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The Body of Christ

Acts 2.42-47

Series: We Value...

March 13, 2022

The Village Church at Shell Point

I. Introduction

- A. I grew up in a rural part of Montgomery County, MD
 - 1. The town was called Damascus
 - a. That's right; my home was only about a block from the Road to Damascus
 - b. I'll let your imaginations run with that one
 - 2. But the church I grew up in was about 4 miles away in an even smaller town called Etchison
 - a. It had about a dozen houses and farms, a general store, and a church
 - b. The church was founded in 1881
 - c. Here's the **picture** of the church – which is pretty much the same as when I grew up
 - d. Mt. Tabor Methodist Church
 - 3. There's a lot of Hawkins family history in that community
 - a. And about half of the stained glass windows in the sanctuary bear the name Hawkins
 - b. Which meant that some Hawkins donated the window
- B. When Jean and I moved back to Maryland from our time in graduate school we moved into a home my grandfather had built in Etchison
 - 1. Right across the street from the church
 - 2. But we decided not to attend church there – even when all the Hawkins stained glass windows
 - a. Mainly because we had Matthew – a toddler – at the time
 - b. And the church was pretty much at that time a church of elderly people
 - c. And we didn't feel that we would have had ministry opportunities for a growing family
 - d. So we became members at a nearby Presbyterian church
 - 3. But we still knew the people there; loved the people there
 - a. And my parents attended church there
 - b. So from time to time, we also would attend services with them
- C. But one of the things we did at that church was attend their church suppers
 - 1. Now they had some church suppers!
 - a. They had fried chicken suppers
 - b. They had turkey and all the trimmings suppers

- c. They had old country ham suppers
 - d. They had fried oyster suppers
 - 2. And hundreds of people would come to them
 - a. Lots of country churches did that kind of thing
 - b. And little Mt. Tabor Methodist was really good at suppers
- D. We stayed in that home for about two years until we moved to Morgantown, WV
 - 1. But when we came back to visit our families, we sometimes joined Mom and Dad for worship at the church
 - 2. But on quite a number of occasions we came to the suppers
 - a. At least we must have
 - 3. Because one time we came back to visit our folks (Jean's parents lived in the same town too)
 - a. And we made a decision to go to church with my Mom and Dad
 - 4. And Matthew – I can't remember exactly how old he was on this occasion; my guess is about 7 or 8
 - a. And when we told him that we were going to Mom and Dad's church he exclaimed, "Oh, we're going to the eat'n church"
 - 5. In his short life and experience, he had come to the conclusion that what most characterized the Mt. Tabor Methodist Church was eating
 - a. "We're going to the eat'n church"
- E. I have to admit, that a good bit of eating took place at that church
 - 1. And I wonder whether or not it's a good thing for a church to be known as an "eating church"
 - 2. So perhaps we ought to search the scriptures to see how the Lord of the church wants His body to be characterized
- F. We're in a series on the core values of TVC
 - 1. **Our mission: We are building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ**
 - 2. But the community we're building has some fundamental commitments, some core values, that make up our DNA
 - 3. **We value...**
 - a. **The Glory of God**
 - b. **The Word of God**
 - c. **The Sufficiency of Christ**
 - d. **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit**
 - e. **The Great Commission of Christ**
 - f. **The Body of Christ**
 - g. **Prayer**
 - 4. Series – covered
 - a. The glory of God
 - b. The word of God
 - c. The Great Commission
 - d. The ministry of the Holy Spirit
 - 5. Today we explore the core value of the Body of Christ
 - a. The body of Christ, of course, is a metaphor for the Church

