

“WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER!”

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Text: Acts 2:42-47 NLT**God’s Word: Luke 19:1-10 NLT**

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⁴²All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

⁴³A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

This is the first picture of the first group of individuals who made up the first Christian Church! They are our forbearers. They are our brothers and sisters in the faith. One day, when we all get to heaven, we will know them intimately. And the model of church which the Holy Spirit formed through them lays out, in embryonic form, what it means to be the Church—both then and ever since!

These first Christians involved themselves in teaching and learning, fellowship and worship, and Communion. They prayed. They were generous with their resources. They went way beyond tithing!!! Compared to the average 21st Century church member who gives less than 2% of their income to the Church—these folks gave everything—and no one was in need!!! They witnessed to their faith. They led others to Christ. *“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”*

They spent their time praising God and the people in the community were impressed by them. They were thought well of by the common folks...not by the religious and political leaders...but by Joe, Jane, Mary, Tom and Harry... *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* What a remarkable witness and we can praise God that Luke, the author of Acts, wrote this down!!!

Let’s ask ourselves this morning, “How does Bucyrus United Methodist Church here in Bucyrus, Ohio measure up to the first believers?” Do you see some elements in them that you witness here? What are the areas where we could use improvement? What are the areas where we are doing well?

This passage gives us a picture of the Church when it was days or weeks old. There were already over 3,000 members and they were growing daily! But even with these impressive numbers, there is still an intimacy, a love for God and neighbor, a measure of commitment that is very appealing and desirous. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts, and I suppose that was all 3,000 or so of them.

And they all had different backgrounds, but this diverse group were able to come together as one. They possessed the koinonia which is the Greek word for “fellowship” but more than that, it means a profound oneness or unity.

They felt so close to Christ and to one another that the grip of materialism which often the cause for much tension in many churches lost its grip on them!!! They sold their goods and made a common fund from which the needs of

any and all could be met. And no one was compelled to do this! It came as an expression of their love for God and for one another. Such actions are truly miraculous!!!

We need miracles like that today! We need them as the Church, and the world around us needs them—in order that they will be found by Christ and join in the life of faith which brings abundant life to all!!!

There was something about these early believers—these brothers and sisters of ours in the faith—there was something about them that was so attractive to outsiders that persons, by the power of God, were joining them daily!!! What was it? What is it? And how can we re-capture this love and power?

These folks in Acts Chapter 2 were so excited about their faith in Jesus Christ—they could hardly stand it! They were devoted—100% percent devoted. Are we this devoted? Are we this excited about our faith?

They were devoted to learning more and more about their faith. They were devoted to the fellowship they had one with another. They were devoted to sharing Holy Communion with one another. They were devoted to prayer!!! And with all this devotion and putting their faith into action—they had a powerful focus on their mission.

Daily, they were growing more and more deeply in love with Jesus Christ!!! Are you growing more deeply in love with Jesus? Do you have a passion for Jesus, for His Church, and its mission? If so, how is this love and passion showing itself out in your life? When we have a work-day, do you come out? When we have Bible study, do you come and grow and learn and share? Are you in church every Sunday (or watch church every Sunday)—no matter how beautiful the weather? Are you part of a small group?

This early church had over 3,000 members, and they all met together in the temple courts each day—but they also met together in one another's homes—in small groups!

Small groups are so important to our spiritual lives—they are vital. They are a place where we come together with deep care and appreciation for one another.

We hold one another up in prayer. When one is sick—all the others help that person. When one is tempted or having difficulty—all the others are there with help and understanding love.

If you would like to be a part of a small group, let me know. Text me, email me, call me. I would love to put together some small accountability groups within our congregation. We should all—every one of us be in what Wesley called, a band society!!!

So not only were these first Christian ancestors of ours growing deeply in love with Jesus Christ, they were also growing deeply in love with their community!!!

They had a servant-like attitude toward those inside and outside the church. This is one of the main reasons they had “the favor of all the people.” They were not harsh nor were they judgmental. They did not make distinctions on how important a person was based on their income, the way they dressed, what kind of accent they had, what they looked like...anything!!! Everyone was of equal importance!

Do we think of everyone in our community as being of equal importance? Do we desire to be friends with and worship with the poorest of the poor, the town drunk, the prostitute, the crack addict, the minority, the social outcast—just as much as we want to worship with other folks?

Recently, I was reading through a magazine and read an article about the High-End Hotel and Service Industry. The story was told from the inside of a five-star hotel.

And over and over again, it was made clear that the persons running the hotel were only interested in the high rollers, the big spenders, the good tippers. And if you didn't dress or play the part—you were booted out!!! That's the way a lot of this world works.

But people need a place where the rules of the world do not apply. People need a place where they will be loved just the way they are—simply because they are human beings for whom Christ died!!!

Is that how you see other people—even folks who lose their temper with you...people who insult you or cut you off in traffic...folks who are fighting with addiction...people who, you may feel, dress inappropriately...do you see all the people living in this community as persons for whom Christ died? And if not, why not? We are the Church, and the Church is for everyone! The Church is about unconditional love!

