

Dedicated.

Reading: Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-37

If someone asked you describe this church...what would your response be?
What are the 4 or 5 most important characteristics you would like to stress?
Would it be the building, music, people?

In Acts we have a description of the church...
Those things that characterized it.

Now, what did they do? The NIV says that they devoted themselves.
The NASB says 'continually devoting themselves'.
They were dead serious about their faith.

The word *devoted* comes from a word which means,
At to make a binding promise or pledge.

At its heart this word *devoted* has to do with enduring, with sticking to something even when it would be easier to dump it, to let it go.
We hear of people who rise to the challenge of something...
They will stick at it till they master it...finish the task.

The people had been changed at Pentecost...
they had heard and responded to the gospel message.

Now they understood that they would never be the same.
And so they began to live out that commitment in a very practical way daily.

I think it can be summed up in a word...dedication.

That dedication was the key for the impact they had on their world.

They were dedicated...committed...devoted
to a number of things that really made them stand out in their world.

If we can grasp that same dedication we will transform our world too!

And in verse 42 of chapter 2 we get a picture of the things they were dedicated to.
4 key passions there.

We read that the people became
a learning People, as they devoted themselves to teaching.

They wanted to get their heads around who this Jesus was...
The one the Disciples were excitedly telling them about.

They gave a high priority to understanding the truth.

Now that they had come to know Jesus, they wanted to know more about Him.
And so, they continually attended the services for teaching
and were devoted to hearing and understanding the teaching of the apostles.

They wanted to understand how to apply this teaching to their lives.

Devotion to knowing the truth was not only needed in the early church,
but it is sorely needed in the church today.

In fact, we are seeing everywhere the fruits of not knowing the truth of God's word.

We face our world every day.

The issues that dominate our culture are the issues with which we must grapple.

Do we have answers to the questions people are asking?

I don't mean pat answers, full of clichés and simple solutions,
but answers that have substance and are grounded in truth?

Have we learned to think Biblically about the issues we face today in contemporary culture?

What do we say about AIDS, abortion, homosexuality, poverty, homelessness, racial prejudice, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, the environment, or even the church?

Unless we know what the Bible says concerning these issues,
we will not have any real answers for others or even for ourselves.

We need to be people of the book.

7 minutes a day! Bible reading...a little often is better than the occasional feast.
(encourage Profession of Faith people...how about you and me?)

We need to have our heads in the right place.

a loving People... all believers were together, having all things in common
and sharing them together

Not only did they want to get their heads around who Jesus was...

They wanted to be like him...to live like him.

They wanted hearts that were like Jesus...

having compassion for people and their needs.

Devoted to living a life of ***togetherness/fellowship***

Our age of cubicle offices, email rather than personal contact, SMS, internet banking,
internet shopping, along with terrifically packed work days
all of this helps to tear us away from each other.

Everyone has to have their own room, car, space...

We are becoming a society full of lonely people.

And yet here is the early church doing everything together...sharing together.

If we live out that model today...

it will cut at the heart of that loneliness that people today can experience.

One of the sad truths is that there are lonely people in the church.

This should not be!

The Word of God counters that, and calls disciples to devoted fellowship.

In fact there is a picture that is found throughout the New Testament which speaks of this devoted fellowship.

It is the picture of a body...The Body of Christ.

Romans 12 puts it this way:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (v.4,5)

Each part unique. Each part looking different.

But each part having the same blood flowing through it.

Each part with the same flesh.

Each part connected to the same central nervous system.

We all look different.

We have different likes and dislikes.

We behave quite differently.

But the blood of Jesus flows for all of us.

And the body of Christ was broken on the cross for us all.

And the lifegiving presence of the One Holy Spirit resides in each of our hearts.

Together as Body.

At the Seattle Special Olympics, 9 contestants, all physically or mentally challenged, assembled at the starting line for the 100metre sprint.

At the gun, the contestants all started out, not exactly in a dash,

but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win.

All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the track, tripped, rolled over a couple times and began to cry.

The others, who were running ahead of the boy, heard him crying so they slowed down and looked back at him.

Then they all turned around and went back.

Every one of them.

One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said,

"This will make it better."

