This morning we enter into new territory as we journey through the book of Acts. Please stand and let’s read Acts 2:42-47.

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

The passage we just read is the most detailed description we have of the early church in Jerusalem. There is much that we can learn from this text, and so I will be camping out here for a few weeks to unpack the essential elements of a Spirit-filled church. Now…before you begin checking out other churches, please know that I will not camp out on every passage in the book of Acts for weeks on end…I promise! However, this particular passage deserves a few weeks as you will see, and my hope is that we will be challenged and encouraged by what we learn from the early church in Jerusalem and how that applies to our church called Colonial.

Now, before I start, let me take off my expository preaching hat and put on my congregational leader hat. Some of you will remember my final sermon of the Grace and Truth Series last summer, just before I left for sabbatical. Toward the end of that message entitled “How Then Shall We Live?” I talked a lot about the kind of community we are, and the kind of community we are becoming. In many respects, Colonial is a community that loves the truth, but sometimes we can come across as short on grace. There are other churches who err on the other side…they come across as full of grace but short on truth. What I want you to look for in our text this morning is how the Holy Spirit creates a community that is so perfectly balanced in both truth and grace. I want you to look for how a Holy Spirit-filled community impacts the city of Jerusalem. I want you to imagine yourself living among the believers in first century Jerusalem, and then I want you to imagine what that kind of community would look like right here in Kansas City…right here in Colonial Presbyterian Church. What we will unpack here in the next few weeks might just change the world if we let it. So before we get started, let’s ask the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purpose and to do what only He can do in us as individuals and in our life together. Let’s pray.
As we get started, my primary goal this morning is to unpack what happened in Jerusalem following the day of Pentecost when some 3000 souls were baptized and began living their lives as followers of Jesus. You will quickly begin to see how the testimony of what happened in Jerusalem speaks directly into our lives as the 21st century church.

Now, let’s begin by remembering the context of where we are. First, remember that following His resurrection, Jesus made a promise to His apostles just before his ascension. That promise was found in the last words he spoke to the Apostles in Acts 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”

Just a few days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes dramatically upon the 120 disciples gathered together in prayer, who then begin to declare the mighty works of God in languages they could not possibly know. As a large crowd gathers around them, Peter proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ with power, and thousands come under conviction. They cry out, “What shall we do?” Peter tells them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and that’s exactly what 3000 souls do that very day.

What comes next is Luke’s general description of what followed that historic day when 3000 souls were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Luke’s description is not time specific, so we should think of this passage as a description of what took place in the days, weeks, months and years that followed that infamous day of Pentecost. Luke sums up the behavior of the early church in Jerusalem in vs. 42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

First, Luke tells us that the Jerusalem believers were devoted to the Apostle’s teaching. What does that mean? Remember that the early church in Jerusalem did not have the New Testament, but they didn’t need it. They had first generation witnesses in the Apostles, they had the Hebrew Bible (which we call the Old Testament), and they had the power of the Holy Spirit in them, making known to them all the truth in scripture and in Christ. The Twelve Apostles taught the first believers in Jerusalem everything they had heard from Jesus in the three years they had traveled with him in Galilee until His ascension on the Mount of Olives. Remember that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are essentially written summaries of what the Apostles were teaching the early church in person. The gospel of John is written by John the Apostle himself, so we can assume that what he wrote later is generally what he taught to the church in Jerusalem as well. We have an idea of what the “apostle’s teaching” was like in terms of their evangelistic sermons to unbelievers when we read Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, and we’ll see further examples from Peter, Stephen, and Paul as we journey deeper into Acts.

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Notice that the apostles were not only teaching with words, they were also teaching by example. Luke writes in vs. 43, “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” We’ll see a perfect example of what Luke is talking about in Acts 3 when Peter is used by God to heal a cripple man in the name of Jesus Christ. So the teaching of the apostles is both word and deed. Next Sunday we’ll give particular attention to the teaching/learning reality of a Spirit-filled community.

Moving on, Luke describes the Jerusalem believers as not only devoted to the apostles teaching, but also devoted to the fellowship. Many of you have heard about this Greek word, “Koinonia”…this is where that word is used to describe the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem. Dr. Eckhard Schnabel writes, “Koinonia should be understood as the personal, fraternal coherence of the individual members of the congregation, the followers of Jesus who live in community brought into existence by the shared experience of the Spirit.” I think that last part is particularly important. The Koinonia…the fellowship of believers, is a community that could never exist apart from the common experience of the Holy Spirit bringing it into existence. In other words, we don’t create community…we are ushered into community the moment the Holy Spirit enters into us. We don’t shop for a church, we are ushered into a community of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit! Christian fellowship has a supernatural origin that transcends every barrier, be it language, race, gender, or other social stratifications. We’ll see this reality all throughout the book of Acts. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the believers in Jerusalem discovered a deep love for one another that they did not know was even possible prior to their baptism. Luke describes the fellowship of believers as those who believed, those who were together, those who had all things in common, and those who were willing to sell their possessions in order to provide for any among them who had needs. We’ll unpack this notion of Koinonia as it applies to our life together in two weeks.

