

Opening

Our Loudest Witness... Church Values from Pentecost to present.

When we examine our foundational values as a church these four are seen in the church of the past and should be seen in the present:

- Diversity – our warmest welcome
- Community – our strongest bond
- Ministry – our best effort
- Generosity – our boldest gift

Acts 2:43-47//

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper[i]), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity[j]— 47 all 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.

[Pray]

Intro

- “Loud” doesn’t always mean explosive and abrupt, sometimes it means persistent.
- Any parent of a little one knows this definition of loud. Loud is, yes, being woken up in the middle of the night by a crying toddler abruptly and suddenly. But loud can also be the sound of the Encanto soundtrack that plays persistently in your brain for 6 months.
- We Don’t Talk About Bruno
 - As of this week has enjoyed 3 weeks at the No. 1 place on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.
 - There are all kinds of theories out there about why this song is so beloved, and one is the song’s ingenious complexity.
 - Apparently, WDTAB is a type of song called a polyphonic madrigal (perhaps where the movie’s family name Madrigal comes from??). This style of song, from the Renaissance, features multiple melodies at the same time, each one finding its own place in the song so that it doesn’t compete but jives perfectly with all the rest.
 - To me it means that I walk around my house singing like a schizophrenic...
 - Camilo: “7 ft. frame, rates along its back...”
 - Isabella: “He told me that the life of my dreams...”
 - **The “loudness” of this song doesn’t have to do with volume in our ears, but with its persistence in our brains.**
- Oftentimes, the church (especially the Pentecostal church) is so busy chasing after the next explosive God moment, that we miss the opportunities to be persistent and consistent witnesses in our day to day lives.

- V. 47// And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.
- I can only imagine what the day of Pentecost must have sounded like when the Holy Spirit rested upon the disciples, and each of them began to speak in different languages... something like a polyphonic madrigal.
- But what we see in v. 47 is that the witness of the church lasted longer than just that moment. It stuck with the church and manifested itself in different practices:
 - a warm welcome
 - a strong bond
 - the best effort of the people
 - their boldest gift.

Generosity

- In medias res (in the middle of action) - The books of Acts is part 2 of a story told by the same author who wrote the gospel of Luke.
- **If we make the mistake of reading Acts 1 & 2 as if they are the beginning of a brand new story, we run the risk of thinking that this incredible generosity was only the byproduct of a supernatural event (Pentecost).**
- Pentecost was only the pulling of the trigger of a fully loaded gun. That gun was loaded in part 1 of the story where Jesus had already begun preaching and demonstrating this early church value of generosity.
- If we look at Acts 2 in partnership with the example of Jesus in the gospels, we will see it as a continuation of a practice of generosity, which the disciples learned from Jesus.
- Jesus' two practices: Solidarity and Charity.

Solidarity

- V. 44// "all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had." [NLT]
- "They held all things in common." [NIV]
- Luke 6// The Sermon on the Plain
 - v. 17-22// 17 When they came down from the mountain, the disciples stood with Jesus on a large, level area, surrounded by many of his followers and by the crowds. There were people from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from as far north as the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those troubled by evil[b] spirits were healed. 19 Everyone tried to touch him, because healing power went out from him, and he healed everyone. 20 Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. 21 God blesses you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied. God blesses you who weep now, for in due time you will laugh.*
- The crowd is full of people who were sick and demon possessed. The lowest of the low, the least and poorest in society. Yet, he turns to his disciples and says, "You who are poor... You who are hungry... You who weep."
 - Jesus is quite literally bringing his disciples down from their high place of calling and putting them on the same playing field as the poor. He is saying, "If you want to be my disciple, you have to live a life of solidarity with the least of these."

- “Blessed to be a blessing.”
- In the American church we have conditioned ourselves to believe that we are only responsible to give generously when we feel like we’ve been materially blessed. But Jesus subverts that sentiment and says... “To be blessed is not to have material abundance. To be blessed is to achieve solidarity with the “least of these.” To be blessed is to “share all things in common.”
- What does this mean practically for us today?
 - **Generosity (through solidarity) is living below our means so that all may have the means to live.**
- **Tithing - is not just a necessary donation to the church you attend. It’s the spiritual practice of intentionally living below your means, so that others may have to means to live.**
 - Merry testimony
 - *Disclaimer* - If you do not have the means to live... I hope you hear from this sermon, that **the church is the place where you can come with all of your needs and not be looked down upon.**
 - We welcome you not only as a recipient of a service or ministry, but **we welcome into a common life of giving, where your needs will be met as you have them, and where you will meet the needs of others when and where you can.**
 - **There’s a place for you here to give and there’s a place for you here to receive.**
- **The tithe addresses two needs: the material and spiritual needs of the community.**
 - Materially, just this week...
 - Internationally - PF’s friend Marcellin. We’ve raised \$8K in combined it with other missions money to provide \$17K to rebuild his home which was destroyed by an earthquake months ago.
 - Locally - we were able to help a single foster mom pay off a debt she owed, and connected her with We Are The Echo, who paid her electric bill.
 - If you give regular tithes; if you participate in the **monthly missions giving** which supports We Are the Echo, then you made it possible for this single mom to have the means to live.
 - Spiritually, right now...
 - If you are sitting in pews, in an air-conditioned space, listening to the sound of my voice over speakers...
 - If you are watching online through cameras and computers that make it possible for us to live stream...
- The early church pulled together their resources to meet the spiritual needs of people:
 - Acts 16:11-40// Lydia
 - Acts 12:12// Mary (John Mark’s mom)
 - Col. 4:15// Nympha

- Questions to consider: Do you set aside income to live in solidarity with your church community? Do you set aside time? Do you set aside energy? Do you set aside hospitality?
- This is the persistent witness that the church is able to give to the world. In the midst of a pandemic and economic downturn, they will see there is a community who cares enough about each other and cares enough about the gospel to live below their means so that others will have the means to live... and to live fully.

