

An Acts 2:42-47 Church: “The L5 Matrix”

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And with many other words he (Peter) solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them (the first Christians), saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the Apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

What image comes to mind when asked to think of a perfect picture? John Kennedy Jr. sitting under his father at the President's desk in the oval office? Neil Armstrong planting the American flag on the surface of the moon? While rafting years ago, the guide took great pains to warn us of the rapids that we would soon traverse, and that if we were not careful any one of us could be tossed out of the raft. I took that warning to heart, so when the time came I dove for the bottom of the raft with hands prepared to become fixed like iron on any part of the raft (I wasn't going to get tossed out...). After the trip was over we were told that there had been a group “raft picture” taken. Wouldn't you know it – the picture captured me in full survivor mode, to the neglect of any and all others in the raft. I was embarrassed to be sure, but for some, a perfect picture.

We have here in these verses from Acts 2 a perfect picture of a Christian church. The 120 original followers of Jesus, along with the newly converted 3000, were experiencing a tremendous sense of love and care and generosity. Many signs and wonders were being performed and all felt an incredibly strong bond of unity. This church had gained favor with God and all people as their joy was extraordinarily infectious. Within just a few weeks of our Lord's ascension, the newly formed Christian community was indeed of “one mind” and growing rapidly. At the core of this community was commitment to five essentials upon which their success and growth was based; “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42-47).

This explosive community of faith was built very intentionally on a commitment to 1) teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) breaking of the bread, 4) prayer and 5) the leadership of the Apostles. The Apostles were teaching and preaching as their first priority (we'll see that in Acts 6:2-4) and the members were paying close attention to that wisdom. Fellowship with other members of the

community was a natural extension of the day-to-day interaction many of them had with Jesus Himself (1 John 4:20). Breaking of the bread as well was an opportunity to have a reenactment of the Lord's Last Supper, a love feast for all times, places and peoples (Luke 22:19). Fervent prayer, that most essential of all practices whereby the children of God come into His presence to be transformed (Mark 14:38), was taking place house to house, all day long. All the while, the Apostles were providing Godly leadership. It was the commitment to these five disciplines (and of course the power and moving of the Holy Spirit) that bonded those believers together in one accord and created that fabulous "First Church of Jerusalem".

We here at Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church are a new faith community. We have been given by God an opportunity to begin again. Note, we are in a new space as a result of the kind and generous help of Calvin Theological Seminary; we have newly employed child care workers; students from Calvin College; next month we will ordain new Elders; we are one of the newest members of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians; and together we are putting into place new organizational structures and practices. When considering the church in Acts 2, I'm certain that you too would want to be a church just like that; one heart and one mind, with joy and generosity, and signs and wonders. An Acts 2:42 church! I challenge you then to join me in building the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church through the adaptation of these five key components found in Acts 2:42-47.

For the purpose of our contemporary matrix, I submit we substitute different words while being faithful to the five principles found in Acts 2:42. Therefore when we think of how the early church gave priority to the Apostle's teaching, we too must give priority to *Learning* more and more about the God who loves us, saves us, and calls us to Himself to build His kingdom here and now. The first "L" word then in our matrix is *Learning*. We are a *Learning* community. Likewise, the early church was devoted to fellowship with one another. At the Good Shepherd church we will be *Living* out our faith in community with other believers as well as those who have yet to confess faith in the Lord Jesus. The second "L" word then is *Living*. We are a community authentically *Living* our faith.

In the days of the early church, Breaking of the Bread meant more than dining with others; it also carried a notion of a reverent reenactment as the Lord's Last Supper was celebrated. Likewise we *Lovingly* worship God every Sunday while sharing in a communion service monthly. The third "L" word then is *Loving*. At GSPC we will be a church *Loving* God in and through our worship services. The Body of Christ has always been a people of Prayer. Prayer is that most personal and intimate time with the Lord, whereby we have the opportunity to not only cry out to Him, but to take time to *Listen* to Him speak to our hearts through His written Word and the moving of the Holy Spirit. Listening was critical to God as the Apostles themselves knew they must make prayer their top priority. Our fourth "L" word is *Listening*. We are a community committed to *Listening* to God, individually and collectively. And finally, just like the first church in Acts 2, we will expect our Elders to be *Leading* us as we grow our new faith community. We are a community respecting those who are *Leading* us in the ways of the Lord. An Acts 2:42-47 Church – *Learning, Living, Loving, Listening and Leading*.