Luke also writes in vs. 42 that the Jerusalem believers devoted themselves to breaking bread. Luke writes in vs. 46, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God…”

Again, the behavior that Luke describes is simple yet meaningful: the Holy Spirit led the early church to establish relationships both corporately and intimately. Based upon the way vs. 46 is written in the Greek, the notion here is that they broke bread together both in the Temple and in their homes. Now is Luke referring to “breaking bread” as a common meal or as the observance of the Lord’s Supper? Yes! Remember that Jesus used a common meal on the night he was betrayed, so that whenever ancient believers engaged in breaking bread together, they would remember Him saying “this is my body, given for you” and whenever wine was served after the meal, they would remember Jesus saying, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood.” So the picture here is that the Jerusalem church first “broke bread” together when they gathered in large numbers in the temple. If ever there was a time of ceremonial bread breaking, it was likely there

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in Solomon’s Portico when hundreds, if not thousands gathered to worship God and be taught by the apostles. But the picture of breaking bread together becomes far more intimate when we read that the believers shared meals together in each other’s homes. The picture here is that they enjoyed genuine friendships with one another. In each instance, the breaking of bread together was an occasion of gratitude and praising God. We’ll talk about this notion of breaking bread together as a community in three weeks.

The final behavior Luke highlights among the early church in Jerusalem is this: they were devoted to the prayers. The plural use of this word “proseuchai” suggests that the Christians in Jerusalem had some regular prayer practices that likely coincided with their Jewish heritage and Temple worship. Now, to be completely candid, there is not a lot of evidence that the Jews were “communal prayer warriors” in first century Jerusalem. One commentator writes that the relative absence of explicit evidence concerning communal prayers is conspicuous. Some have suggested that communal prayer played ‘little or no role in the typical Jewish synagogue.’” Jesus was clearly unimpressed when he ran out the money changers in the temple and declared that the Temple was SUPPOSED to be a house of prayer! Which is to say that if the Christians devoted themselves to communal prayer on a regular basis, that was really something quite new…it was not simply an extension of their Jewish rituals.

Now we know that the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem held public prayers every morning, after the slaughter of the morning sacrifice and before the incense offering. Then, 3:00 in the afternoon (the ninth hour) was the “hour of prayer” in the temple, when devout Jews paused to pray wherever they happened to be at the time. There is some evidence that suggests the priests would recite the Ten Commandments and the Shema during the prayers in the temple, so that might somewhat inform what Luke meant when he stated that the early church devoted themselves to “the prayers,” but it’s hard to know that for certain. The bottom line is this: communal prayer became a far more central, important, and common practice for the Christians than it had ever been for the Jews. Luke has already emphasized this point in Acts 1:14 as the disciples sought the Lord together as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit; in Acts 1:24-25 as they prayed prior to selecting a replacement for Judas; in Acts 3:1 we’ll see that the healing of the lame man coincides with the hour that the church would be together praying in the Temple; and we’ll look at some other examples in a few weeks from now.

So…here’s what we’ve learned today in Acts 2, and again, I want you to be thinking about how this applies to your life and our life together as a church: We learned that those who received the Holy Spirit BECAME devoted to the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship of believers, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

Now, listen, before you begin to feel like you are being preached to about what you should be doing as a Christian, let me be clear: the point of this message is not to make you feel bad about
what you are doing or not doing. I’m not even trying to teach you what you should be doing.
The point of this message is to simply describe what happened in Jerusalem in the first century
when 3000 people repented, followed Jesus into baptism, received the Holy Spirit, and then
began living their lives together as followers of Jesus.

This is their story…but let’s be clear about who “they” were. Remember that aside from being
Jewish, the only thing these people had in common was their conviction of sin and their
conviction that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God who was gracious enough to forgive their
treason and rescue them from God’s well-deserved wrath for crucifying His Son! They are a
people who have repented and desperately called upon the name of Jesus to be saved. They are a
group of people who have received the Holy Spirit.

A few weeks ago when I preached on the Holy Spirit, I had several people come to me with
concerns, primarily because of conversations they had with people in their family who honestly
said, “I don’t have any stories of power in my life that would lead me to believe that I’ve
received the Holy Spirit…and yet I’ve been going to church my whole life.”

Now, after reading our text for this morning, I suspect some of you will go home and have to
admit that you do not devote yourself to the study of scripture, you do not devote yourself to the
fellowship of believers, you don’t break bread with your fellow believers, and you’re not devoted
to prayer. Again…maybe you’ve been in church or around Christianity your whole life, but the
description of the Jerusalem church is completely foreign to your experience.

