

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“Leadership and Fellowship”

Acts 2:42

Introduction: Rapid Maturing

One of life’s great pleasures is to see someone mature before your very eyes. Most parents whose children have reached adulthood have had this experience. What was a bratty, smart-mouthed teenager who wouldn’t even take out the garbage becomes a responsible, compassionate adult. What a joy that must be for a mother or father!

People who volunteer in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or church youth groups can see this happen from time to time too. Often the child that is the biggest pain at the beginning of the year is slowly transformed into a good kid, a kid you actually like.

A similar progression happened with Jesus’ disciples. Prior to the resurrection, they were a bunch of clowns. We almost laugh at how dense they were when Jesus questioned them. What a change from the Gospels to Acts! In the book of Acts, the disciples have been filled with the Holy Spirit and they have become some of the greatest leaders in human history.

Four Fold Service

Our epistle lesson comes immediately after Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has descended on the disciples with tongues of fire and enabled them to preach in many different languages. More than

3,000 people joined this “Jesus movement” after one sermon. The disciples are on fire, literally.

Then in verse 42 we get what might be the best summary of what the church does in the Bible. I’ve referenced this verse before and I’ll do it again. Acts 2:42 describes what the apostles and believers did in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven. This is the early church at its earliest. The verse says:

And they devoted themselves to (1) the apostles’ teaching and (2) fellowship, (3) to the breaking of bread and (4) the prayers.

Want to know what a church does? This is it in a nutshell.

Apostles’ Teaching

“...They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” is clear enough. They listen to the apostles telling them about their relationship with Jesus. They listen to the apostles explain how Old Testament prophecies apply to Jesus.

The apostles have an advantage over pastors today. They actually knew Jesus during his earthly ministry. They walked with him, talked with him, and saw the way he worshiped so they could pass this knowledge (or tradition) on to new Christians that didn’t know him in person.

Pastors do have one advantage over the apostles, however. The apostles probably did not have access to the whole Old Testament. They may have had certain scrolls but not enough for each person that wanted one. They certainly did not have copies of the New Testament. It hadn’t been written at this point. So by owning Bibles

with both the Old and New Testaments, we have an advantage over the first disciples.

We should take advantage of this great treasury of wisdom that God has preserved for us. Not being in Bible study is wasting a treasure that many of God's people died to preserve.

Fellowship

The second aspect of early church life we see is fellowship. Fellowship is not just having fun with other Christians although that is part of it. Fellowship is sharing your whole life with your fellow Christians.

It is impossible to have fellowship if you only spend one hour per week in church. It takes more than that to build a Christian community. In staff meetings, we occasionally lament that our building has such a narrow, winding corridor between the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. At the same time, that is a pretty flimsy excuse not to have fellowship with one another. If someone really wants to get to know his fellow Christians better, he will walk it.

In my last congregation, which was much smaller, we ate lunch together after most services. We had an informal potluck almost every Sunday and the members really knew each other. That might not work here but my point is that we should get to know one another better so that our community will look at us and say, "We know they are Christians by their love."

Breaking of Bread

The third component of what the early church did was "breaking of bread." This is another way of saying they celebrated the Lord's

Supper. They celebrated it every Sunday as a commemoration of Jesus rising from the dead on a Sunday.

It is hard for me to understand why at one point in our history as American Lutherans we gave up celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday. In some cases, it could have been because pastors traveled from church to church and so some Sundays there was no pastor to commune the congregation. Most of the time I think it was just to fit in with other Protestants who don't make a big deal about the Lord's Supper.

No matter what the cause was, that situation is being fixed today. At this congregation, we have the Lord's Supper every Sunday although you have to switch services times to get it. Nonetheless, it is an improvement over having to wait two weeks to have it.

The Prayers

The fourth practice of the early church mentioned in this verse is prayer. We pray so often in church that we seldom think about it. Outside of church, we ask people to pray for us – but not right now. Lutherans don't like to pray out loud or around other people unless the prayers are formulaic like "Come Lord Jesus" or "Our Father." Somehow I doubt that the early church prayed like that. I suspect their prayer was more spontaneous, more like someone crying out in need, unashamed of who hears him.

One reference work refers to prayer this way:

The (church) Fathers speak of it as the elevation of the mind to God with a view to asking proper things from Him.¹

¹ Catholic Encyclopedia entry "prayer"

That sounds a little academic but it is correct. Prayer is lifting up our minds to God and asking for things that are pleasing to him. We thank him for all the good things he has given us. We praise him for who he is – the King of Glory. Finally, we make requests. Most people spend too much time making requests and not enough time praising him but as we grow in faith we begin to spend more time praising him. The book of Psalms is especially useful in this.

Conclusion

Who would have guessed that the disciples would come so far so fast? The disciples show a transformation that only the Holy Spirit can make. They go from being clueless to knowing how to lead an international church within 40 days of the resurrection.

Today the church continues doing the same thing that it did back then: 1. learning the apostles' teaching, 2. fellowship, 3. the Lord's Supper and 4. prayer. While we often get bogged down in minutiae, the church is called to do no more than these four things.

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*