- b. In the scripture the Church is seen as His body
 - c. An integrated, organic whole
 - d. Which united around the common mission of the Great Commission
 - e. Is the visible expression of Jesus Christ to a world desperately in need of redemption
 - 6. Unfortunately, the Church hasn't always been, nor is it presently, the epitome of faithful and unified witness for Jesus
 - a. That's why it's important to take the time to explore what the scripture teaches about how the Church, the body of Christ, is supposed to function
- G. When we speak of the Church as the Body of Christ we need to understand it on two levels
 - 1. There is the "big C" Church – the global, universal Church
 - a. Made up of all believers in all places – and across all times
 - b. That's what we mean when we say "we believe in the holy catholic church" in the Apostles' Creed
 - c. **"Catholic" = universal**
 - 2. And there is the local church
 - a. And the local church is locus of encounter with the world
 - 3. The world doesn't interact so much with the "big C" Church
 - a. It's too big, and even a bit abstract, for the world to engage with it
 - 4. But the world does engage with believers at particular places and times
 - 5. They say that all politics is local
 - a. It's probably even more true, that all true religion is local
 - b. If we want to understand what the Body of Christ really looks like, we have to look at its local expression
 - 6. So this morning, we'll be looking at one local expression that is a wonderful model of what a faithful demonstration of the Body of Christ looks like
 - a. And it will be easy to see how we measure up to what the Lord of the Church has in mind for His Body

II. **The Idolatry of the Body**

- A. The first observation I'd like to make is that our culture – particularly in the west – has a pervasive preoccupation with the body
 - 1. The body – the human body
 - a. We are extraordinarily health conscious
 - 2. We expend incredible amounts of time and resources on our bodies
 - a. We spend millions of dollars on products to make our bodies look and feel – well, like a million bucks
 - 3. We build magnificent buildings to care for our bodies
 - a. And thank the Lord – the Larsen Health Center finally got its paperwork and will be moving residents in a couple of weeks
- B. All of that is wonderful
 - 1. Our physical world is good

- a. As God created it – He declared it was good
 - 2. And our physical bodies are good
 - a. When God created human beings He declared the whole creation to be very good
 - 3. And God entrusted into our care the created world
 - a. We are stewards of the creation
 - b. And that means, stewards of our bodies
 - 4. Being interested in the health and welfare of our physical existence is a God-ordained enterprise
 - 5. Not only that, but Jesus lived, died and rose again so that our bodies would be redeemed
 - a. The resurrection is promised – and we’ll have spiritual bodies
 - b. No more tears, no more pain, no more dysfunction
 - c. Physical existence the way it was intended before sin got in the way
 - 6. And by His grace, we are able to enjoy the firstfruits of that existence in the healings that God provides
- C. But even good things can become idols
 - 1. And health in our day and age, I’m afraid, has become an idol
 - 2. Commercial – “When you have your health, you have everything”
 - a. Really?
 - 3. First of all, you won’t always have your health in this life
 - a. We do the best we can; but all of us are on the downside of the hill
 - b. And if you ask developmental physiologists, that decline started in our 20's
 - 4. But more importantly, you can have your health, but if you don’t have Jesus, you’ve got nothing
 - a. And – if you don’t have your health (and a lot of our own people in this community have serious health issues), but if you have Jesus, you have everything
 - 5. What does eternity look like, with Jesus and without Jesus, in terms of health?
 - a. Weeping a gnashing of teeth doesn’t sound very healthy to me
 - b. No more crying, no more pain, no more death – that’s what we get in an eternity with Jesus
- D. My concern is not that we are concerned with our physical health – that’s fine
 - 1. My concern is that, by comparison, we have so little interest in the health of the body of Christ
 - a. The health of the church
 - 2. So what does a healthy church look like?
 - a. The healthiest description of a church in the NT is arguably the First Church of Jerusalem
- E. Text
 - 1. **Acts 2:42–47** (ESV) —
 - a. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- b. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.
- c. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.
- d. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.
- e. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people.
- f. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