Then all 9 linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

Everyone in the stadium stood and cheered for over 10 minutes.

What a fantastic picture of the body working together.

Winning wasn't the issue...helping each other was.

In the early church they needed each other...they shared their lives together.

They knew they couldn't go it alone...especially as a persecuted minority.

We sang together...blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.'

That tie is the fellowship, the common bond of Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrew admonished us strongly when he wrote: "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*" (Heb. 10:25)

You can only experience true fellowship by giving diligent attention to meeting together with those in the fellowship.

It takes time and effort to develop meaningful relationships with others, even in the church.

People generally gravitate to others like them in some way.

We find people who are our same age, or have a similar situation in life, like small children, or no children.

We find people who share our interests.

But in the church, we are put together with many others who are not like us.

In the church our common interest is Christ and we are to transcend issues like age, education, social status, situation in life, race, and the like.

This is the beauty of the church, and a testimony to the world of the love of Christ.

A tax collector and a Zealot could be together.

a **worshipping People**, in the Breaking of Bread- verse 42; both formally and informally in the Temple and in their homes – verse 46

They gave all the thanks and praise to God...

For who he was and what he'd done.

They were having their hearts injected with praise for God and Jesus Christ.

Continually reminding and encouraging each other in their walk with the Lord.

They did that in their homes and together in fellowship.

an **Evangelistic People**, with the Lord adding to their number – verse 47.

In a world where there is so much Hurt... so much Suffering...

so much Anger and Hate... where people bicker and fight...,
where people are Abused...Exploited... Killed...
Here were God's people making an impact on that world.

Their impact felt through their words and actions.
The hands of God being extended through them.

And the world took notice of what they were doing.

One of the things that strikes me about this church is the way they all were involved.

They were ordinary people...but each did their bit for God and the church.

When you think about the early church,
you can't help but think how ordinary each of these people were.
Unfortunately we tend to think of them as superstars in the church...
Somehow different from the rest of us.
They may have been used by God in extraordinary ways...
but they were no superstars!

The Bible shows them as ordinary people with all the same weaknesses and shortcomings we experience.

Jesus appeared to go out of His way to find a group of followers who had little claim to greatness apart from their willingness to believe and obey Him.

If you were going to pick a dozen guys to change the world, would you have picked this team of people?

Imagine what would have happened if Jesus had submitted the resumes of His staff to a modern management group.

The results might read something like this:
Thank you for submitting the resumes of the 12 men you're considering for management positions in your new organization. All of them have undergone a range of tests.

It is our staff's unanimous opinion that most of the nominees are lacking in qualifications for the type of enterprise you are undertaking.

We find that Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of anger.
He seems far too impulsive to be put in a position of oversight.

Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership.
The brothers James and John place personal interest above company loyalty.

And they seem to be impatient with others.

Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that could tend to undermine morale. We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau.

In closing, one of the candidates shows great potential. He is a man of ability, resourcefulness, and ambition. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your Chief Financial Officer and right-hand man.

If you were to look at the people God used in Scripture and in contemporary history, you would discover that God has always gone out of His way to find individuals who didn't look as though they would amount to much.

This is great news because it gives you and me the assurance that God can use you and me just as surely and as powerfully as He used those men and women.

But God is not looking for supersaints or heroes. No he is looking for devoted disciples...men & women, boys & girls who are fully committed to him. A regular, ordinary person that he can pour his strength into.

I know that Henni would not see herself as a superstar.

We recognize that she has special gifts and so we have asked her to use them in the Pastoral Care work of our church.

But she is no superstar.

I am no superstar...I have my faults...

Anyone at soccer yesterday can testify to that.

But I am set apart for a task too.

None of you are superstars...

But I see incredible talent being used by God in amazing ways in this church.

That excites me...

When we describe our church to people...

We need to be able to say, 'We are a dedicated bunch'

Dedicated to God's Word...so our heads are filled with his truths.

Dedicated to the worship of God...our hearts full of praise.

Dedicated to fellowship...our hands working in the church and world...

Bringing the love and compassion of Jesus.

We need to be exactly like those first believers in the early church.

May God grant the ability to do just that.