

What Does a Spirit-Filled Community Look Like?
- Acts 2:42-47

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Today after the worship service, we're hosting a newcomer's lunch. Some of you who are coming moved into this area over the past summer. So you had to search for a church. You may have visited different churches. It's likely several factors contributed to your decision to stick around with us for now. It can be quite a journey to find a new church family. Some of you who made this same church shopping journey a few years ago. Some of you have been here for decades so you might not even remember what it feels like to have to search for a church community.

But I would like all of us to imagine for a moment that we have moved into a new city. You and your family are searching for a new church community. Imagine you have visited several churches. You want to have a family discussion about the different church communities. So everyone shares their perspective. Then someone asks this question – Which of those churches was filled by the Holy Spirit? If you were part of that conversation, what indicators would help you conclude that a church was filled by the Holy Spirit? How would you answer that question?

Some might say “Well church A definitely was filled by the Spirit because you could just feel it.” Another might say “Church B was filled by the Holy Spirit because of the enthusiastic singing of the congregation.” Another might say “Church C was filled by the Holy Spirit because of their emphasis on prayer.” Still another might say, “A Spirit-filled church? Why would we want to go to a place like that? Doesn't that mean they do weird things and roll on the floor or something?”

How can we know whether or not a church community is filled by the Holy Spirit? That's what we're going to look at today as we continue our series entitled Living with Mission in Mind: Becoming a Good News Messenger. We started on Welcome Sunday looking at our theme verse for 2019/20. Isaiah 52:7. It is found near the bottom of the little message sheet. It says, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” God calls each Christian to bring this good news to others. So we've looked at different parts of the good news messenger life. We learned our motivation must come from love for God and for others. We learned about our need to pray for all people because “God desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”¹ Last week we about our need to seek open

¹ 1 Timothy 2:4

doors with people to discuss life purpose, faith and God. Today, we're talking about the need to invite our friends and neighbors to experience the Christian community.

But a Christian community needs Christ in the midst of it. The life of the Christian community comes from the Holy Spirit. What does a Spirit-filled community look like? That's where we will start. We'll ask "what's our part in that Spirit-filled community. We will talk a little about inviting others to that community.

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV) (Page 771)

⁴²And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This passage describes the church at its earliest stage. The book of Acts starts with Jesus still present speaking just before He ascends into heaven. He gives them some final instructions and then leaves. Acts 1:15 tells us that there were about 120 people who had joined the 11 remaining disciples as believers in the risen Jesus. So they next find a replacement for the betrayer Judas. Then in Acts 2, the day of Pentecost arrives. This was a Jewish festival celebrated about 50 days after Passover. Jesus was crucified, buried and raised at Passover and according to Acts 1:3, Jesus appeared to them for 40 days after his resurrection. This day of Pentecost was about 9 or 10 days after Jesus' ascension. Things are still very fresh in the minds and hearts of this community of 120.

Then the Holy Spirit comes upon them. They speak in foreign languages. Acts 2:5-6 tells us that Jews from every foreign nation lived in Jerusalem. They had learned the language of their foreign country. Suddenly they heard the Gospel proclaimed in their native tongue by people from this community of 120. So some conclude that the Jesus followers are drunk. But Peter stands up and reveals this is not the case at all. It's only 9 in the morning and people don't go out drinking at 7 AM so they're drunk at 9. He proclaims instead that this pouring out of the Spirit on many was the fulfillment of a prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit onto all flesh. Then Peter goes on to tell about Jesus and that He was in fact Lord or Messiah.

So in Acts 2:37, just before our passage, those listening are convicted in their unbelief and rejection of Jesus. So they ask Peter "what should we do? He answers in Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So this gifting and anointing of the

Spirit was not just for the 120. Anyone who repented and turned to Christ, received forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. Many respond. In fact in 2:41 we read “So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousands souls. So this community of 120 suddenly explodes to over 3000 spirit-filled believers. Then Luke, the author of both the Gospel of Luke and this book Acts, describes what this Spirit-filled community looked like. So let’s pick up some characteristics of the Spirit-filled community starting in Acts 2:42.