The L5 Matrix

Our First Commitment: *Listening*

Oswald Chambers writes in his devotional; *My Utmost for His Highest*, “The purpose of God is not to answer our prayers, but by our prayers we come to discern the mind of God.” As followers of Jesus we must develop personal and private time to be with the Lord, and to *listen* to Him. When God the Father spoke on the mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) He said, “This is My beloved Son, *listen* to Him. If we are going to walk with God we must *listen* to Him first and foremost. We must know His heart and mind and it is only through reading His word and prayer that we will come to know Him. “Blessed is the one who *listens* to Me” (Proverbs 8:34). I know that Ravi Zechariah, along with many other prominent church leaders has said; “If we fail in our prayer life, we will fail in every other part of our lives.” As an Acts 2:42 church, we will be a church that *listens* to God by making time to pray together, and to pray and read His word daily in times of personal and private devotion.

Our Second Commitment: *Loving*

The members of that first faith community were devout Jews. They understood that the Bible teaches that God must be worshiped, “You shall fear only the Lord God, and you shall worship Him...” (Deuteronomy 6:13). Likewise; You shall *love* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). And there is no more appropriate time and place to *love* God than to worship Him on the Lord's day in a sanctuary filled with believers! Jesus Himself said when tempted by Satan; “You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” (Matthew 4:10). At the consummation of all things we will *love* and worship God forever and ever (Revelation 22:9). We worship God when we *love* God. By pouring out our prayers and praises, by singing of His glory and meditating upon His Word written and His Word preached, we show God our love of Him. That act of worshiping God is why the Lord's Supper is commonly known as a “*love* feast”. It will be essential for every member of the Good Shepherd Church to make a commitment to pour out our *love* to God in corporate worship every week! That's just who we are.

Our Third Commitment: *Learning*

In His Great Commission Jesus said to His church; “Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:20). Likewise He calls His church to “Take My yoke upon you and *learn* from Me...” (Matthew 11:29). *Learning* more and more about the God we love, trust and serve is critical to the growth of our faith and relationship with God. Thankfully we are now in a community (Calvin Theological Seminary) that has dedicated itself to doing exactly that! The Bible exhorts us to “*learn* what is pleasing to God” (Ephesians 5:10). That will require us to actively provide and participate in Biblical studies. We'll teach our children on Sunday morning and we'll seek opportunities for us all to *learn* about the God who saves and restores. The Good Shepherd Church is a *Learning* church!

Our Fourth Commitment: *Living*

When we talk about being a *Living* church we mean that we are an authentically Christian church. “If we *live* by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit...” (Galatians 5:25). What God has given us as we *Listened* to Him, and the strength and joy we've known in *Loving* God through corporate worship, and all that we have *Learned* about God must be *Lived* out! Jesus said; “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16). As we *live* in our families and communities, while working or at school, we are called to show God's love and the hope we have in Christ Jesus. The Good Shepherd church is a church that does what it says, “...do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). We are a community of believers that authentically lives our faith; day to day, in season and out!

Our Fifth Commitment: *Leading*

The Apostles themselves were all men who had known Jesus. They walked and talked, dined and slept with our Master, and thus learned how to lead from Him. They demonstrated that leadership when the question arose as to whether to replace Judas or not. Again, when a dispute in the new church arose concerning the distribution of resources to widows, they responded by instituting what today we know as the office of Deacon. They themselves said; “we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). At Good Shepherd Church, we are led by the Holy Spirit to call persons to serve in *leadership* capacities. These persons are ordained as Elders and together make up the Session. (The Session is made up of nine “active” Ruling Elders, each serving a three year term, and all those ordained and selected to serve the church as Teaching Elders. We elect 3 Ruling Elders to the Session each year as 3 other Ruling Elders complete their terms and step down. The responsibility of the day-to-day operation of the church belongs to these *leaders*. Our Elders *lead* in areas of personnel and finance, in church officer nominations, administration and matters of stewardship and budget. The membership of the church has a duty to trust and support these *leaders* as they devote themselves to God. *Leading* is a God ordained duty that we take very seriously at Good Shepherd Church.

Thus God blessed His church in the beginning with the wisdom to understand and accept His divine priorities; “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). We too have been blessed by God to know what He has called us to do as well. We will devote ourselves to *Listening* to God through daily prayer and the reading of His Word as well as participating in Home groups. We will devote ourselves to *Loving* Him every Lord's Day in our Sunday worship service as we pour out our praise and adoration. We will also devote ourselves to *Learning* as much as we can about our Jesus, His love and grace and glory. Additionally, we will commit ourselves to *Living* out our faith every hour of the day no matter where we are. And finally, we who are called into church offices will devote ourselves to godly living and *Leading* as we earn the respect and confidence of those being *Led* in the Biblical ways of God. An Acts 2:42-47 church, all to the glory and praise of our awesome and holy God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen.