

Acts 2:42-47

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 August 2007

Preacher: Robert Macleod

[0 : 00] I want us this evening to turn to the scriptures that we've read in Acts chapter 2 and look together at the portion from verse 42 through to 47.

For those who like a text, it may well be appropriate to suggest verse 46 where Luke tells us, Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. This morning we spent some time looking together at the very beautiful miracle that was performed on the deaf and the mute man as a result of his caring friends taking him to meet Jesus.

And on the surface what we have there is, yes, a miracle performed by our Lord in healing, a man who has suffered the humiliation of these deformities, more than likely the result of some trauma or accident.

But the real message behind that miracle, as we suggested this morning, is that we see in the way that the miracle was performed, a model for ourselves to apply to ourselves, to reach a needy world.

[1 : 50] A model in which we see the importance of the Word, the importance of God's Word, that we can speak with authority to a needy and to a spiritually bankrupt world.

Thus says the Lord. We saw the importance of that upward look, that position of absolute dependency upon God for our power.

the place that our sympathy and our empathy and our compassion has in the outworking of that model.

And also the importance of touch. We can support ministry at home and abroad.

And that is good. We can pray for it. We can financially back it. But that must never ultimately exclude any of us as God's people from touching the world around us.

[3 : 19] Leaving the work for others to do. We cannot touch that world, as it were, by proxy. And I want to progress that thinking this evening, because that world that we want to reach, and reach through modelling our lives, our ministries, after the Master, is ultimately for the purpose of bringing into God's kingdom a community of people.

Constituting ourselves as His church, His body. Yes, you say, but surely that's a strange thing to long for in view of all the different denominations and, you would say, categories of church up and down the land throughout the world.

That is another issue altogether. But surely the longing of all of God's people is to reach some, to save some, to win some.

That together we will ultimately constitute a church that no man will be able to number. And until that day comes, that church will continue to manifest itself in different ways.

Have different rituals, different procedures, different perhaps subordinate standards, we might say. It will have different traditions.

[5 : 01] But certain things will never be true of a church that veers the name of Jesus, that seeks to glorify His name upon the earth.

And that's why we've read in Acts this evening, because almost from the outset of Luke's record in the Acts of the Apostles, we are given insight into what that church will be like.

And I confess that very often at times when my spirit's heavy, and I need that spirit lifted within me, I'll simply come back to these opening chapters in the Acts of the Apostles to remind myself that this is the norm of what the church should be.

This is what we engage in Christian ministry for. This is what we seek the windows of heaven to open and pour spirit blessing upon us for.

In the opening chapter alone, we're reminded in chapter 1 that that church will inevitably be a place where the presence of God is felt.

[6 : 18] When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all together with one accord in one place, waiting upon God to come upon them.

It will be a place, as we're told in chapter 1, that it will inevitably attract the attention of the outside world. Because when the Spirit of God came upon that church, we're told that those in Jerusalem were amazed and they marveled, saying to one another, Look, are not all of these who speak a Galilean?

We notice too that it will be a place whose doors will be opened to all. Because in the quotation from the Old Testament, it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.

Your sons, your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Down in verse 21, it shall come to pass that the whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

It will be that kind of place. And it will be that kind of place because that church is a church that will proclaim the message of salvation.

[7 : 55] And that's when you come to chapter 2 at 40 to 46. What you have there is that church cameoed for you in Luke's early record of the Acts of the Apostles.

And it is a magnificent cameo of what the church should be like. Bill Hybels has a church motto for his congregation in the States.

There's nothing like the local church when the local church is working right. And here, following Pentecost and the early endeavours of the community of God's people in Jerusalem, here is a cameo of a local church that's clearly working right.

And I want to leave that cameo with you here in Aberdeen this evening so that as you continue to engage in ministry and in witness to this city, more and more might it be your experience as a congregation as it was the experience of those way back then in Jerusalem and subsequently in the experience of the church when strangers came amongst the people of God that they could say truly God is in this place.

Truly that's something we should covet for all our congregations tonight. For all our denominations tonight in Scotland. This sense of God's presence.

