

The First Community

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[0 : 0 0] Everyone who has come to faith in Jesus Christ as a Christian who believes in Jesus Christ as we do as Christians here We have recognized that our perspective and our priorities and everything about our lives have changed Because we've met with the risen Savior and we see that very powerfully in the book of Acts as it started off With 12 beleaguered disciples who were beaten and destroyed and defeated when Jesus was crucified Days later having met with him the resurrected Savior. They were completely changed They were transformed. They were radically transformed so that the the whole world was turned upside down by the foundational Teaching and living and witness of the apostles who met with Jesus and I just want to look at two things very briefly I hope You might not think it's terribly brief. I hope it will be fairly brief two things with regard to this passage about the the transformation in the church or the transformation in this community that met with the risen Savior and also

By implication that the changes that Characterized and mark the individuals as well. Just look at two things believing and belonging just going to look at these two things briefly and I guess in many ways baptism speaks a lot about believing and belonging and Community so last week Corey looked at the first section of this chapter Peter's sermon the first sermon as it were following Jesus resurrection and ascension and what Corey mentioned what we see in the passage is That the sermon was incredibly Christ focused It was absolutely central to the sermon and that's interesting because Luke is that kind of Recorder he is recording as we see from the beginning of his gospel and also in in acts He's recording the life and work of Jesus, you know, that's what he's doing. He wants to have a detailed factual witness-oriented account of the life and death and resurrection ascension of Jesus and then how that affected

His followers and the starting of the church and so really the sermon focused on two events the death and the resurrection of Jesus Focused on two kind of witnesses to that as it were The Old Testament prophets who spoke about Jesus who would come and who do this as the Messiah and the apostles who witnessed it who saw it who were there I witnesses and it focuses on the facts of that It also focuses on two promises that Jesus brings the resurrected Christ brings forgiveness and The gift of the Holy Spirit that is spiritual life so that we can know and understand and serve Our Creator and our Lord and two conditions So there's two events two witnesses two promises two conditions. Sorry. We can't help doing this as preachers Sort of order everything probably not entirely accurate, but two conditions to responding to this risen Savior was repentance and faith that is turning around

Changing our minds. That's what repenting me just changing our minds which in effect Also changes our hearts and our commitment and our trust to Jesus and And in so doing we saw and we just read the end of that little section that many people were absolutely Convicted by that we're all part of many of them were part of the proceedings of the crucifixion of Jesus and what was happening They were convicted by that so what can we do and they said turn to him put your trust in him He'll forgive and you will know life and eternal life and their world these individual world and The world of the time was absolutely turned upside down was changed by this remarkable event unexpected event so we have the first sermon there and That leads us on to the first community talk about believing and belonging so because These people were transformed and changed and were told that three thousand of them came to faith in Christ that day That was there for the start of the New Testament church of which we are kind of

Followers on from here this this day and there was new belonging so they had new identity These believers that came of Christ had new identity and the verses we read from verse 42 kind of highlights in very Seed form it highlights the kind of characteristics that Christians and the church that is filled with the spirit of God should show and should live in their lives and Belonging was

hugely important and part of that and Belonging I think belonging is really important to all of us isn't it the fact there's so many here for the baptism today Family and friends speaks about belonging it speaks about who we identify with who's important to us and what matters to us belongings hugely important isn't it reflects our blood our DNA our attitudes our culture our gifts our

[5 : 31] You know our pleasures the things we enjoy you know if I was to think about myself for a moment I'm a lament. Okay There's a sense of belonging there in the sense of my name The family I come from I'm a husband. I'm a brother. I'm a son. I'm a uncle. I'm a nephew I'm a grandson and and these things are all can sub cultures of my My identity but I could also say I identify as a Scotsman some Scottish and identify with that and identify with it Being Scottish and maybe having even Highland flavors because my parents were both from the Highland So there's that identity which is also part of me and then my minister So identify with all the other free church ministers there There's not many of us kind of small subset maybe a hundred or so and identify with them So that when as we did recently very tragically lost one of our brothers that cuts to the core because I identify with them as my colleagues and as my friends and