To both concerns…both that you lack power from the Holy Spirit…and that your life doesn’t
look like that of the early believers in any respect…I would offer you this simple question: can
you see your sin? Have you ever truly repented?

Remember, Christians, by definition, are people who are very well aware of their sins and the
fact that they quite frankly deserve to go to hell. You’ll never meet a genuine follower of Jesus
who cannot recount in quick fashion the ugly stain of his or her sin. Every person in the
Jerusalem church could tell you where they were standing when they were cut to the heart with
conviction on that day of Pentecost. They knew they were sinners saved by grace. I can tell you
right now, if that doesn’t describe you…if you cannot see your sin and you have never truly
repented, in the true sense of the word, you’re not a Christian. If you are still pretending to be a
good, moral person who God will have no choice but to welcome into heaven because you’ve
been a good, moral person…you would not fit in well at all with the Jerusalem church. I don’t
mean to be nasty about it, but pay attention to the text! There were likely thousands of other
Jews who heard Peter’s sermon or heard about his sermon, but only 3000 were baptized. Which
3000? Those who were cut to the heart by their sin and were willing to both personally repent
and publicly be baptized as a sign of their repentance and their identification with Jesus Christ as
the one who forgives sins. The rest of Jerusalem refused to acknowledge that they had done anything all that wrong in crucifying Jesus, and they refused to accept that Jesus was the Son of God who came into the world as the promised Messiah and the forgiver of sins.

Listen: if you cannot see your own sin, you won’t repent. If you won’t repent, you won’t call upon the name of Jesus to be forgiven. If you are not forgiven, you won’t receive the Holy Spirit. If you don’t have the Holy Spirit, you won’t have power, and if you have no Holy Spirit power in you, you won’t live like the first century church.

However, if you have seen your sin and been cut to the heart, and that led you to repent and call upon the name of Jesus in desperation for the forgiveness of your sins…if you publicly professed Christ with your mouth and identified with Him in baptism, then here’s what I can tell you in no uncertain terms: you WILL tend to live like those in first century Jerusalem, because repentant sinners who are forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit will predictably live in this way: they will be devoted to the teachings of the apostles; they will be devoted to the fellowship of believers; they will regularly break bread together and be thankful; and they will be devoted to prayer.

Remember: I’m not asking you to behave in a certain way this morning. I am asking you to consider the way you behave as either evidence that you have been saved and are filled with the Holy Spirit, or not. If you have been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, here’s what I can tell you: you will increasingly hunger for the Word of God…you’ll long for it every day like a deer pants for fresh water. The scripture will more and more be imprinted upon your heart. The WORD of God will become far more important than the words of men.

And you’ll love the Bride of Christ…warts and all. You’ll find commonality among believers wherever you go…anywhere in the world…and the moment you meet those who have been ushered into the fellowship of believers through the shared experience of the Holy Spirit, you’ll have an instant bond…as though you’ve known that person your whole life. You will gravitate towards the fellowship of believers and spend time together for encouragement, accountability, and friendship…in short, you’ll do life together.

And finally, you’ll pray. You won’t be able to stop yourself. All day long your thoughts will always turn back to the Father. You’ll care about what He thinks about your life and your plans. You’ll break out in prayer when you see something beautiful or something broken, you’ll drop to your knees in an instant when you are threatened or when you are grateful. Prayer becomes the language of your heart as you communicate to the Lover of your soul.
Again, I’m not telling you what to do…I’m telling you what you will do, what we will do as a church if and when the Holy Spirit enters into our lives. It won’t be all of that all the time, but these tendencies are as predictable as the rising sun.

If you recognize the behaviors of the early church in your own life, be encouraged: the Holy Spirit is at work in you. For no one can hunger for the Word of God without the Holy Spirit. We do not naturally become generous and live sacrificial lives for those in need…that’s the work of God who changes our hearts and makes us generous. No one is drawn to a life of prayer without the Holy Spirit. So again, if these behaviors are common in your life, be encouraged, and be thankful.

If all of this seems foreign to you this morning, ask yourself: can I see my own sin? Have I ever been cut to the heart by the stain of my own sin, or do I tend to rationalize my sin and point out the sins of everyone else to make myself look better than I am? If so, I would challenge you to be honest with yourself, and then step down from being your own judge and allow yourself to be judged by God’s standards. Even more importantly, look to Jesus. See Jesus on the cross, and take responsibility for your part in His sacrificial death. The conviction of sin and the love of Christ will lead you to repent. And repentance is the doorway that leads to a new life in Christ…that is true for individuals…it is also true for communities, cities, and most certainly churches. More on that as we go. Let’s pray.