[9 : 43] This sense of the outworking of God's spirit in our midst so that it's unmistakable. So what does Luke tell us about the workings of this community in Jerusalem?

Because it's very telling. Here are hundreds if not thousands of converts. They have no buildings as such. They have no pastors as such.

They have no sense, real sense of direction yet. They don't even have what we might call a real understanding of Christian life yet. There's no church constitution.

no set of creeds. But somehow or other in this community of God's people are the ingredients that we should covet for all our churches.

The first of which is the reality of worship. And that's what we sense very quickly in these verses.

[10 : 52] That this community in Jerusalem was a place in which God was authentically, truly worshipped. And there are telltale signs there.

First of all, we're told they continued daily or they devoted themselves. There was a steadfastness, a single mindedness, a fidelity to the worship of God.

amongst this community in Jerusalem. It is telling us that when they came together, there was an intensity about their worship.

There was a full-hearted devotion about their worship. There was a passionate commitment to their worship. God's love. There was a love. There was a love. There was a love.

And that should challenge us this evening. Because there was nothing half-hearted about what they did. There was nothing lackluster in their corporate worship of God.

[12 : 02] love. And I say that mindful that I'm in a congregation of people here this evening. In a congregation of people that I can challenge this evening in respect to your spirit, as I could do with my own spirit worshiping wherever next Sunday.

is our worship like their worship? If Luke was sitting in church this evening, could he say it of Aberdeen, or of Falkirk, or of the Free North and Inverness, or of Far and Betty Hill, a Betty Hill congregation up in Far there?

Could he say of the people of God as they came together, they continued steadfastly. They devoted themselves. There was this single-mindedness about their worship.

There was this passion about their worship. Could he say it about you? Could he say it about me? The tragedy with us isn't it so often we come together, but we don't seem to have this capacity to exude real passion about what we're engaged in.

We sometimes present the spirit of half-heartedness. Half-heartedness. It's as if we're doing what we are expected to do.

[13 : 41] It's as if we're engaging in something that's simply a routine that we do on a Sunday morning and evening. not here. Not here.

We're told that there was this continual devotion on their part to the worship of God. Something else we're told about that worship was that it was a worship that was, we might say, full of joy.

There was fun in it. there was exhilaration in it. And that might sound very hollow to some of us this evening.

Because we're not almost, we're in a sense not even conditioned to think of worship in that sense. That's what charismatics do in the outworking of their worship.

Our worship is characterized by quietness, by stillness, by what we would say respectfulness. But I sometimes wonder if that desire to be respectful and quiet and still is an excuse so often to non-participate in something that should from our hearts overflow.

[15 : 05] When we read Psalm 122, the words of the people of God, I joyed when to the house of God go up, they said to me, is that a people that's dragging their heels to Jerusalem as if it's a struggle to go to the temple?

I don't pick that up at all. We sung in Psalm 84 this evening again the spirit and the sentiment of the Psalm. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts to me!

Is that the words of a man or someone who's basically going through the motions, who's involved in ritual and not in reality?

I don't think so. Neither was it the case in Jerusalem. When you go back to this cameo of Luke, there is first of all, yes, a respectful, rightful formality about what they're doing.

There is the ministry of God's Word there. There's the reality of baptism there. There is the sacraments there.

[16 : 28] There's prayer there. prayer. All of these things part, you would say, of the formal day-to-day experience of the people of God.

But inbuilt into all of it that they were doing was the reality of the joy and excitement and exhilaration. I've been long enough in our denomination and preached in so many different places in it.

And it's been a privilege to do so. But I can say this hand on heart that perhaps I've encountered sometimes more often than I'd like to care to admit.

Congregations of people where I'm struggling even in the midst of the formalities that are right and necessary to sense something of the passion and the commitment and the excitement and the exhilaration that should be there.

Have you found that? Can you remember my friends when you first tasted that God was good and God was gracious? Can you remember back to the days when God's Word was speaking to you?