Within the city maybe here. I identify with other ministers from other churches and other denominations And of course I'm a hip supporter So identify with that tribe You know fast-flowing Cup winning football loving Sport that's who I identify with in that level and so we all of these we are all defined by our different Identities and by the subgroup that fall into them But what we see here and what I know in my life and what you know in your life as Christians and what is being highlighted here was that the fundamental primary belonging for the Christian is Christ and the church the local church the covenant community of believers and That is the natural consequence For for all of those here who the 3000 that came to Christ were told that they were committed to him and committed to one another

They identified with that Christian community the church because that was important to them and for us we recognize that therefore Christ and the church is not just a subculture. It's not one among many. It's not that You know a Scotsman and blah blah blah and I'm also go to church and that's just part of me It's not just a subculture one among many. It's preeminent infiltrates and it lords over every other identity that I have that my primary identity and yours is a Christian and the church here is as the early church was preeminently Christ's Because Christ is our identity throughout eternity Not just in let's say Christ is Lord. He's our Creator and our King and so and there's a huge movement towards individual identity today, I think and also individual salvation and individual salvation is very important in the Bible, but this is an important

Counterbalance to individuality because we recognize that community and church and the lordship of Christ is not optional for us that we are brought in by nature of our commitment to Christ and the work that he's done is to community to family to belonging to Being together now that is hugely important and we'll reflect that a little bit in the baptism When we do the vows the vows will not just be for the parents at one level and for the God parents But they will also be because we take vows as a congregation all of us as a family we take a vow to Care for and love and to pray for and to look after my car because we believe in community is really important and the community of God's people is a primary Recognition for us. So just for a minute as we do the second half here. I'm just going to look very briefly at

Four of the characteristics of this early church community which reflect was spirit filled and And reflected Jesus Christ now about a year ago. We highlighted four characteristics that we thought were important Significant for us as a church The four G's we called them high tech Okay, four G church It's lost in y'all. Okay for G the ether glory Gospel grace and growth, okay The glory of God is important to his worshiping and serving him the gospel itself the truth of the gospel hugely significant and Important to grace the outworking of the gospel of love to one another and in the communities in which we live and growth is To see God blessing and to see us growing in grace individually and growing as a church So these are four things and I'm quite glad that in looking at this early passage that are four similar characteristics, I'm not going to use the same words

[10 : 52] Well, I am in one of them, but the rest are slightly different words But they're the same theme the same truth and that's important So we see that this was a church a community of people that having been transformed and changed to come to know and love Jesus Christ They were turned around completely and they became a worshiping church They devoted themselves to the apostles preaching and to prayers and all came upon every soul and And then we're told the day by day they attended the temple worship the breaking of bread in their homes Praising God and having

faith with the people so it's clear from that very small montage that they were a Worshiping people so from a people that didn't worship before they became worse. Well, no, sorry. That's wrong They were worshipers, but they weren't worshipping the living God and we're all worshipers We all worship something we all have something that's more important even Well, no, maybe we don't have something more important than ourselves But we all either have ourselves or something that we put first

That's really what worship is and this became a worshipping church and we're looking at worship in our evening service St. Columbus just now, but this worshipping Reality is part of area and a coming together to worship for encouragement and for recognition of who our Lord and who our God is and we see that this worship was Joyful and reverent so they were all inspired By the nature and the character of God, but it was also joyful now. We've got a real problem with that We've got a problem with being reverent and joyful Somehow we think if we're gonna be reverent in a worship we need to look glum We need to look serious and solemn and that makes our worship much more acceptable to God because it's solemn and serious but that wasn't a That wasn't a dichotomy for the New Testament church. It was both Reverent Solemn at that level if you want to use that word and joyful

