

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

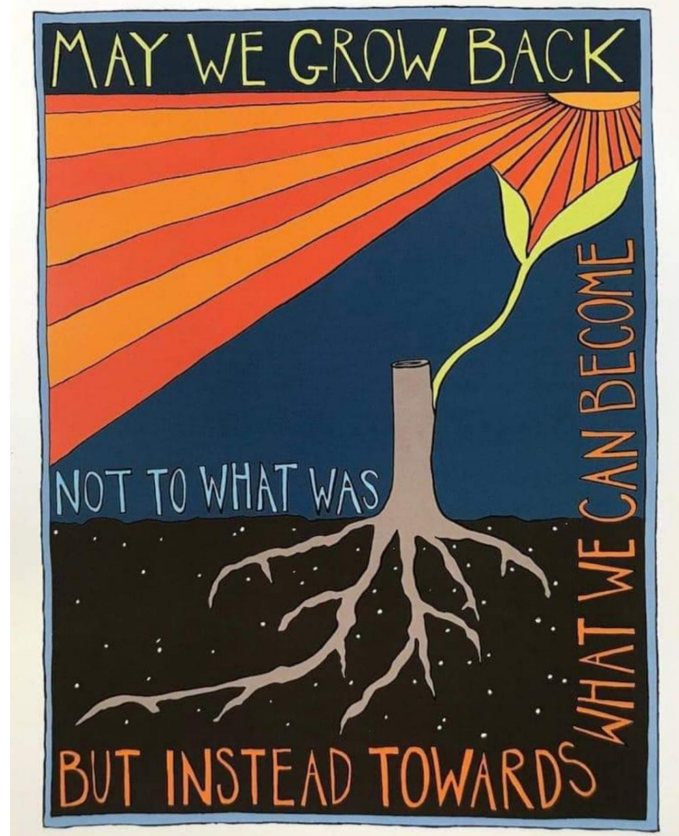
Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Sermon

I think this is the 8th week now that our church has been worshipping together through video and phone services and since we really started to make regular posts on our Facebook page to keep connected. I'm finally starting to get used to it. And I'm even learning to appreciate a lot of the benefits.

- It's easier for many of our members who have been ill to join in from home. They don't need to be left out of our community worship, just because they're not feeling well.
- We're able to provide points of connection every day of the week, and not just on Sunday mornings.
- The videos are helping us reconnect with some of our brothers and sisters who haven't been around recently.
- We can now share worship with family and friends who live far away.
- We are even reaching new people who have never been to our church in person!

And I love all that! I think it's so great that God's promises can reach so far and wide - and that our community is extending even further. I have even been thinking about ways that we can continue to offer these points of virtual connection to people after we've started meeting together in person again. It's been great to see all that God can do, even in the midst of a global health crisis! And I'm so excited to meet the people that have found us through these videos!



But, I am really grateful for this passage today. I think it's such a helpful reminder of what the purpose and function of the church really is. Because I have to admit, I've been falling down the rabbit hole of Facebook Analytics and YouTube Statistics. It's been great to see the church's reach and engagement skyrocket thousands of percentage points in growth in the last few weeks. And it's been amazing to see view-counts rise.

But, I think God wants to remind us, that "likes" and "subscribers" are not the metrics that God uses to measure the health of our church. That is not what makes God want to bring people in to a church.

Because church is not a show. It's not a program you watch on tv or an experience to consume. No, when the Spirit of God is truly involved, a Church is a community of people, called by God, who:

- Are willing to let each other see that none of us are perfect, but that we have needs and struggles and fears. Yet, we trust each other enough to ask for help.
- A church is a community of people called by God who are willing to be awed and surprised by the good that God is doing around them, even in the midst of scary circumstances.
- A good church values each other more than they value their possessions. And when they see their neighbors lacking something, the first thing they look for is what they have to give away so that they can help.
- A successful church might not get a lot of clicks, but they do drop off meals and groceries for people who are at risk if they go shopping. They do write checks to their neighbors who are sick and have hospital bills stacking up.
- They have glad and generous hearts, grateful for all that they have been given, willing to share it, and trusting that God will continue to provide for all.
- They are devoted to the way of Jesus, not letting anything stop them from sharing the love that they have been given, and when they can't be together in the same room, they still find ways to share their lives:
 - By sending cards and making phone calls
 - By writing notes and playing concerts from their front porches
 - By sharing links to worship services to praise God together and by genuinely praying for one another.

This is the kind of church that God's Spirit wants to create in the world. This is the kind of community that God wants to grow. This is success in God's eyes and what God wants to share with the world. God wants to use the church to make sure everyone has what they need and no-one has more than is good for them. God wants for everyone to have a place where they will be loved and cared for. And those are the only reasons God wants to grow the church.

I don't think God could care less if we have more people to give money to the offering or to fill up our pews or to follow our Facebook page or to make us feel important. God doesn't care about the production value we can add to our videos or the view count or the hits on our website.

God calls people into the church so that they might find still water, and green pasture, a healthy path, and a place of reconciliation with their enemies. God wants to use the church to provide an abundant table for all and an overflowing cup, to share goodness and mercy, and a place to dwell in God's care forever.

God wants the church to be a gift and a salvation for the people God calls to it.

And those are things you can't find in a show. For that God needs a community of faithful people like you. So, stay devoted to God and to each other. Share your lives and all you have through prayer and praise. Practice discipleship through conversation and generosity and the sharing of hope. And I trust that when we return to worship and community in the same room one day, any new people that God might have added to our community through these videos and Facebook posts will find what they have really been looking for, and the real reason that God is calling them to be here in the first place: They will find, A Shepherd who loves them, and a flock to walk beside them, wherever God leads.

Amen

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