[17 : 46] His Spirit was leading you? You couldn't get enough of Scripture. You couldn't get enough sermons. You couldn't be about the people of God enough.

Coming to church on the Lord's Day or on midweek or whenever it was, was something that you came to with relish. Because God was real.

God was speaking. God was in the place. and you were looking to God to work not only in your own life but in the lives of others. What's gone wrong with us?

What's gone wrong with our attitude to worship? What's gone wrong with this heart of mine and perhaps your heart that no longer finds thrill in the things of God in terms of worship?

But it wasn't just formal. There was an informality about it as well. Because they met not only in the temple we're told.

[19 : 05] And that's a very telling thing in itself. If we had time we could explore it. But at the formal level there was back then much that could have been complained against and criticized as there is today.

And so many of God's people today in their criticism of our worship and the worship of the church in the widest sense, so often sees them opting out, starting up new groups, going somewhere else.

In Jerusalem that's not what they did. They stayed within what we might have said was the institutional church. They stayed patiently within it, not impatiently rejecting it as John Stott puts it.

And from within they brought this new life that was part of their experience. They rejected, for example, the sacrifices, there's no doubt of that.

For all of them who were part of that church had come to recognize that the once and for all sacrifice had already been paid in the blood of the Lamb that was slain.

[20 : 23] And he who was the Lamb of God who had come into the world to take away the sins of the world. But that's another aspect of studying for some other time.

There was the formality but there was the informal. Because we read that they also gathered from house to house. And again that's a lovely little bit of picture, of insight into their experience.

That should challenge us today. And the worth of that is perhaps best illustrated in the experience of Peter. Because as Luke records Peter's experience, not just at Pentecost but subsequent, as he begins his ministry, there comes a point where Peter's arrested.

But amazingly, in chapter 12 we're told how he's freed from prison. And the moment Peter finds himself out in the street so miraculously freed from that prison so following Herod's violence to the church.

Where did Peter gravitate to? Where did Peter go? We read that Peter went to Mary's house. Why did he go to Mary's house?

[21 : 50] Because he'd been used to gathering in Mary's home, doubtless, on many previous occasions. As were many other Christians in Jerusalem.

people and I'm sure many homes were similarly open. And following the formal, the public worship of God, they would have gravitated one here, one there, groups to different homes.

And the more I think about that picture, the more I would love to be a fly on the wall of some of these gatherings. things. It's lovely coming together in this public way to worship God.

But isn't it equally lovely to go away from church, go back to someone's home, who loves the same Lord, who has the same interest in the things of God, and to talk about the great things that God has done for our souls.

There's something very precious about that. And it seems to be something that we're losing in our generation. But back there, no. They had this sense of worship at a formal level, but they had it also at an informal level.

[23 : 10] But then you notice something else that Luke tells us about them. They were a people who were instructed. They were not only characterized by worship, they were also characterized as a community that was instructed.

They continued, or they committed in verse 42 themselves, steadfastly to the apostles' doctrine. They became known as they who believed.

What did they believe? They believed an objective body of truth, and they embraced that. again, that's brought out to us in verse 4 of chapter 4.

Many who heard. What did they hear? What they had been taught. When those many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about a 5,000.

They were people who gave themselves to instruction. A reminder to us that the Christian faith doesn't abandon the mind.

[24 : 30] A reminder to us of the place and the importance of Christian education. A reminder to us of the priority that they gave to it.

And when we think of the priority that was theirs, how much more do we need it. They were a people who were hungry to grow in their knowledge of what they had come to experience, what they had perhaps some of them only at Pentecost heard for the first time.

I think many of them only began to come to terms with the truth of God as Peter stood in the midst of them and preached to them explaining to them from the beginning who Jesus was.

And the practical application of that for us this evening, if we're not to run out of time, is simply to remind ourselves not just of the place that worship should have, but of the priority that instruction should have in all our lives as well.

Not just that we become well fed as it were theologically, but that as we fill our minds with an understanding of the things of God, we better equip ourselves for the world in which God has placed us.

