

Word and Sacrament, Fellowship and Worship

Psalm 30; Acts 2:37-47

I expect that this passage has often been seen by pastors like me as a preacher's dream. Luke lays out in his narrative a neat four point description of the activities to which the early disciples of Jesus "*devoted*" themselves, literally, , "*the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayer*". And seminary graduates are taught to recognize and to love and to preach the outlines and lists we find in Scripture with the result that I have heard many and preached a few messages on these four points, "*the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayer*".

The apostles' teaching is the word of God, unless the life of a church is founded on what it actually says in the word of God, everything withers. We will live and breathe as a church or not, to the extent that we make time together to read and be taught the word of God. Next is "*the fellowship*", not sipping coffee and nibbling pastries in the fireplace room, the word fellowship implies much more than good company and good friends. It is a formal word which links us to together as family, obligates us to support and encourage one another as comrades in a common cause.

The third element that identifies us a disciples of Jesus is "*the breaking of bread*", which pastors like me have wanted to take as the sacrament. We want the central pillar of the church to be that moment of repentance when we remember what Jesus gave to forgive us and identify with him by taking his body and blood to heart, so to speak. What we sometimes miss is that the early disciples seemed to remember Jesus every time they ate, they took literally Jesus' words, "*Do this, as often as you drink from it, in remembrance of me.*"

Finally, we're told that the disciples were "*devoted*" to "*the prayer*". It seems so obvious I hardly want to mention it. Every pastor I've ever known is in favor of prayer in theory. What we see in the lives of Jesus and the early disciples is that prayer was interwoven into their common life, the Jerusalem Christians reported to the temple porch at 3pm every day to pray together.

So there are the four disciplines that the disciples of Jesus are supposed to hold in common and practice together. But I'm going to suggest to you that the key to the passage is less the particular balance that the four disciplines find in our lives and more in the verb that engages us with them all. Luke tells us that the disciples were "*devoted*" to these things. In other words, this was not a tidy four point formula that got the disciples where they needed to go.

To the contrary, they loved to read and discuss and be taught the gospel, they loved to build the kingdom together, to remember Jesus at the common meals they shared, they prayed together because their understand of God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice inspired a level of devotion that went far beyond working a formula to gain success.

And that's where the choir comes in. You are so valuable to us because you bring to bear a medium, music, that makes all the outlines and formulas of doctrine something more than sterile religion. Devotion inspires singing and singing inspires devotion. Apart from the occasional silly ditty, people sing of the matters that move and haunt their hearts, "*Life is like a mountain railroad with an engineer so brave*", "*O Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the skies be rolled back like a scroll, the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend...*"