Uniquely Jesus: The Story Continues November 12, 17

This We Do Together, Acts 2:41-47

When a person lives in a house for an extended period of time, they slowly begin to collect stuff, whether they buy it, or have it given to them.

Accumulating usually happens one piece at a time, which is why we don’t notice it at first.

But when you have to move, and you have to pack up your stuff, as we did three years ago, you find yourself asking, “where did all this stuff come from?”

Every one of us has priorities that we live by.

But subtly and slowly, nonessentials somehow creep into our lives, like stuff does in our homes.

We may not notice it, until our life starts to feel like we are on a treadmill, and we wonder how do we get to this place, where it seems like, all we do is run from one thing to another.

When we read of the church in Acts, we may think of it as being perfect;

no flaws, no struggles, everybody filled with joy, everybody spending their lives on what mattered most.

We will soon read of challenges they faced.

But Acts 2:41-47 teaches us that the early church started well and strong, because of four priorities they committed themselves to.

Before we read the passage for today, look again at how the church began.

**Read Acts 2:41.**

Many who listened to Peter, accepted his message.

They believed the news about Jesus.

Their acceptance of Jesus was an inner response of the heart.

But their acceptance was also a public response.

In what way?

They were… baptized.

Baptism is a **public statement of repentance** that says – *“I’m turning away*

*from a life focused on self, towards a life centered in Jesus.”*

Baptism is a **public declaration of allegiance** that says – *“I am not in charge of my life anymore. Jesus is!”*

Baptism is a **public announcement of commitment** that says – *“I belong to Jesus!*

*I stand with him!”*

On the day of Pentecost, bout 3000 people accepted the message of Jesus.

They were baptized.

And on the same day…they were added.

Added to what?

Added to their number.

What number?

The 120 who had been together since Jesus’ return to his Father’s home.

Those 3000 people became a part of Jesus’ church.

But it didn’t stop there.

As verse 47 says, the Lord continued to add to their number daily those who were being saved.

Jesus’ mission, then and now, has been to rescue spiritually dead men and women and bring them into his family.

Which means, the Lord Jesus wants to add to… our number…on a regular basis …those who are being saved in Sooke.

What is emphasized in verses 41-47 is that once a person places their faith in Jesus, they go on to live out their faith in the context of a community.

We need the Lord in our lives; and we need one another.

**Read Acts 2:42-47.**

The church in Acts was devoted to…four things.

What does it mean to devote one’s self to something?

Devoted: *to give your time or effort completely to****something****you believe in or to a person. ie. He****devoted****his life to serving his family, friends, and neighbors.* https://dictionary.cambridge.org/.../devote-something-yourself-to-something-someone

There were four priorities which these believers gave themselves to:

the apostles’ teaching

 the fellowship

 the breaking of bread

 prayer

**The priority of the apostles’ teaching**.

Why was this so important?

After his resurrection, Luke 24:45, Jesus *“opened (the disciples) minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”*

It wasn’t as if the disciples had never read the Scripture.

What was the problem?

What hadn’t they understood?

Luke best explains in his gospel, 24:27, using an incident that happened on the road to Emmaus, between the risen Jesus and two followers of his, who didn’t initially recognize Jesus.

They talked of their hope that Jesus might have been the Messiah.

They talked of the news told by the women who’d been to the tomb and who insisted that Jesus had risen.

But those two were uncertain that it was true.

After listening to them, Jesus pointed them back to the OT Scriptures.

 *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”*

Jesus opened their minds to understand.

The result?

When they got back to Jerusalem, they told the rest, “The Lord has really risen!”

Look at Nehemiah 8:5-12:

***7****The Levites…instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.****8****They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clearand giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.*

***12****Then all the people went away…to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.*

This is the goal of teaching!

The apostles, each day, quoted from the OT Scriptures, and then made clear, in their teaching, how the Scriptures spoke of Jesus – his rejection, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection from the dead.

This was of the utmost importance.

The God who had promised in the Garden of Eden, that a Rescuer would come, and crush the head of Satan, had kept his word.

Through Jesus, God fulfilled the promise he had made to Abraham long ago – that all families on earth would be blessed through him!

God’s promises had always been there.

They’d been written down, from centuries past.

But they’d been misunderstood, or not seen.

Tim Keller explains it like this:

*“Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed (credited, freely given) to us.*

*Jesus is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for our acquittal.*

*Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave the comfortable and the familiar in order to create a new people of God.*

*Jesus is the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on mount Moriah, but was truly sacrificed for us. God said to Abraham, “I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love.” Now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love.”*

*Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.*

*Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.*

*Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and mediates a new covenant.*

*Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his foolish friends.*

*Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people’s victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.*

*Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn’t just risk her life to save her people, but who gave his life to save his people.*

*Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.*

*Jesus is the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us.*

*He’s the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true light, the true bread.*

This is WHAT those first believers were being taught by the apostles.

Peter when he preached had said about Jesus in v.22, that he *“was a man accredited by God…by miracles, wonders and signs, which God [had done] among [the people] through him…”*

As the apostles daily taught, God did the same with them. Look again at v.43 - *…many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*

The power of the Lord was present with them, as it had been with Jesus.

