the dead and our sins are forgiven.

Amen