

“Being God’s Church”
Acts 2:42-47
April 30, 2023

In the summer before my senior year in college, I had the opportunity to attend Parachute School, known in the Army as “Airborne School,” for two weeks at Fort Bragg down in Fayetteville. We were told on the first day of training that we would make 5 jumps from an airplane and after the 5th jump we would then be considered “Airborne qualified,” which meant we could permanently wear the coveted “Airborne Wings” on our Army uniforms after we graduated from college and were commissioned into the Army. Now these Airborne Wings which you see pictured, have 2 pointed studs on the back so they can easily go through the fabric on your uniform when you pin them on. SFC Stone was our lead instructor, who had made over 1000 parachute jumps in his Army career, and one day he noticed that we were all dragging in our training. We were outside all day, it was hot, and we were tired as no one got a lot of sleep.

So as a way to pump us up, He took his Airborne Wings, held them up for us to see, and said, “For those of you who complete the training, I will personally pin your Airborne wings on your uniform at a special ceremony. But the real question is, ‘Who will be tough enough to receive blood wings?’” He then held his Airborne wings at his chest and with his other hand he pounded the wings into his chest, so that the pointed studs went into his skin, thus causing him to bleed – hence “blood wings.” Then the other 5 instructors all walked up to him, one at a time, and they each took a turn pounding their fists on the Airborne wings on SFC Stone’s chest, but SFC Stone did not even flinch.

Well, that got our attention and it changed our attitudes immediately to the point that whenever SFC Stone spoke, we listened and did exactly what he told us to do. On the day we completed our training and received our Airborne wings (by the way I chose not to receive blood wings and just had mine pinned to my uniform) SFC Stone was asked by my friend’s father, who

was an Army General, what he did to get us to succeed and a group of us overheard him say, “Oh, I did something ridiculous one day that seemed impossible not to hurt to get everyone’s attention – namely, I pounded my Airborne wings into my chest.”

Let’s see, doing something ridiculous and impossible that changes everything. Sounds like Jesus, doesn’t it? It seemed ridiculous that the Messiah could save anyone by dying and it seemed impossible that anyone could rise from the dead, but through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection He changed us from a people with little meaning and purpose in their lives into a new fellowship or church with a mission and a focus.

In the verses leading up to our first lesson from Acts, Peter gets the attention of the crowd by telling them that they were responsible for putting to death the very Son of God. Imagine the guilt and sense of hopelessness they felt. So they asked Peter, “What shall we do?” Now that’s quite a question. They are asking, “What can we do to make up for putting God’s Son to death?” Sometimes we may feel that way over sins we have committed, but there’s nothing we can do to take them back. So Peter says, “Repent and baptized.” That sounds pretty simple, but that’s exactly what happened as 3000 people were baptized. 3000 people believed that through repentance and baptism they would be completely forgiven, and they then became part of the church that day.

But it didn’t end there; knowing that Jesus had died for them and they were forgiven they wanted to know more and to do more. So we see in our first lesson that 1) They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to prayer; 2) They dedicated themselves to fellowship with one another; and 3) They were generous in their giving, especially to those in need.

The church that grew by 3000 that day continued to grow as they had the kind of church that everyone wanted and that was pleasing to Jesus. But things have changed since that day. Instead of one Christian church, there are now many as a variety of different denominations and church bodies fill our world. Some are large, some are small, some are growing, and some are

struggling; but the basics of what makes a church strong and growing have not changed at all. A church that is pleasing to God and that is attractive to others must be built on this pattern recorded in Acts 2. So do we fit this pattern? How do we compare to that first church?

First, these people devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, meaning to the Word of God. They loved the Word of God, they treasured it, they were into the Word at every opportunity. We have the Apostles' teachings, the Word of God, at our fingertips every day, but are we into it every day, at every opportunity? I don't think any of us would consider an hour or two each week to be devoted to the Apostles' teaching based on the way we devote ourselves to our families, our jobs, our leisure activities, or even to social media. So that's an area where we all need to confess our lack of devotion and continue to improve.

But there is another way that these people of the first Christian Church were devoted to the Apostles' teaching. They did not let their own ideas enter into the teaching of the Word of God or compromise God's Word with the hope that it would attract more people. These early believers accepted all the teachings of the Apostles and they were not afraid to point out the things that God calls sin. Sadly, there are many churches today that are changing their views on certain issues, hoping to attract more people. Do you think the teachings of the Apostles were any more popular to unbelievers at that time than they are now? No. If we devote ourselves to the Scriptures both by being in them and by standing on them our church will continue to be blessed.

Therefore, with the Word of God guiding the members of this first church, secondly, they were also dedicated to fellowship with one another. One of the key ingredients that held these first believers together and made them appealing to outsiders was their sincere love for Jesus and each other. That doesn't mean they agreed with each other on everything or saw the world in the same way. But the Holy Spirit enabled different people from different backgrounds with different perspectives to live, work, pray, eat, and worship together.

So how are we doing in our fellowship with one another? Our nation today is divided in many different ways, and every year we hear how some states are red and some states are blue, how some communities are liberal and others are conservative. We may not be drawn to each other for social activities, but we share an awesome Savior and He bridges all gaps and gives us a common bond of love. So I guess you could say that the true color of the Christian Church today is purple, where reds and blues don't just blend in, they blend together as we love and care for each other.

Finally, the third distinctive mark of the first Christian Church was its generosity. In verses 44-45 it says, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." I could preach for hours about the generosity of this church. Jesus has done some amazing things to people in our church. We have taken up special financial offerings for people in need here in this church, in our community, in our nation, and around the world. We provide 30 backpacks of food every week for children in need at one of our local elementary schools. Our children from Vacation Bible School and Open Arms have provided for needy families here and around the world for many years. Some of our high school students are going on a mission trip this summer to South Carolina to help people in need. Many of you have made quilts and blankets for our members who are sick, for our local hospitals, and for people overseas. And I am just barely scratching the surface of the generosity in this church with those examples. Just imagine the people we can reach and the needs we can meet if we continue to be generous like those first Christians.

While it has been 3 weeks now since our Easter celebration, when Jesus rose from the dead and invited us to live in a relationship with Him; how are we responding to that invitation on a daily basis? I pray we will all respond to that wonderful, seemingly impossible news, by devoting ourselves to His Word, dedicating ourselves to fellowship with others, and by being generous in our giving.