

Introduction

- Moving in - cauffle - when the movers finally finish and leave you in the place on your own:
 - what do we do now?
 - where do we begin!?
- I suspect that might have been in the disciples minds as they walked the short distance back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives:
 - Jesus has gone, he's given you your instructions: be witnesses, but wait...
 - "how will we know when the Spirit comes?" "what do we do while we wait?" "what will being witnesses be like?" "how can we go to the ends of the earth?"...
- But this was one occasion when the disciples seem to have got things right, and from their priorities in this waiting period we can learn **three important lessons** for being the church today:
 - particularly for being the church in a period of **uncertainty and change**.

A Living Church will be Prayerful

- The first thing that the disciples demonstrate is that **a living church will be prayerful**
- I remember where I learned a great deal about how to pray:
 - peculiar octagonal room tacked on the back of the church I attended as a student in Edinburgh, where the PM was held;
 - either freezing cold (heating not on!) or very stuffy;
 - west facing, so sun shone came slanting in through the trees outside in the summer time
- I have warm memories of that room - but **not** because of the room itself:
 - because of the people who pray there week by week on a Wednesday evening
 - came in as a young student and met people who knew God, who had been spending time in his presence since way before I was even born. There was a warmth and depth and a vividness to their relationship with God that was wonderful
 - not always expressed in polished word or phrase - often not, in fact!!
 - but exhibiting a trustfulness, an underlying attitude that said, "**Father, you alone can do this - help, please!**"
- I spent several years going to that PM on as many Wednesday evenings as I could manage; for much of the time I never prayed a word!
 - but there I saw trust in action, trust in God expressed and growing
 - **and that is what prayer is all about!**
- That's exactly the attitude Peter and the other disciples adopted:
 - they prayed, constantly!
 - all of them, not just some of them!
- We are not told specifically what they prayed about - perhaps the words themselves don't matter so much? - but what is clear is their attitude, of leaning on God for his help and direction.
 - and it was into this attitude of open-handed trust that God was able to pour that most precious gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit!
- That has practical implications for us:
 - how do we pray?
 - its clear that we don't **need** to meet with others to pray; indeed Jesus often went off alone to pray;
 - but on the other hand, its a rare person who can grow and sustain a life of prayer without the example, encouragement and help of others who are seeking to grow in the same way.
- **How do you get fit?** By **exercising**, doing the very thing that shows we are fit!

- and few have the self-discipline to exercise alone...
- How do you become trustful? By expressing trust in prayer!
 - and few have the self-discipline to pray completely on their own...
- Come to one of the PMs, or to the housegroups, as you are able; or find someone with whom you can pray.
 - not out of guilt because its something the new minister says we ought to!
 - but out of a desire to grow in trust!

A Living Church will be Obedient

- The second thing that the disciples demonstrate is that a living church will be obedient to what the Scriptures teach
- I was at a meeting during the past week when a couple of missionaries who work in central Thailand were speaking of their work.
 - their "job" is to support, encourage, train local leaders;
 - issue came up with one of the leaders; some behaviour incompatible with his profession and his position;
 - Jesus' gave fairly clear instructions for dealing with this kind of situation: *(Matthew 18:15-17) "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*
 - BUT in Thailand such an approach is culturally very difficult!
 - great pressure not to confront...
 - the missionaries struggled with their fellow leaders to decide what to do
 - finally decided that they would confront; discipline was exercised; painful; yet, though it is still early days, there are some indications that their obedience may prove fruitful in the long term.
- In the passage we read in Acts, the issue was not so much one of discipline, but one of leadership:
 - as they read in the Scriptures and prayed, they saw that they needed to replace Judas, and have 12 apostles; 12 very symbolic, 12 tribes in Israel, from 12 sons of Israel (Jacob)
 - BUT sensitive issue: they would be replacing Judas, who'd betrayed Jesus so badly! And it was Jesus himself who had chosen the original 12; how dare they get involved in choosing a replacement?
- They chose to obey, regardless of how hard that choice was.

A Living Church will Choose its Leaders Wisely

- A Living Church will be Prayerful
- A Living Church will be Obedient
- And the third thing that the disciples demonstrate is that a living church will choose its leaders wisely:
- I remember feeling very sorry for an elder I heard about in one church:
 - a new minister had come, and was instituting a lot of changes;
 - a lot was being asked of the elders to give a lead in implementing those changes; they were being called on to live up to the Biblical standards of leadership set out, for example, in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus
 - and this elder's complaint was "This is not what I signed up for!"
 - he'd been asked to be an elder many years before; recently moved to the area, moved his lines to this church; short of elders in a church that was expanding rapidly: "do your door duty and pop the communion cards through the door..." - that was what he was asked to do!
 - and so these "new" expectations were a shock to the system!

- The problem was, leaders had not been chosen wisely in the past, and that had stored up problems for the future.
- Here in Acts 1 we see the disciples choosing well:
 - they looked for people who had spent time with Jesus, who knew him for themselves; (v.21)
 - they looked for people who could bear witness to the transformation he brought (here, witnesses to the resurrection, to the new life he brought, v.22);
 - and they looked for God's guidance on all they sought to do (v.24-26)
- Simple lesson for us to choose wisely who we ask to be involved in leadership, whether eldership, BobbyBuilders, GB, Housegroups, Holiday Club, or anything else we put our hand to.
 - and if we ourselves are already in such a position of leadership, we should guard those qualities in ourselves - our time with Jesus, our ability to bear witness for ourselves to what he has done in our lives, and a sense of his hand upon us leading and directing our path

Conclusion

- *A Living Church will be Prayerful*
- *A Living Church will be Obedient*
- *A living church will choose its leaders wisely*
- But a living church won't be perfect!!
 - you know the old joke?
 - if you find the perfect church, don't go there - 'cos as soon as you go it will cease to be perfect!!
- The early church was not perfect, even when they got things right (as here)
 - and we are not perfect either!
 - yet it was as this imperfect church was prayerful (trusting), obedient and seeking to choose its leaders well that God was able to come and transform its situation through the gift of the Spirit.
- [May we follow in their example, and know the wind of the Spirit in our midst!](#)