Charity

- *V. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*
- **“Selling all possessions” is meant to signify sacrifice not prescribe any particular economic system (Marxism, communism).**
 - The early examples in Acts of “holding all things in common” is not a prescriptive endorsement for living in communes. Throughout the rest of the book we see examples of many individuals and families who own private property. And the book of Acts ends with the apostle Paul living in Rome in his own private property.
- Acts 28:30// Paul - “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house [where he lived at his own expense]....”
 - Acts 28:30 concludes... “and he welcomed all who came to see him.” Paul knew that even though he “possessed” his own home, his home should not possess him.
 - Not keeping up with the Jones’s... Super Bowl Toyota commercial... Leslie Jones, Tommy Lee Jones, Rashida Jones and Nick Jonas... **A perfect picture of the competitive nature of consumerism in America... Our possessions have a tendency to possess us.**
- **Instead of keeping up with the Jones’s, we should be trying to keep up with Jesus’ generosity.**
- John 13:34-35// *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. **Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.***
 - Rather than competing with one another to have more and better stuff, we should be provoking one another to acts of love that look like the sacrificial love of Jesus.
 - Agape = “charity”
 - “Charity is an ever-owing love that seeks nothing in return. It is spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is the love of God operating in the human heart.” - MLK
 - The kind of charity that we as Christians are called to give is not the kind that comes out of an overflow of material excess (like the spare change we throw in the bucket). It’s the kind of charity that gives sacrificially and expects nothing in return.
- **Generosity (through charity) is giving sacrificially as an expression of love.**

- 1 Corinthians 13:3// If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it;^[a] but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.
 - Of course we know that Jesus demonstrated his love in this way... He gave everything to us, He even sacrificed his body. What makes the message of that sacrifice powerful is not just that Jesus died. But that Jesus died *for us*. Not so we could pay Him back, but so that we could be reconciled to God through Him.
 - So, our generosity must be the kind that reflects the love of Christ. It must be a kind of love that is non-transactional (doesn't expect anything in return), and that is sacrificial.
- **It's possible to give in such a way we've been talking about...** living below your means... tithing... seeking solidarity... **But still fall short of the early church standard of sacrifice.**
 - Faith Promise
 - I think that's the value of the faith promise we do every year... **It's one thing to find margins in your budget for giving, it's another to find margins in your heart (your affections for things) so that you are prepared to give spontaneously.**
 - **It's a practice of dispossessing ourselves of our possessions.**
 - The number we put down on our FP is higher than we've ever put down before. I'm not gonna lie, it was difficult for me to write that number. And I know that if that money comes in, there are a million things I would rather use that money for... Things that I want and desire.
- Questions: Are you prepared to part from your possessions for the sake of those God loves? Is your generosity loving or is it begrudging?

Closing

- City Life Vision: That there would be no other place on the planet where Jesus is easier to find than the 757!
 - **If the 757 is going to be a place where it's easy for others to find Jesus, it will mean that life will not always be easy for us...** Diversity... Ministry... Community... Generosity... These are costly and complicated.
 - As a church we want to continue to provide open door moments where people will experience an encounter with Jesus. But **we don't want to do it in ways that are easy. Because we know if we did, they would be completely detached from the way that Jesus and the early church show us how to do it.**
- Laguna Garzon Bridge
 - There's a bridge in Uruguay that is unlike any other in the world, but it was built with the same old purpose in mind—to get people to the other side.
 - Before this bridge there was only one way across—a slow moving, one vehicle tug-boat.
 - The solution could have been simple—build a simple bridge straight across. **But the community did not want to get people across at the expense of the beauty and function that the lagoon itself served.** The lagoon was not just a bypass from one side to the other, it was a whole ecosystem of its own, where wildlife thrived and where fishermen would congregate in order to make a living.
 - So, the renowned architect, Rafael Viñoly designed this one of a kind circular bridge to not only get people across, but to steward the livelihood of the community that lives there now. **The curved sides requires travelers to drive slowly, taking into consideration the pedestrians and fishermen who might congregate on the sides. It also cuts down**

the noise pollution that might disturb the wildlife. And, perhaps most importantly, it was built beautifully so that people across the world would be drawn to the lagoon and to the shoreline which the bridge is meant to connect them to.

- The lagoon which could previously only support one vehicle crossing at a time now allows a thousand vehicles to cross a day.
- Of course, the people of the internet have mocked the design as “dumb” and impractical... **Wouldn't it be easier to just make the bridge straight with less fuss, less cost, and more convenience? The answer is yes, it would be easier. But would it be beautiful? Would it be loving and generous? Would it invite people to cross it?**
- As a church, if we want to create open-door opportunities for people to meet Jesus and to touch heaven, **it's going to cost us. It will slow us down. It will introduce unexpected curves and inconveniences. We will have to split our focus between the eternal destination on the other side and the intermediate space in between. But the designer of the Church is world renowned! Not only does he know how to get us across to the other side, but he is able to do it in the most beautiful way—with charity and in solidarity.**
- “Lagoon within a lagoon.”
- The church is meant to reflect heaven... **We aren't just meant to point people to an eternal destination, we are meant to point people to the reality of its presence here on earth.**