

Texts: Acts 2:42-47

Sunday 17th February 2019

Brightons Parish Church

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matt. 22:37-39)

With our young people I began to unpack that, love for God and for one another was central to the early Church, so much so that even in their changing circumstances they prioritised certain practices and were devoted to doing them, **because, as we saw last week, they wanted to live for Jesus and play their part in His continuing ministry; they were convinced He was alive and so, they wanted to know more of His life for themselves and be a conduit of His life to others.**

Over the years it transformed the world – in a relatively short space of time, the early church came to be envied by the Roman authorities for how extravagantly they showed love to neighbour, no matter creed, colour or class.

And the result **was this: “...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)**

The growth of the Christian faith was phenomenal, not only here at the birth of the church but across the early centuries. Yet does this phrase mean that these Christians simply stayed at home? Does it mean that they played no part in these historical changes coming to fruition? Of course not – the verses we will look at in a moment, as well as the rest of Acts, if not the rest of the New Testament,...

make it very clear that individual Christians and the Christian community as a whole play a key role, that what we do, what you and I do, is of great importance. If Brightons Parish Church is to have a vibrant future, and if that is to overflow into our community, such that our community thrives as well – then we all (we all) have a part to play in that; we all do need to do certain things, as we'll see today and next week.

But before we get practical, notice this: “...the Lord added to their number” – “...the Lord added to their number” – the early church knew that any life, any growth, any success, any vibrancy, any positive impact upon its own members and then the surrounding community was a result of the Lord being active in and amongst them,...

and so, they made it clear in their account: “...the Lord added to their number.”

Maybe it's because of this conviction that the author of Acts sandwiches the stuff we like: the miracles, the great feats of love, the joy, the incredible growth in numbers – the author sandwiches all these things that we'd love to see, between two key statements: “They devoted themselves to.....[and] the Lord added to their number.” The start and the end go hand in hand, because the top list is like the four wheels of a car – without those four wheels, the car won't move, or with some wheels missing it will only bump and grind along the road, but never reach its full potential, never seeing the distance and destination it could reach with all four wheels.

Or it's like me trying to make **my favourite cake** – Chocolate Guinness Cake (and yes, I can make it) – it's like me trying to make that cake without chocolate, Guinness, bicarbonate of soda or cream cheese: any Chocolate Guinness cake that doesn't include those things is going to be dull and flat, lacking life and lacking all the good stuff that makes me want to keep it to myself!

With baking and cars we know that we need the whole package, but **when it comes to church** we somehow think we can have one without the other – we want the miracles, the great feats of love, the joy, the incredible growth in numbers – but we'd rather leave the other stuff to the “spiritual people” or “religious people” or the minister. So, please here me **clearly on this**: we will never get the good life, without the Good Lord; we will never get the good life, without the Good Lord.

If we want vibrancy in Brightons Parish Church, and if we want that vibrancy to overflow to the community, such that it blesses and benefits the community, and if we want people out there to think church might be relevant, then we each, individually, must know and walk with the Good Lord – because when we do that, His life, His power, His love, His grace will flow into our lives and overflow into the lives of the wider community. It's simply how it works: we will never get the good life, without the Good Lord.

So, **our passage today is not complex or even hard to understand, and many of the ideas and terms you will be familiar with. In some ways, I probably could end the sermon here and leave the rest up to you...but I love to learn, and consequently, I love to give others the opportunity to learn and grow as well.**

So, in the time remaining, I am going to try and limit what I say, and give you as much of the remaining time to chat amongst yourselves. My idea is that this week we'll focus on verse 42, and next week we'll cover the other verses. Hopefully you're up for giving that a try for these two weeks, and then we'll go back to me talking for twenty minutes. Sound fair enough?

So, v42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

But what do these terms mean for us today?

- **Firstly, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching:** they learnt about Jesus and His ways. We can do that a little through Sunday worship,..

but we each need more, and so today, maybe you should consider starting to read your Bible more regularly, and if you need help with that, then the discipleship team have daily reading notes available in the vestibule after today's service.

- **Secondly, they devoted themselves to fellowship:** the word for fellowship here is “koinonia” and its basic idea is “sharing” – sharing in life together. How can we do that with one another? Maybe join a fellowship group; or maybe get involved in active service in this church and next week we'll hopefully have a vacancy list to help with that. Or help with the Easter Fun Day.
- **Thirdly, they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread:** they shared in communion,...

they came back to the Cross time and time again. Here we only celebrate that a handful of times a year, so please try and be here for it.

- **Lastly, they devoted themselves to prayer:** they prayed; again and again throughout Acts we see that the early church prayed. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is quoted as saying this: “there has never, to the best of my knowledge, been a revival in the church that did not begin with a renewal of prayer.” We never get the good life, without the Good Lord, and that’s so true of prayer. **For us, that could mean** coming to the Thursday evening prayer meeting. Or you could come to the Sunday evening services, because this year I’m thinking our theme for them will be prayer.

So, now it's over to you – I'd like to give you the remaining time in small groups to talk about what it might look like for you to be devoted to Jesus through these things, to know and walk with the Good Lord. If you like, one idea is to start the conversation with the category you are weakest at - but whatever you do, try to come up with one or two things you personally could do differently so as to love the Lord a little more with your heart and soul and mind. So, over to you.

(PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION)

Friends, we obviously have not had time to think about all the ways we could apply these verses in our lives – but hopefully you've got a few ideas to take away, and maybe you can take some time this week...

to read these verses again and think through how you might put them into practice in your own life. For these things do help us to walk with the Lord, from whom we receive life, and love and grace – and as we dwell in Him and He in us, then His life and love will overflow in this place and out into the wider community, and maybe then Brightons Parish Church might also testify too that “...the Lord added to their number.”

May it be so. Amen.