It was celebratory and also all inspiring and that's a brilliant balance for worship in our lives as individuals and our lives together they Engaged in the sacraments at this early stage baptism and the Lord supper the breaking of bread It was structured. They gathered on the first day of the week. They met in the temple It was also spontaneous They gathered together in their homes. So it was both formal and informal. It was Structured like we do in a Sunday morning, but also they met in homes Which I know we do as well on a Wednesday evening, but I know you do informally and spontaneously as well They met for prayer and for praise They recognized their need of God and they prayed to him as a people in their lives And that was all hugely Significant Worshipping church first thing I want to say second time not gonna spend long on these was that they were a learning church and they these all intertwine

They're not they don't stand on their own really individually. They're all mixed in together And and we're looking for these characteristics both in our Christian lives as individuals and our church life as St.

Columbus Worshipping church. They were a learning church There's 42 again. They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread into prayers So they were a learning church. We are learning Chris. You know, we don't come to faith in Christ and then Abandon all hope of learning and put our brains in a closed casket Though many would like to think that that's what Christians do there neanderthal and and you know are unscientific and I've left everything somewhere down the line in a gutter but rather we know and we recognize that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth and The Bible is the revelation of God and his character and as those who have become Rescued by him and who devote call themselves Christians that is the followers of Christ then we want to know more about him So it's impossible isn't it for us to love somebody that we don't know

[15:16] It's crazy for us to say. Yeah. Well, God's really significant and important in my life But actually I don't want to learn anymore about them. I think I know plenty and what I don't know I'll just make up and suit me Because God is there to be known and the Christian life isn't for us and it should never be for us anti-intellectual It shouldn't be that we retire our brains when we become Christians We should stand alongside some of the greatest intellects of the world Who have given their faith and life to Jesus Christ and support them as they defend the faith?

So they were a learning church and we should be a learning church. That's why we preach. That's why we have Bible studies That's why we encourage one another in our Christian faith and this learning church encouraged one another as they devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching You know what it's like, don't you if you're with a crowd of people, you know how difficult is to learn something on your own Well, it is for me really difficult the hardest year of my life was in 1980 when I had to learn Greek for a summer on my own before I entered the free church college. It was the single most depressing Battle of my life learning that language on my own It's so much better when you can learn with other people around you You know what it's like in the workplace if you've got a motivated Work team who want to grow and learn and do things better or at school or in college or wherever it might be if you've got people who are alongside you who are stimulating you and

Encouraging you to learn and that makes learning a great deal easier because there's more and The opposite is true as well Isn't it if you're in with a bunch of people who are not interested whatsoever that kind of rubs off and you tend to be to struggle because of that and here God puts these people together and He says you devote yourselves together the fellowship of learning and we love to see that with the kids We love to put them into kids church So they learn together and they become friends together and they run about here together. We love seeing that We love seeing them having friends and developing friends together and this being part of their home As they learn so worshiping learning quickly loving church Verse 44 says and all who believed were together and had all things in common They were selling their positions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as they had need Unbelievable Grace completely transformed them and they were not so concerned with their own

Comforts, but they saw the needs of others and they became a hugely generous people Grace made them a really powerfully generous people and they shared they were a community who shared together Some of them sold their houses others didn't because they still met in houses But they just were generous and saw great need and responded to that need There was a friend in need Very often we think to the friend in need is a pain in the neck But that wasn't the attitude they had They they recognized that their friendship and their need and their dependence on one another was huge and Therefore they served and they gave to one another C.S. Lewis is an instinct thing he which was very controversial and it may still be very controversial He said don't waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor Act as if you did Now what he's saying is he's not saying be hypocritical

What he's saying there is look just obey Loving is an act of the will it's not necessarily a feeling of warm and fuzziness towards your neighbor who might be a pain who might be in great need who might Take you out your comfort zone or who might demand of you, but he's saying just Just love them and serve them and usually what we find in that is that desire follows as we pray for as we obey as we serve God and as we do what we do and God honors that and That's hugely significant in in the whole community of church because it's rad isn't it radically different From most of the subcultures that we that I mentioned earlier that we cling to ourselves Which are based on our blood or our likes or our attractions or the benefits we get from them That's the that's most of the subgroups we have but here the the community of believers is based on Christ and what he has done for us and it involves listen for this gospel altruism

