

Chat with the Children

- Before the service hand out colouring/menu sheets so folk can think about their favourite meal...
- Talk about folks choices in their menu of favourite meal...
 - then slide into what elements would make up the best church ever
- Some snap elements to a good church, without much comment - we'll be thinking more later...
 - Lord, help us to be a really good church family...

Introduction

- What kind of church would like to be part of? What would your ideal be? What things do you think are important to you?
 - interesting to think through!
- Throughout Acts Luke uses short summary sections to break up the longer sections
 - they provide a kind of breathing space for reflection on the state of affairs so far!
- So, how far has the baby church come by the end of Acts 2?

They were devoted to...

- Key word in the this passage is devoted
- Devote: give all or a large part of one's time or resources to (a person, activity or cause); Devoted: very loving or loyal
- v.42 mentions four things that typified the life of these early Christians, things they devoted themselves to:

They were devoted to the apostles teaching

- Apostles teaching we now have as the NT:
 - note how it makes explicit the connection between the OT and Jesus
 - so, for us, what the Word teaches us.
- In particular, as it is taught:
 - what does devoted mean?
 - not a sycophantic adulation of the preacher, certainly!!
 - "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you
 - paying careful attention, engaging with what is being taught, asking questions so that we applying that teaching to the living our lives

They were devoted to the fellowship

- Fellowship - word used means "sharing".
 - in other words, "they were devoted to the sharing together"
 - more than simply the sharing of possessions that is one practical consequence, and is mentioned in vs.44-45
 - sense is that they were devoted to one another
 - they chose to give themselves to each other, helping, serving, being real and open and honest with, finding out about, befriending, supporting, being with one another;
 - there is what we might describe as a spiritual sense to it - the help was not just practical (meals, lifts...) but also to encourage devotion to Christ
 - they devoted themselves to that which was important to the fellowship - and that which was important to the fellowship was following the risen Lord!

They were devoted to breaking bread

- Communion
 - at this period in the church's history, it would have almost certainly been over a

meal - the **breaking of bread** at the beginning of the meal, almost like "saying grace", only more so!

- **What does it mean to be devoted to communion?**
 - I've known people, particularly those who have grown up in churches where the regular practise is to have communion every week but who have subsequently moved to a church where communion is less frequent, who feel deprived!!
 - so, does devoted to breaking bread mean we do it every week?
- Its not so simple or mechanistic as that!
- **What, after all, is communion?**
 - at its most basic it is a **remembering...**
 - a remembering not just of the **fact of Jesus death on the Cross**, and of the events of those few days in Jerusalem;
 - but also a **remembering that we are sinners**, that it was our sin that took Jesus to that Cross, that the task that he finished on the Cross was winning us release from the slavery of sin and death!!!
 - a remembering of our **truest identity, saved sinners**
- A remembering that brings these things to the forefront of our lives
- And so being devoted to the breaking of bread says more about where the touchstone of our lives lies - in Christ:
 - and for we who celebrate communion relatively infrequently, it probably also means finding ways of keeping Jesus' death on our behalf at the forefront of our minds and hearts

They were devoted to prayer

- The final thing they were devoted to was prayer.
 - we've seen already in Acts 1:12-26 that the followers of Jesus were devoted to prayer;
 - and it wasn't something that was lost once the Spirit came - if anything, the reverse!
- They said, in effect, **"if something is important its worth talking to God about. And even if I'm not sure its important, its still worth talking to God about it!!"**

Why were they so devoted?

- For their own sake?
 - because these embodied and expressed their love for Jesus
 - because these moved the church along in its mission

And the results are....

- In each of these things there was a conscious choosing to act in a particular way:
 - it was more than simply they happened to end up feeling like that, so that's the way they acted
 - rather they were convinced that the teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer were their truest priorities, and so they chose to order their common life round those priorities.
- As they did that, a number of consequences followed:

They were held in awe (v.43)

- Particularly as a result of the very specific out-pouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, they were held in awe by those around them
 - people were being changed;
 - people were being healed;
 - miracles were being done.
- And people looking on saw that God was at work - and were filled with the kind of awe and self-conscious we might feel plunged into the presence of celebrity or well-known talent!
- People aren't always attracted to transformation!
 - God can be intimidating!

They had everything in common (v.44-45)

- As we've seen already, one of the practical consequences of their devotion to the fellowship, to one another, was that they seemed to hold light to their own goods:
 - probably wasn't that everyone lived in a commune
 - indeed, it would seem, that folk still owned their own stuff, had their old jobs or other sources of income
 - what changed was their attitude: "if I have something, and my brother in Christ needs it, then he can have it"
 - there was a generosity of spirit that meant that no-one was left needy
- Such generosity is risky; its potentially easy to abuse!
 - but there was a concern for the welfare of their brothers and sisters in the Lord that is very challenging to our materialistic world!

They demonstrated a gladness of heart (v.46-47)

- In some ways quite closely related to their generosity with possessions, a further consequence of their devotion to teaching, fellowship, communion and prayer was a gladness of heart:
 - as they sought to live their lives in step with God through the Spirit's enabling, God granted to them a gladness, a sincerity, a reality that made their lives attractive to those around them.
 - it didn't mean all their problems were taken away; very shortly persecution would come!
 - but they had found the true source of life - a relationship with God through Jesus - and it showed in their attitude!
- You've heard the old joke: if you say you are a Christian, full of the joy of the Holy Spirit, why don't you tell your face about it?

Their numbers grew (v.47)

- The final consequence was that their numbers grew:
 - the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved!
- As people observed Christianity working in the lives of the believers, as they were in awe at God's hand, as they saw with favour the way of life and attitudes these Christian people adopted, as they did these things they were drawn by the Spirit to Christ himself!

Conclusion

- Go back to whatever you thought was important to you in a church!
 - how does what you thought of then compare to what Luke describes here?
 - hopefully we'd all want to affirm that the priorities he describes the early church as having are things we want to see in place here!
- So, let us devote ourselves to:
 - the apostles' teaching, and
 - to the fellowship,
 - to the breaking of bread and
 - to prayer!
- So that Jesus is glorified in our midst as others come to know him