

Texts: Acts 2:42-47 and Matthew 5:13-16

Sunday 24th February 2019

Brightons Parish Church

Last week we took our first look at the verses from the end of Acts chapter 2 and specifically focused on verse 42. **If you missed that week**, or forget what was said, then you can now access the latest sermons online via our website, and thank you to our team who have made that possible. Last week we saw that the life and vibrancy of the early church flowed from them dwelling in Jesus and Jesus dwelling **in them**; that as “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...the Lord added to their number.”

We saw that these four key facets of church life were like the four wheels to a car or four key ingredients to a cake, that there is no good life without the Good Lord.

I encouraged you to think about how you might live out these verses in your own life and we had some time to talk that over with one another. So, for 1 minute, why don't we turn to our neighbour and share what came of that discussion? Maybe you did something, thought something, prayed something – so, for 1 minute, it's over to you again – what came out of last Sunday for you?!

(PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION)

Throughout this series in Acts we have seen again and again that a key theme is the continuing ministry of Jesus and that we (each) are invited to play our part, we are all invited into the adventure of partnering with Jesus. One commentator on the book of Acts points out that the author of Acts never attributes the growth which took place primarily to the preaching of the apostles; indeed, as we see **in our reading today**: “All the believers...[were] enjoying the favour of all the people.” (v44, 47) This favour that the whole church was experiencing would have given opportunity for them individually to share their faith with friends and colleagues and neighbours – this would have involved all the disciples, not just the apostles – and from this, the seeds of faith were sown and the apostles watered, and God, by His Spirit, brought about a great response.

So, if last week was primarily focused on how we each can walk closely with the Good Lord, then this week we are faced with **the question: how can we adventure with the Good Lord? How can we play our part in His continuing ministry? Maybe you don't think of it as an adventure, but in this next video let English Bishop J John tell you why it really is an adventure! (VIDEO)**

As a follower of Jesus we are involved in God's global mission – it really is an adventure. So, again, like last week, I am going to try and limit what I say on these verses, to give you as much of the remaining time to chat amongst yourselves.

I've summarised the verses **here as: wonder, wallet and welcome.**

- So, **firstly, “wonder”**: “everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles” – these wonders and signs provoked awe, probably provoked questions. They were given as signs to the Jewish people to highlight that their hopes and dreams were now being fulfilled through Jesus, that the dawn of a new age had come, and the kingdom of God was breaking in to this world. But it wasn’t just the apostles who provoked wonder or questions, as I said last week, the church at large impacted the wider Roman culture. And in chapter six of Acts, Stephen is described as “a man full of God’s grace and power, [who] performed wonders and signs among the people” – so the miraculous wasn’t limited to just the apostles. But the principle is this: whether through the miraculous or through love in action,...

the church at large stirred up wonder, they provoked healthy, positive questions. **A small book I read** last year talks about this, it's called 'Surprise the world' and in it, Michael Frost **suggests that** "all believers [are] to live questionable lives...lives that evoke questions from their friends...our task is to surprise the world." How can we do that? He suggests that we should seek to bless others, **understanding that "bless"** means to "strengthen the arm of another". Maybe through our words, our acts of kindness, through a gift and of course our time. So, maybe there is someone in your street you can seek to bless? **Or what about prayer?** Many of us have a conversation with a friend about an issue in their life, and we listen and we nod and we give comfort, but that's as far as we go. Yet, would it not provoke a question, maybe wonder, if we said,...

“I’ll pray tonight for you about that.” Or indeed, if we go that extra step, and say, “Can I pray with you just now about that?” No one’s ever turned me down, even before I was a minister, and with a one sentence prayer, you could both strengthen and stir up a little wonder. It’s a great way to adventure with Jesus.

- **Secondly, “wallet”:** “all the believers...had everything in common...They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” – last week we saw that the believers devoted themselves to fellowship, to “koinonia”, the sharing of life. That sharing, as we see here, went as far as to touch the wallet and the purse, for property was sold according to need; it wasn’t enforced sharing or communism, but it was sacrificial sharing of life for the benefit of one another.

So, can I ask, when was the last time you reviewed your giving to church? Many of us may give through standing order, but have left that unchanged for some time. **Or, when was the last time** you donated to the Foodbank? So, this week, or in the coming month, why not think about whether you can adventure with Jesus through your wallet or purse?

- **Lastly, “welcome”**: “they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” – last week in v42, we saw that the disciples devoted themselves to “the” breaking of bread, but here it is simply that they broke bread and ate together, a subtle difference. **Their sharing of life together** included the sharing of meals, of hospitality. It was done with “sincere hearts” –

which means it was done without pretence, but simply and with generosity. It stands in contrast to our individualist age. Prior to coming to Brightons we lived in Dalkeith, in a new housing scheme, with lots of folks that didn't go to church. We would talk with neighbours quite regularly, but not once, I'm embarrassed to say, did I invite them in for a meal, and likewise they didn't either. Maybe that's the reason why the conversation only went so far. It's just so easy in our time, in our country, to run the rat race, and go from one little box to another little box, rarely interacting with those around us.

But if we opened up our homes, to folks on our street who don't come to church, then it might open doors to deeper sharing, it might help lonely people...

find a place where they are valued and accepted. You don't have to necessarily invite the young families, if you don't feel able to do that – if you reached out to someone your age, or someone 10 or 20 years younger than you, and over time if they decided to give church another try, even at the age of 40, 50, 60, 70 – then that might stir up questions in their children or grandchildren, and who knows where that might lead. So, inviting the neighbours 'round might look different for each of us, and that's OK. But let's not allow embarrassment over furniture or fear of serving an inadequate meal hold us back; to do so is simply letting pride get in the way.

So, once more, let's break into small groups and talk about what it might look like for us to adventure with Jesus in these areas – and, again, if you can, try to come up with one more thing you personally could do to partner with Jesus in His continuing ministry.

(PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION)

Friends, whether it be through one of these three ways, or by reading the vacancy list and volunteering for a role there, we each are called to adventure with Jesus. **As our reading from Matthew highlighted,** the nature and character of our lives proves the reality of our faith: we are salt and light if we claim to be Christian, and that saltiness, that inner light, cannot actually be lost...

so it should be evident in our lives and through our lives to the people around us.

That has always been God's plan – for you and I to play our part in the continuing ministry of Jesus. God has no “plan B” – it's you and me adventuring with Jesus that will help change this world. And maybe as we lean in to that, through wonder, through our wallet, through our welcome, we might waken up people out there to the fact that the kingdom of God is near at hand and the light of the world is Jesus, and then they too might glorify our Father in heaven.

May it be so. Amen.