[26 : 03] There is an American pastor I was reading about recently who illustrates the importance of this well. When he said in the early days of his children's lives he would get away with giving them cheap hot dogs.

But the moment they tasted T-bone steak he could never get away with offering them a hot dog again. Can you see the application of that spiritually speaking to our souls this evening?

We need our souls fed, nourished well, equipped well. Because the more we grow in our knowledge, the benefits are immense to our well-being.

Strengthening faith, bringing stability into our lives in the midst of not just the good days of life, but particularly in the difficult days of life.

Helping us to search the scriptures and to divide the scriptures to resist error and to calm fears. The people of God in Jerusalem worshipped in the way that Luke describes.

[27 : 22] The people of God in Jerusalem gave themselves to hungering and thirsting after righteousness. But you notice also they fellowshiped as well.

And again there's many things we could spend time looking at here, but time is going to beat us. But when we think of their fellowship, when we think of the fact that they not only met publicly in the temples, they met also informally together, from house to house.

In verse 46, eating their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. Praising God and having favour with all the people.

There is something very beautiful about that as well. Because it's reminding us that what brought them together to sit continually under the apostles' teaching, pulled them together in the informal days of life as well.

together. And what united them? We might say there was this unity that was theirs. It was almost Trinitarian.

[28 : 40] A unity in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Their common God and Saviour bound them together in fellowship.

Isn't that why later the apostle would say, we are all one in Christ Jesus. But there was this commonality or fellowship also in what they shared out with one another.

They shared their possessions. They shared so that there was no need. They shared their spiritual worship. They shared their physical and material blessings.

with one another. There was this reality of fellowship. Sharing together. Sharing in something.

Sharing with each other. They were partners. Partners in this glorious experience of grace. And they loved it.

[29 : 50] psalmist speaks about the worth of this unity. The worth of this unity when brethren dwell together as one.

Ought to have a little more of that kind of reality in the church of today. Where we, when we meet, meet as brethren, not as strangers.

have you ever reflected on how sometimes as Christian people we can behave so coldly to one another? It is as if we've got nothing in common.

And yet we have this glorious experience of grace that binds us together. so much so that there should be no Christian ever feels an outsider.

No one feels coldness when they come into our churches. No one's lonely. No one's struggling to get through the week because there's no one to speak to or no phone to lift up and even make contact with someone.

[31 : 03] We could go on. But the church can be a cold place, my friends, and we ought not to allow it be so. And finally, we don't need to say too much.

It was evangelistic. Like we said this morning, Jesus wasn't afraid to reach out and to touch.

the rotting flesh of humanity, as someone described leprosy, and described the deformity that sin so often brings into the experience of mankind.

We are. And sometimes we're so afraid to reach out and to touch it, we lock ourselves away in little, comfortable, evangelical groups of people.

And Rome burns. Aberdeen allows itself to become more and more, as it were, a decaying city because sin abounds.

[32 : 18] We need to come back and seize the vision and capture the concept that the grace of God that has touched us touches others and where grace abounded towards me and you, the cheapest of sinners.

It will abound to others too. And maybe at this early stage in Peter's recovery and restoration as an apostle. And others around him that were perhaps a degree cynical and lackluster in their faith are beginning to capture it to capture it also.

Because apart from teaching and fellowshiping and worshipping amongst God's people in Jerusalem, they begin to reach out and tell of the great things that God has done and will do.

They were unashamed to teach in the name of Jesus, so much so that almost from the word go, the authorities are down on them. Because they're teaching Jesus and the resurrection from the dead.

But isn't it wonderful to read in these early verses of Acts, these little nuggets thrown in by Luke, there were three thousand added to the church.

[33 : 43] There was added to the church daily those who were being saved. My friends, how to have that back again in the church in Scotland? As a consequence of your work and my work in seeking to reach the world that's out there and around us, may God help you to be this kind of church here in Aberdeen.

But in time to come, and times to come, it will be said of you as it was said of them, God is in this place, amongst this people.

He's in their heads, He's in their hearts, He's in their voices, He's in their gratitude, He's in their fellowship, He's in their ministry.

May God bless you.