III. **The Devotion of the Body**

- A. The first thing we see in this text is this was a devoted church
 - 1. They were devoted to four things
 - a. The apostles' teaching
 - b. The fellowship
 - c. The breaking of bread
 - d. Prayers
 - 2. And usually when we study this passage we jump to those four things
 - a. And we'll certainly get to them
 - 3. But we often forget the primary verb in this sentence
 - a. **Devoted = proskartereo (Gk) – to persist, to hold fast**, to be strong, to endure
 - 4. In other words – these people were committed to their church
 - a. No matter what challenges came their way, they were going to remain faithful to their local fellowship
 - b. And the four things we'll describe in a minute – they didn't just practice those things
 - c. They were devoted to those things
 - 5. They were "all in" on their local church
- B. And that doesn't mean that the First Church of Jerusalem was perfect
 - 1. There is no perfect church
 - a. And in Acts 4 we find out there were problems
 - 2. And by the way, if you find the perfect local church – don't join it
 - a. If you do, it won't be perfect any longer
 - 3. But these people – in spite of whatever imperfections existed – were "all in" in this local body of Christ
- C. And that is so unlike our culture
 - 1. Our consumer-oriented culture
 - 2. People shop for churches these days the way they shop for a loaf of bread or a car
 - a. And when they get dissatisfied with their favorite brand, they just go change to another

3. They didn't have those options in the 1st Century in Jerusalem
 - a. But it wouldn't have mattered
 - b. They were devoted to their local church
- D. Sociologist George Barna has been studying the religious climate of our nation for nearly a generation
 1. Using the tools of his trade – surveys of various sorts
 2. One of the criteria for identifying which people he categorizes as strongly committed to the Christian faith are those people who attend services twice a month
 3. In America, you are thought to be strongly committed to the faith if you show up to services half the time
 - a. If you want to know why the church in America is weak – just start there
 4. Doesn't sound like “devoted” to me
- E. Are you devoted to your local church?
 1. If it's TVC, are you devoted to this church?
 2. If it's another church, are you devoted to it?
 3. Are you “all in”
- F. Now when we're devoted, what are we devoted to?

IV. **The Doctrine of the Body**

- A. **Acts 2:42** (ESV) — 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ...
 1. First – the apostles' teaching
 - a. They were devoted to the doctrine of the apostles
- B. The church is not primarily a social community
 1. The church is not the Rotary Club
 - a. Or the Kiwanis
 - b. Or the Lions Club
 2. Those are fine organizations
 - a. They do a lot of good
 - b. But they are not the church
- C. The church is a community
 1. But the church is **A Community of Truth**
 - a. The local church is committed to the doctrine taught by the apostles
 2. Again – the Nicene Creed – “we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church”
 - a. Apostolic – devoted to the teaching of the apostles
- D. So what did the apostles teach?
 1. Well, first, the apostles were with Christ through His earthly ministry, and were witnesses of His death, resurrection, and ascension
 - a. So they taught what Christ Himself taught
 - b. And they taught the person and work of Christ of which they were eye-witnesses
 2. And the record of the apostles' teaching starts with the gospels
 - a. The life and ministry of Jesus

3. And then their teaching is recorded in the epistles of the NT
- E. But they also taught the Bible
 1. But what Bible did they have?
 - a. They didn't have the NT
 - b. They wrote the NT!
 2. But the Bible they had was the Hebrew Bible
 - a. What we have as the OT
 3. And when you read the gospels, you find Jesus Himself using the Hebrew Bible
 - a. And the apostles recorded Jesus' use of the OT
 4. And when you read the epistles you find the apostles also using the OT to affirm the person and work of Messiah Jesus
- F. So a church that is devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the apostles' doctrine, is devoted to the Bible
 1. The whole Bible
 - a. The OT as well as the NT
 2. Paul: **Acts 20:27** (ESV) — 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.
 - a. Beginning to end
- G. Are you devoted to the Bible?
 1. It's not easy
 - a. This is a big book!
 - b. I've been a Christian since I was a teenager
 - c. And I've found that it takes more than a lifetime to master the Bible
 - d. I've not yet mastered it!
 2. But I hope I'm devoted to trying!
- H. Do you think you're devoted to the Bible if you spend 30 minutes a week on it?
 1. That's about how long I preach each Sunday
 2. What do we do on Sunday evening?
 - a. Most of the time – not when we have a concert – we teach the Bible
 - b. So if you came on Sunday evening you could double the amount of time you would spend studying the Bible
 - c. And if you stopped coming on Sunday evening you could cut in half the amount of time you spend studying the Bible
- I. Then there's CLS classes – teach the Bible there
 1. And small group Bible studies
 2. No shortage of opportunities to take advantage of Bible study in this community
 - a. By really exceptional Bible teachers
 - b. Do you realize how blessed we are to have the Bible teachers we have in this church?
- J. And then, what about every day?
 1. That's why we do Study with the Pastor