Another group whom the first Christians had a deep love for were the lost!!! A love for the lost leads to changes in programs, priorities and finances. In their book Comeback Churches authors Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson write:

“Most Christians don’t like lost people. We wish it were not so, but it is. Lost people don’t think like us...they don’t know our inside references. They are not ‘our’ people. Let’s face it, people outside the church can be messy!”

If we are to live into what it means to be the Church—we must be intentional about falling in love with the lost! We must love the lost as much as Jesus did! We know that Jesus came to seek and to save people who are lost.

Think about what Jesus did when He picked Zacchaeus out of that crowd in Luke Chapter 19. Zacchaeus was not exactly the most popular guy in town—actually, he was hated!!! But Jesus not only spoke to him, Jesus also asked to visit Zacchaeus’ house! You can almost hear the collective gasp. How could Jesus go over to the house of someone like Zacchaeus, much less talk to him? As the Scripture says, *“All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”*

Are we making anyone mutter about the lost people who are being reached by our church? If so, we should rejoice!!! For we will be in good company.

Jesus tells us in Luke Chapter 6, *“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”* Are we becoming more and more like our Teacher, Jesus? If not, why not? If we are not, we may want to re-evaluate whether or not Jesus is the one teaching us and not someone or something else.

A friend of mine at another church has a really neat ministry going with skater kids. You know who I’m talking about. You see them around town. They are the kids who dress a bit funny. Their hair may be dyed a few different colors like orange, blue or green. They are usually between the ages of 12 and maybe 16. And they often look troubled. I haven’t seen as many in this town as I have in others where I’ve served. Anyhow, one day, my friend was driving in the area, and he saw 6 or 8 skater kids riding their skateboards in a vacant parking lot. He wanted to speak to them so he pulled into the parking lot and began to walk toward them...but when they saw him coming they took off fast!!!

You see, these children are so accustomed to being told to “get out of here” or “get off this property” by adults that they have come to expect this. Anyhow, my friend saw where they went. They had headed behind the Bi-Lo grocery store building across the street. So, he drives over there...gets out of his car...and walks back behind the Bi-Lo building. The kids were staring at him, preparing to bolt the minute he gave them indication that he was going to be a threat.

But, instead he called out, “Hey guys. I want to talk to you. My name is Terry Davis. I go to the church up the road and I’d like to invite you to come skate in our parking lot!” The kids were dumb-founded! “Really?” “Are you serious?” You see, Terry knew that these kids who love to ride their skateboards have very few options—very few places to skate. No one wants them.

So Terry and some other folks built a skate-park with professional skate ramps and all kinds of stuff in the church parking lot for the kids. And the kids come there in the droves.

Terry told me that most of these kids have virtually no parental supervision or love. Many of them have one parent in prison and another parent strung-out on dope.

The kids often tell stories and lie about their lives because they are ashamed and insecure. Before being invited to Terry's church, many of them thought of Jesus only as a curse word!!! Now they are falling in love with the God who was already in love with them!!!

The Founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, went out and met the people where they were—sharing the love of Christ with them in their communities. Wesley preached out in the fields to the coal miners and persons who society looked down upon and marginalized. He preached to the poor and also built make-shift hospitals for the people who could not afford a hospital or did not live near one.

He studied medicine, because of his love for Christ, the Church, the mission of the Church, the community and the lost. And he wrote pamphlets and distributed them for free with information on how to fight this disease or that illness.

This is the kind of heritage we have, we see it in the lives of the first Christians and we see it in the life of The Comeback Church of our mothers and fathers—the Methodists!

Wesley said that there is no Gospel without the Social Gospel! And what he meant by that is that faith must not only be preached—it must also be practiced!!! It's pretty much the same thing that the brother of Jesus—the first Bishop of the first Christian Church wrote about in his letter which is found near the back of our Bibles.

We at Bucyrus United Methodist Church are to be an assembly of believers who are “on the move for Christ” as we cast our nets out to a lost and dying world.

We have been called to work lovingly in God's harvest field which includes our surrounding community and the world! We are to be a community of believers who are seeking to have a “habitual love for God and neighbor.”

This is how John Wesley defined Christian Perfection. We do not claim to be perfect, nor do we believe that anyone achieves a kind of perfection—which could be described as living without any sin—in this lifetime.

And so we are to be a church that seeks persons with “messy lives”—the marginalized, the social outcast, the poor, the confused, the scared, the depressed, the lonely, the imperfect, the disenfranchised, those who have been hurt by ‘the church’, those who are looking for community!

How are we letting them know that God has a Place for them here? How are we letting our community know that we seek to be a church that does not pass judgment, but instead, embodies the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience toward all?!!!

That first Church in Acts must have looked like a group of people waiting at a bus stop! What a motley crew they must have been! They were made up of *“Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Capadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene.”*

Some were from Rome, Crete and Arabia.

And yet, as we read in Acts 2, they were devoted; they were filled with awe and surrounded by miracles; they were together and had everything in common; they met together every day; they prayed together, fellowshiped together, took Communion together, ate in one another's homes; they had glad and sincere hearts; they praised God and enjoyed the *“favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* We have been added to their number as well. How are we doing in passing on this most important and great faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ Who came and died for all in order that all may be saved?!