[20 : 25] Involves us putting other people first and serving them simply because simply because We don't have any particular reason other than what how Christ has been altruistic towards us and we fellowship in our diversity and in our mixture and in our Our unnatural groups as it were and we come together in Christ's name We open our homes and we open our hearts because of need. I think that can be a powerful apologetic for the gospel today I read this week about a Red Cross survey that said a third of I don't know how they worked this out by the way a Third of British adults Would say would claim that they have no one to turn to in a crisis a Third of British adults would say they have no one to turn to in a crisis Loneliness in our connected society is a huge curse is a huge problem and the Christian community shouldn't be insular only looking after itself and having a strong internal community it should reflect an outgoing and loving acceptance of others and be a great

Apologetic for the gospel that brings us into community that Gives us belonging looking today at belief in belonging Well, this is about now we fail and we fall miserably short so often I stand here and ask For all of your forgiveness for the times we've all failed one another in that But we seek by God's grace and in the power of the Spirit to be a loving church and lastly and very briefly a growing church as well We're told at the end and the Lord added to their number day by day those who are being saved You see they weren't insular they were looking out and they had lots of interest and contacts with people who weren't believers And who didn't accept the gospel but who saw the transformation and who saw the love and who saw the sincerity of their lives and influenced others greatly so that people came in and belong and and were saved Became Christians they were attractive as a people and outward looking and

God recognized that and It became a community that he was happy to Transform hearts and lives by and save people and bring them into that That's a huge challenge for us in St. Columbus this morning that people we grow By people coming and coming to know Jesus Christ in our community. So it wasn't just growth by people moving into the area moving It wasn't nominal growth

people just coming alongside for the sake of it. It wasn't Simply the individuals were becoming Christians and then going off and doing their own thing and climbing Arthur seat but they were they were Being saved and they were being added to the number of the community they Believed and they belonged Sometimes people need to sense that belonging and then they will believe as God works in and through them

So the challenge for us this morning and with us I finish is that Christ makes a huge Huge difference. He changes everything in our lives We might have been brought up in a covenant home. We might have been brought up knowing the gospel It might have been a very gentle move to faith might have been very dramatic But either way It's not the beginning that matters It's how he continues to transform us as we praise and worship and hold him in joyful reverent awe and Allow ourselves to be devoted to learning more about him day to day and Week to week and we long for that for our children We take vows on that basis that we will teach them about Jesus and God uses that for his glory And I hope that if you're here today, and you're not a Christian. You're just an interested Observer you may be here for the baptism. You don't normally go to church tonight I hope you will consider the truth of Jesus Christ and the claims of Jesus Christ

The sermon of Peter which talked about his death and resurrection and how important that is and that you'd investigate that Use your mind use your intelligence use your heart Pray if you've never prayed before and ask God to open up Truth to you so that your heart will be changed and your mind your intellect Your understanding will also be changed and I know when that's the case It will be the greatest moment of your life to know and understand that belonging and that ultimate identity in In Rescue and reconnecting with your maker and Lord and Savior Amen Let's bow heads very briefly and prayer Lord God help us today. We pray to consider your word and to remember this great Prototypical first Christian community that is reflected in these early words a Spirit-filled community

[25 : 54] Baptized in the spirit of God that we seek to be here both as individuals Spirit-filled and also as a community help us to do that forgive us when we don't forgive us when we struggle Forgive us when we make it hard for others to be part of the community or when we Bioractions or thoughts or our words are are careless or hurtful or Break that community covenant and trust in one another or when we don't care about it And it's insignificant to us and may we be a devoted and committed and loving and learning and worshiping and growing community And may you have all the praise and glory. Amen