- a. Where more than 100 of us study the same passages of scripture together every day
 - K. We're a church devoted to the apostles' teaching – the doctrine of the body of Christ
 - 1. That's who we are
 - a. Are you "all in" on the apostles' teaching?
- V. **The Fellowship of the Body**
- A. **Acts 2:42** (ESV) — 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship...
 - 1. Ok, so if being devoted to the apostles' teaching is a bit too convicting, fellowship seems a lot more appealing
 - B. Most of you have been in churches that had fellowship halls
 - 1. What did you do in fellowship halls?
 - a. Coffee and pastries?
 - b. You ate in fellowship halls
 - 2. Now we can get into that!
 - C. But that's not what fellowship means in this passage
 - 1. **Fellowship = koinonia (Gk)**
 - a. Really means community
 - b. Root = koine – common
 - D. Fellowship really has to do with caring for one another in community
 - 1. The passage itself defines it for us
 - 2. **Acts 2:44–45** (ESV) —
 - a. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (Koine)
 - b. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.
 - 3. That's the fellowship
 - 4. **Acts 4:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. (Koine)
 - 5. **Acts 4:34–35** (ESV) —
 - a. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.
 - E. Now this is not communism
 - 1. Where the state confiscates personal property and redistributes it
 - a. It's not even that the church takes personal property and redistributes it
 - 2. It's voluntary
 - a. Individuals or families decide what of their resources they want to give for the benevolent ministries of the church

F. Example

1. Morgantown church
 - a. House sitting in spring 1981
 - b. Had just started attending the C&MA church
2. House in Maryland hadn't sold in 9 months
 - a. Finally sold
 - b. Had to move our furniture and belongings to Morgantown
 - c. Had no place to put them
3. Offered a prayer request in church about our problem
 - a. 2 households, one family and one single man – lived across the street from each other
 - b. They offered for us to use their family rooms to store our furniture and boxes
 - c. We didn't know them, really, at all
4. Their view was, while our homes have our names on the deed, they really belong to God
 - a. And if God can use our homes to help a brother and sister – they belong to Him
5. That's fellowship
 - a. A community that cares for its members

G. Now we are in a unique community

1. If you are a Shell Point resident, much of this kind of community caring is provided – it's why Shell Point exists
 - a. SP is, after all, owned by the C&MA Foundation
 - b. SP is an arm of the church
 - c. It exists for the glory of God and the care of His people (the SP mission statement)
2. But in other ways we are a caring community as well
 - a. Sometimes we see brothers and sisters in need and can be a channel of communication of those needs to SP
 - b. Sometimes we can work through the church to provide for those needs
 - c. Sometimes it's a matter of friends helping friends informally
3. But in whatever way we can, the church is to be devoted to caring for one another in community

H. That's being devoted to the fellowship

VI. **The Hospitality of the Body**

A. **Acts 2:42** (ESV) —

1. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread ...