What does a Spirit-filled community look like?

Luke begins in verse 42 by saying “they were devoted” to four different activities. The word translated “devoted” meant to be constantly diligent. It describes effort that never lets up. And this devotion also carried a belief of confident waiting for results. So it was a steadfast commitment empowered by the Spirit to each of these four areas. So what were they devoted to?

1) The Apostle’s Teaching

At this point, the New Testament had not been written. So they had to depend on the apostle’s to teach them what Jesus taught. They received this teaching from Jesus during His earthly ministry. They also learned from Him during His 40 days of post-resurrection appearances. But these 3000 did not know Jesus’ teaching. So the apostle’s taught likely in homes and smaller gatherings about Jesus and His teaching.

Now of course, we don’t have the apostle’s here to teach us. But we do have their writings in the New Testament. Each Gospel, book or letter was written by one of the Apostles or a close associate of them. That’s why we base our teaching on their writings from the New Testament along with the Hebrew Scriptures that make up the Old Testament. So a Spirit-filled community devotes itself to the apostle’s teaching.

2) The Fellowship

This community devoted itself to something called the Fellowship. The term is “koinenia” in Greek and means participation or sharing. It contains the Greek word “koine” which also meant common. So they showed concern for one another. They didn’t just come together to hear a lecture from the apostles and then leave without talking to or caring for those around them. They were devoted to one another. This commonness came from their common bond of Christ. Because of Christ people from all walks of life were suddenly thrown together in one community.

Now this is more of a challenge in our individualistic society today. So many of us live self-sufficient lives. Or we live self-sufficiently as families. By that I mean our survival does not depend on other people. We are self-sufficient. Many here can provide enough for themselves or their families to be self-sufficient. So any connection to a community is usually out of interest or if it fits into our schedules. This self-sufficiency can lead us to believe we don't really need a community. Schedule pressure makes it way easier to pull out of community when we get busy.

But it seems that for many in the early church, their very survival depended on the community. Imagine what it would be like today if we depended on one another for survival. Then we might be less concerned about social status, personal compatibility, theological preferences and how the church was being run. Instead we would just work together to live. I want to encourage us to resist the cultural trend of self-sufficiency and disconnection. Though we may not need each other to survive physically, we need one another to survive spiritually. We need each other to keep going in a world hostile to our faith, where the devil constantly wages war against us. The passions of our sinful nature wages war against our souls.² So we need each other to keep on track and pull each back when we begin to wander. A Spirit-filled community is devoted to the Fellowship.

3) Breaking of Bread and Sharing meals.

A Spirit-filled community is devoted to breaking of bread and sharing meals together. To us, the phrase "breaking of bread" doesn't make much sense. But in those days, it likely referred to the ongoing practice of the Lord's Supper. These 3000 had already been baptized. But they needed to continue to break bread and remember the Lord Jesus' death until He came back.

But they not only ate the Lord's Supper together. They ate meals. Notice in verse 46 we read, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad hearts. So it seems like this group of 3000 plus met in different homes. They ate together and maybe paused during the meal to observe the Lord's Supper.

Eating together can be a tremendous community building experience. Its' an opportunity to sit down and talk with other people. You spend time in a more relaxed atmosphere. But you are also more vulnerable. Why? We get to watch one another eat. That's putting ourselves in a vulnerable place. No one looks that great when they eat. You

² 1 Peter 2:11

might see their tongues or their cheeks puffed out with food. But you also realize these are real people in a real community who have the same basic need for food like I do. We have some opportunities coming up to eat together – today’s newcomer’s lunch, men’s breakfast and a potluck Sunday on the first Sunday in November. But don’t wait until then. Get together with others and eat together.

4) The Prayers

This community devoted themselves to “the prayers.” It seems “the prayers” refers to the daily appointed times of prayer in Jerusalem; this was the religious capital of Judaism that contained the temple. In Jerusalem, they practiced a regular schedule of daily prayer. So even in Acts 3:1, Peter and John are going to the temple at the “hour of prayer”. It seems this early church used this opportunity to pray regularly throughout their days. Now we don’t live in a society where everyone stops to pray at appointed times of day, so we need to intentionally pray with other Christians.