I also think that daily, God the Spirit did in the lives of his people, what he had done in the two disciples who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

Do you remember what they had said after Jesus left them?

Luke 24:32: *Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us and opened the Scriptures to us?*

The scriptures were opened!!

Do we need the same thing to be done with us?

Do we need the Scriptures to be opened to us?

Romans 8:7 tells us that the human mind is *“hostile to God.”*

For some of us, it may have been subtle; for others more overt, but every person is born with an anti-God mindset.

We need help if we are to come to God.

We can’t see the evidence of God that is clearly there.

But thankfully, it is God who makes himself known to us.

On the day of Pentecost, God used Peter to express to those who gathered the truth regarding Jesus, and 3000 of them believed.

When a person accepts Jesus, what happens?

**2 Corinthians 5:17** says, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

The word used in the Greek language for ‘new creation’ is *metamorphosis.*

We use this word to describe what happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, or when a tadpole becomes a frog - they experience a radical and irreversible change in their very essence.

When a person accepts Jesus, the Holy Spirit births in them a new nature that is now alive to God; that delights in God.

A person, who is born of the Spirit, is radically and irreversibly changed in the very essence of who they are.

That’s what it means to be a new creation.

That’s what it means for the old to be gone and the new to have come.

But God isn’t through with us, when his Spirit births in us a new nature.

He’s actually, just getting started.

Through the same Holy Spirit, God begins in us a life-long renovation of our character.

How does God do this?

How does he renovate our characters?

Romans 12:2 says, *“we are transformed by the renewing of our mind…”*

God renovates our character by confronting, and then changing, desires and habits within us that had been central to or that had previously energized our old way of living.

God changes us by changing how we think.

But what does he use to renew our minds?

Colossians 3:16 says, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

God uses the word of Christ to transform us.

What is the word of Christ?

It is the word he has spoken; the word he had written down; the word he has preserved.

This word makes known… God’s thoughts and ways.

This word makes sense… of us as human beings and the world in which

we live.

This word tells the story… of the extraordinary length which God went to,

in order to rescue us from our enslavement to sin and our bondage

to death.

This word reveals the truth… of how life is best lived.

This word speaks in advance… of how history will end, and a new age will begin.

Jesus said, *‘You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’*

As God renovates our character, using the word of Christ, he transforms us from the inside out.

There is weight… and power… and life to God’s word.

As we are taught to think differently, the Holy Spirit trains us to live differently.

It is important that you and I read and think upon Scripture…on our own, whenever and however that happens.

We must give the Holy Spirit material to work with.

The word of Christ can’t fill your life; it can’t dwell in you, if you don’t develop the habit of reading it.

There is a new app I’ve been using – it’s free – and I highly recommend it to you.

But remember – it isn’t just about reading for the sake of reading.

Without understanding, we will not engage with the Bible as God intended.

Erwin McManus says, *“If the Bible doesn’t change your life, it is not being engaged.”* Unstoppable, p.85.

I remind you that God’s word is living and active.

His word has the power to penetrate into our soul.

It convicts us where our thoughts and attitudes are not aligned with what God says is good and right.

God’s word uncovers and exposes lies we have believed.

It shines light into our hearts so we can see clearly.

It puts before us *“very great and precious promises,”* that enable us to *“become partakers of the divine nature,”*and to escape *“from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”* 2 Peter 1:4

Do you want to hear the voice of God?

Then read this word aloud.

This is the place where we begin to discern his voice.

As Colossians 3:16 says, it is important that we teach one another as we worship together by singing, psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

That’s why your worship leaders are careful in the choosing of the songs and hymns we sing, that they have substance and weight to them.

We do this because our songs are to teach us truth, as we sing them to God in the presence of one another.

These two things, are very important, but the first priority mentioned in Acts 2:41-47, was not the believer’s own personal reading of Scripture; nor their worshiping in song together.

Those followers of Jesus devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.

We learn from them, that in Jesus’ church; the teaching of God’s word is a priority.

I am not an apostle.

But I do stand in the line of all who’ve gone before me; all who’ve been given this awesome privilege to teach God’s word so that the people of Jesus might understand it, in order that they might live their lives by it.

For me, teaching God’s word is a sobering privilege.

It’s a partnership undertaken with God’s Holy Spirit.

I can’t teach you unless the Holy Spirit first teaches me.

And when I do teach you, it is in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, that he will use the written word and my spoken words, to bring understanding to you.

It is not just facts that I teach.

Nor is it ancient stories I remind you of.

The goal of my teaching is that you would understand truth and choose to live by it.

Until Jesus returns, or we pass from this life to the next, we are continually learning who our God is and the great things he has done and is doing.

To follow Jesus is to be a life-long learner.

To be a part of his church is to belong to a movement, a community of people who are life-long learners.

We will never, ever come to the point, not just here on earth, but in the age to follow, in the time of the new heaven and the new earth, where there is nothing more to learn of the amazing God who created us, saved us and brought us into his family.

Like the early church, we devote ourselves to the teaching of God’s word.

Next week we will look at the other priorities which they gave themselves to.

Invite Cynthia to share her God story

**The Blessing**

2 Timothy 3:16-17:

**16**All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproofing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness,

**17**that the follower of Jesus may be complete, equipped for every good work.