B. Finally! There it is!

1. The "eat'n church"
 - a. The church does, in fact, eat
2. Little Matthew was on to something!

- C. Now there will be some who will try to spiritualize this
1. Make it about communion
 - a. After all, we break bread when we have the Lord's Supper
 2. But that's not what this passage means
 - a. This passage means the church family ate together
 - b. Again, the passage itself tells us
 3. Acts 2:46-47 (ESV) —
 - a. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people....
 - b. This is the "eat'n church"
- D. But why? Why is the church family eating together so important?
1. That's where relationships are built
 - a. That's where we share our lives with one another
 - b. It's what we might call "table fellowship"
 - c. Or "hospitality"
 2. Families normally gather around a common table with great regularity
 - a. That's where much of genuine love, affection, and caring takes root in the home
 3. This was driven home to me years ago when I taught special education
 - a. I taught learning disabled and behavior disordered Jr. High boys
 - b. And I learned that often the boys with the behavioral problems didn't have any kind of organic disability
 - c. But they had dysfunctional families
 4. I remember doing a home visit with one of students
 - a. Nice home; great neighborhood
 - b. There was hardly any furniture in the home
 - c. No dining room table
 - d. No kitchen table
 - e. So I asked the youngster, what does your family do for meals?
 - f. He said, "Oh, we never eat together. I just look in the fridge for something and take it to my room."
 - g. They never ate together!
- E. Jean and I started a college church ministry in the Morgantown church in the early 2000's
1. In that ministry we had a team of people, led by a guy who used to work with his mother in a catering business, who prepared a full meal for the students following the Sunday evening service
 2. People used to make fun of us – no wonder students come; you feed them!
 3. But no! That wasn't the point
 - a. Following the service, they stayed
 - b. We all gathered around tables
 - c. And got to know one another; loved one another; cared for one another

4. Families do it
 - a. And the church family does it in a healthy church

VII. **The Prayers of the Body**

- A. Finally, the First Church of Jerusalem was devoted to prayer
- B. **Acts 2:42** (ESV) —
 1. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- C. Prayer is arguably the one lifestyle that distinguishes Christians from others
 1. Secular people study things (probably not the Bible)
 2. Secular people often care for their neighbors
 3. Secular people eat together
 4. But secular people don't communicate with God
- D. But prayer is not just casual conversation about trivial things
 1. Prayer is the engine of the church
 - a. Prayer is the power center of ministry
 - b. Prayer is always the first work of anything that gets done of eternal significance
- E. At TVC, we seek to be a praying church
 1. We pray in all our worship services
 - a. We set aside an evening service on Wednesdays to pray for one another and for our international workers
 2. Groups get together and pray for various needs
 3. And none of that is as important as what Jesus describes as the secret closet of prayer
 - a. Our individual times of devotion
 4. And none of our corporate praying will ever rise above the level of our individual prayer lives
- F. Of all the things that characterized the First Church of Jerusalem, and that is a model of all healthy local churches, this is probably the most convicting
 1. Most of us have to work at prayer
 - a. It doesn't come naturally
 - b. The idea of prayer as a spiritual discipline is central to how we grow in Christ
 2. I would challenge you, if you haven't found it in your routine to join the church when we pray on Wednesdays, try it
 - a. You'll discover much about the church, our ministries, our people, when you pray with others
 - b. And many times we are studying the Psalms – the prayer book of the NT
 - c. And we're all learning and growing in our prayer lives as a result
- G. So that's what a healthy body of Christ looks like
 1. A devoted body
 2. Devoted to
 - a. The apostles' teaching

- b. The fellowship
- c. The breaking of bread – really! Eating!
- d. Prayer
- 3. That’s why it’s a core value of TVC
 - a. Are you devoted?

VIII. The Growth of the Body

- A. Oh, and one more thing
 - 1. Healthy bodies grow
 - a. And the early church grew as well
 - 2. You might be wondering, where does evangelism fit into this picture of the healthy local body of Christ?
- B. Acts 2:47 (ESV) — 47 ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
 - 1. Evangelism happened
 - a. The church grew
 - b. Acts 2.41– 3,000 were added in one day
 - c. Acts 4.4 – 5,000 were added as the church continued in its healthy state
 - 2. Yes, the church grew
 - a. But God did it!
 - b. “The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”
- C. You know, it’s rare to have a community like the First Church of Jerusalem
 - 1. A community devoted to
 - a. The apostles’ teaching
 - b. True, caring fellowship for one another
 - c. Building relationships around a common table
 - d. And prayer
 - 2. And when the world sees that – it gets their attention
 - a. So when the gospel is preached
 - b. It has credibility
 - c. It screams authenticity
 - 3. And when the world sees that
 - a. People come to faith in Jesus
 - b. They say, I want what those people have
 - 4. And the Lord adds to the church
- D. That’s the Body of Christ
 - 1. A core value of TVC
 - a. Are you devoted?