

January 4, 2015

"Welcome to the Forever Family"

Acts 2:38, 41-47

You Might Be In the Wrong Church If....

- A week before Christmas the pastor announces the church will be "closed for the holidays."
- On your second Sunday as a visitor they ask you to be their pastor.
- The floral arrangement on the altar is in the shape of a big horseshoe... that reads "Belmont Race Track."
- The minister falls asleep while delivering his own sermon.
- The worship band has a tip jar on the loudspeaker
- The Bible they use is the Dr. Seuss version.
- The offering plate has been passed three times and they haven't even sung the open song yet.
- The people in the pew next to you brought a sack lunch.
- You discover the church refers to the 10 commandments as the 10 suggestions & offers to let you "pick any six."
- The Pastor preaches an eloquent sermon on ancient heresies and the church board wants to make them part of the doctrinal statement.
- The Ushers ask "Smoking or non-smoking?"
- Everyone agrees the temperature in the Sanctuary is absolutely perfect!

But you might be in the right church if it looks like this from Acts 2

Acts 2:38, 41-47

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ..."

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 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—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.

Acts 2:38, 41-47 THE MESSAGE

Peter said, "Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up.

They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

Everyone around was in awe — all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

If you receive my daily email, “Good Morning!” or as some have called it, “God Morning!” then you have seen this at the top of that email every day, referring to our church:

Welcome to the Forever Family
Knowing Jesus & Making Him Known
Helping people live a life of faith in God

Devoted to:

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

God's Word

Fellowship

Ministry to those in need

Prayer

Worship

Taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to Everyone

That list of what our church is devoted to comes directly from our text today in Acts 2. What do each of these things mean? Why are they so important that we are steadfastly devoting ourselves to them? This is what we would like to talk to you about in our new series that starts today called, “Welcome to the Forever Family.”

What are you devoted to? What are you so committed to that you will persevere in that thing; you will remain steadfast in learning about it, growing in it, seeking it, spending time there, being around people who are into it or can keep you motivated in going after that thing?

Acts 2:42 AMP

And they steadfastly persevered, devoting themselves constantly to...

Now that's commitment! So, what would others say you are committed to: steadfastly persevering, devoting yourself constantly to?

It is an important question because it can determine the stability of your life. And things you think will bring stability are the very things that are not stable at all.

2 Peter 3:17-18 (Peter ends his letter like this)

I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends. Be on guard so that you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing.

[What Peter is saying or what God is saying through Peter is if you want stability in your life (if you don't want to lose stability in your life) then watch what others, even what some preachers and teachers of Scripture tell you. Don't get caught and carried away by their errors and the errors of popular opinion and what they say you should be devoted to. So what should you do instead – the bible not only tells you what to stop doing, but what you should replace it with -]

Rather, [then follow wicked people and their errors of what brings stability] you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen.

In other words, stability comes from being steadfast or devoted to the right thing. It comes from faith or steadfast devotion to Jesus and being devoted to add to our faith so we can grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. The early church was devoted to the right things.

I feel the need to talk about the word, “church” this morning and the correct definition of “church.” I'm not sure why those who translated the bible from Greek to English even chose the word “church.” The first time the word appears in the New Testament is in

Matthew 16:18b (where Jesus says)

I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

[A side note: this verse is a prophecy from Jesus. He predicted us! And every time we gather together with other believers we are fulfilling His 2000 year old prophecy.]

The Greek word that Jesus used is ekklesia (ek-klay-see'-ah), “I will build my ekklesia, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” Ekklesia means a gathering or an assembly of people. It was not even a religious term. It referred to any gathering of people, for civic purposes, or soldiers for a military purpose. Ekklesia was simply a gathering or assembly of people called out for a specific purpose. It never referred to a specific place, only to a specific gathering of people united by a common identity and purpose.

So where did the word church come from. The German culture influenced by Christianity, used the word kirika, which became in modern German the word kirche. The word meant “house of the Lord.” The German term was used to refer to the ekklesia of Jesus, and from it we get our word church. The word church in our English Bibles is not a translation from the Greek. And that is unfortunate because the German kirche and the Greek ekklesia are two very different ideas. A kirche is a location. An ekklesia is a purposeful gathering of people. A kirche is a building you can unlock, turn on lights and heat and later shut off the lights, turn down the heat and lock up. But you

can't lock up an ekklesia. The church is not the building; it is the gathering of the people of God in this building or in a home or wherever the people of God gather.

The church started out not as a place but as a happening, a live organism, not an organization. Organization was needed, God is a God of order, but the church is much more than an institution. The church is not meant to be simply a meeting, but a movement. We do not simply have worship services but we have a mission to serve our local community. We don't come to church, we are the church, an assembly of people building community with one another, to know Jesus and to make Him known. We are people helping one another and those in our community to live a life of faith in God. The church is people who are being breathed on by the Holy Spirit.

Which brings us to our first point: a forever family is a gathering of people who are devoted to being filled with the Holy Spirit.

If there's one thing that comes through overwhelmingly in reading the book of Acts, it's that the Holy Spirit is blowing a fresh, creative wind over these men and women. The church is something that's breathed on from above. It came into being as the Holy Spirit descended upon praying men and women. It was sustained as the same Holy Spirit dwelt in these people and gave them new life. The church as we see it in Acts is always something that happens as the Holy Spirit descends. It's never an institution with a history you can look back at and measure and talk about. It became an institution, of course, and it was necessary and proper that it should, but it started out as something that happened, and that experience of happening, of divine occurrences, is the one thing that's most evident in the book of Acts, and most essential for our own definition and awareness as a church.

- Eugene H. Peterson

We want to be a church – an assembly of people who are devoted to being filled, led by, yielded and surrendered to the Holy Spirit. The only church building the New Testament talks about is a building made of people, with Christ as the cornerstone where God lives by His Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

God is not confined to a building but is present by His Spirit with all believers. How do we become believers and made part of this dwelling where God's lives by His Spirit?

Acts 2:38 AMP

And Peter answered them, Repent (change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner selves instead of rejecting it) and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of *and* release from your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is how you become the ekklesia. Everyone is invited to the church; you don't have to be a follower of Christ to come to church or even be a part of a church. Anyone can come and listen, and sing, even be involved in the ministry of the church, and serving the needy in the community and around the world. But until you change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner self instead of rejecting it, and make a decision to follow Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit you are not a member of God's family, the ekklesia where God lives by His Spirit.

This accepting of Christ as your Savior may be gradual or happen at a particular moment in time that you will never forget. But when it does

Romans 8:16

His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

God becomes our Father, we become His children when we accept Christ and we come under the influence of the Spirit; led by, under the control of the Spirit of God.

Romans 8:14

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Once we have asked Jesus to forgive us and become our Savior, we then must consecrate our whole life to Him making Him Lord of our life. Christ expects and deserves total devotion, and our lives must be yielded completely to the influence and control of His Holy Spirit. When our lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit we will want to do what pleases the Spirit.

Romans 8:5-9

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.)

And so the Bible commands us...

Ephesians 5:18

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That command to be filled with the Holy Spirit literally means always be being filled or be ever filled with the Holy Spirit.

The ekklesia or the forever family of believers in Christ are people who are devoted to being continually filled with the Holy Spirit, living to please Him. Will you make that commitment today to devote yourself to being filled with the God the Holy Spirit? God has something for you today. He wants to fill you with the Holy Spirit.

Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have been directing my own life and that, as a result, I have sinned against You. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now invite Christ to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You commanded me to be filled, and as You promised in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit."

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If so, bow in prayer and trust God to fill you with the Holy Spirit right now.