We have several groups at SVBC that come together and pray. Every Wednesday evening at 7, a group meets in our prayer room to pray. The small groups, the men’s and ladies studies all of have times of prayer. Ladies Morning Out prays before they divide into studies. But this is an area we can always grow in. In fact, I can’t find a verse in the Bible that observes “the people of God prayed too much or too often.” Usually the comment is they’ve stopped praying or they’re praying to the wrong gods. One big challenge we face today is constant bombardment of sound, information, media and music. We can condition ourselves to be so consumed by all of this that quiet prayer seems stranger. It’s stranger still to pray to someone who does not answer back out loud. Yet a Spirit-filled community is devoted to prayer. We all need to keep going and growing in prayer. It is central to being Spirit filled.

So these first four characteristics of the Spirit-filled church are all found in verse 42 and governed by the phrase “they devoted themselves to.” But then we see some more characteristics of this community as the passage unfolds. I want to briefly touch on 3 more before we get to what’s our part in all this.

5) Awe of God

The Spirit-Filled community was in awe of God. Verse 43 tells us that they were all filled with awe. “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” Now signs and wonders done by God’s powers can certainly inspire awe. But notice Luke does not directly connect the awe with the signs and wonders. He lists what happened in this community. He doesn’t write “awe came upon every soul because the

apostles did many signs and wonders. He writes “and awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Certainly some of the awe could have come from seeing what God did through the apostles. But these new believers in Christ could also have been filled with awe simply because they sensed the Spirit among them. Maybe they were awed by the apostle’s teaching or by the wonder of breaking bread together. They may have been awed by the sense of God’s presence during prayer or the deep community they experienced for the first time in their lives.

This is a very good test for a Spirit-filled community. Are we awed by God? Or are we awed by something human made or some human. If people leave a church gathering more in awe because of the humans than by God then that could point to a problem.

6) Common concern and Sharing of Possessions

The Spirit-filled community shows common concern for one another. The people are shared possessions for the benefit of others. Verse 44 “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

So they didn’t just verbalize their concern for one another. They acted to support one another. Now to us living in an individualistic society, these verses may sound strange. It almost sounds like communal living. We may not have much experience nor desire to experience such a life. But Jesus had led the disciples in something like this. They shared a common purse during their travels and Judas was the money manager. But a careful reading of this passage does not indicate communal living. It says they were together and shared their possessions. But notice they still went to individual homes to eat. Nowhere do we see Jesus nor do the apostles forbid private ownership. It seems pretty clear that donation of funds or possession was voluntary. The point here is that when they saw someone with a need, they helped one another out.

Friends, I have heard about and seen many of you live this out. I have heard how you have given up some of your funds to help someone in a tough time. I have seen how you have shared possessions or passed on something to another family in need. This is a great evidence for the Spirit’s work among us. Again, we can continue to grow in this. But keep on showing this concern for one another.

7) They worship together. The Spirit-filled community comes together to worship God. We see this in 2 places in this passage. In verse 46, they attended the temple daily. You went to the temple to worship. So it seems like they gathered together to meet. And some of that meeting involved the collective worship of God. Verse 47, they were praising God. So it seems like this practice of announcing the worth of God and all He has done became common among them. There is something about gathering together with other believers to worship the Lord. This is one great opportunity for the community to collectively praise God and seek Him.

So now we at least have some idea of what the first Spirit filled church looked like. I wonder if any of these characteristics entered your mind when asked; “What does a Spirit-filled community look like? Don’t we sometimes think that we need something spectacular, amazing, unusual or supernatural to prove the Spirit’s presence? And I am not denying that a God acts in supernatural ways. Any Spirit filled community would have the supernatural because of God’s presence. But maybe we need to redefine our understanding of supernatural.

Because here we see a community devoting themselves to the apostles teaching to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. They came together and showed concern for each other. They worshipped together and ate together. This is Spirit-Filled community.

The common thread I see running through Luke’s account is togetherness. **The Spirit Filled church has a supernatural togetherness indicating God’s presence.** There’s a couple of reasons that I think this is Luke’s theme. First, Luke uses the word together twice in the passage. Verse 44 – And all who believed were together. Verse 46 – And they attended the temple together. The whole passage describes activities this community did together. Second, did you notice that every sentence in this passage begins with the word and? Some Bible translations smooth this out for us. But the ESV keeps the wording even though it’s a little more awkward in English. So verse 42 – And they devoted themselves; 43 – And awe came upon every soul; And many wonders and signs were done; 44 – And all who believed were together; 45 – And day by day; 47 – And the Lord added to their number. It’s like Luke can’t stop himself from piling on one sentence after another to describe this profoundly changed people. This togetherness depended on the Spirit enabling them to put aside their differences, natural jealousies and selfish motivations to experience this unusually close community. These all add up to part of what a Spirit-filled community looks like.

Why would a Good News Messenger need to invite others to experience Christian community? We hope they can actually see and experience how the good news impacts a people. We hope they will sense God's presence among us. We hope they will see an unusual concern and care for one another.

This is the type of community we aim to see at SVBC. This is the type of community we want to invite others to experience; a community that God creates. When the Spirit empowers and fills the community of God's people it embodies the Gospel for those who don't know Christ. It can be one piece of reaching others with the good news. Here's something that I'd like you to consider incorporating to your relationships with people who don't know Christ.

Think about someone in your life that lives in the St. Albert/Edmonton area that doesn't know Christ. You're praying for them. You're praying for opportunities. Now imagine you invite them to come to church. How might they respond to that? They may have an issue with the institutional church. They may have had a bad experience with a church. They may be suspicious of the church because of some news story about abuse or some cover up by some church. If they do come to "church" then you're follow up conversation might focus on whether or not they liked it. Did they like the building? Did they like the songs? Did the church meet their standards or expectations? Did they like the speaking? There might be a lot of barriers that go up in someone's heart when invited to come to church.

But what if you approached this person or family with a different invitation that went like this. "Hey. I'd like to invite you to meet some people in my community. I'd like to introduce you to some of my friends. There's some neat people and some great stories. Would you come?" This might involve an invitation to a church service. I don't want you to bait and switch them. So they agree to come and meet your friends and ask the address. And you say, "we're meeting at 51 Woodlands Road at 1045 on Sunday." Well that's a weird time to get together. Oh, no that's just when we meet. Then they show up and think they've got the wrong address. Be honest if that's what you're doing. Invite them to experience the community here.

But maybe it doesn't start with an invitation to meet the community at the church. Invite them to meet some of your community in your home or out for a meal or go to a movie and dessert together. Invite other Christians there. Let them get to know your friend. So then when you do invite them to experience more of your community at church, they come and already know some of the other people. They see what this community looks like. Will you think and pray about inviting others to meet some friends or experience this community? See what God does with it.

I promised to address the question of “what’s our part in this Spirit-filled community. **We need to constantly be filled by the Spirit.** Though we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment we come to Christ, we need to do our part in opening ourselves to the Spirit’s work in our lives. So though we have the Spirit in us, each day we have to decide if we will open the valve of our souls to let the Spirit fill us and lead us that day. You know the valve you turn at the top of your propane tank on your bbq to let the propane gas flow into your bbq? Your bbq won’t light without the valve open. Sometimes we just don’t open the valve inside of us to the Spirit’s filling. We just plunge into our day and run on our own strength. Or we close the valve by the way we live. But when we return to God and seek Him, it’s like the valve opens up and we are again filled. When you have a community of people whose valves are open to the Spirit’s filling, you end with a Spirit-filled people who come together and love each other deeply. If you need to think and pray living in the Spirit, I would point you to a couple of New Testament passages about life in the Spirit. Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26. Go there and ask God to teach you and lead you in life by the Spirit.

So be constantly filled and refilled with the Spirit. Invite others to experience Christian community and let’s see what God does. If you are not yet part of God’s family, listen to Peter’s words spoken on that Pentecost day when the church was born.” “Repent and be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”