

May 5, 2024

“The Marks of the Spirit’s Work”
Acts 2:42-47

FCF: The problem of imbalance

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord has made clear the marks of his people.
(magnet) We should desire those marks for ourselves.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I’ve been thinking about the concept of balance. We have balance sheets, balanced diets, the need for work-life balance. Athletes need balance, on the court or on the field. The scales of justice need balance, hearing from both sides. We need balance with recipes, not so much of one ingredient that we leave out another. And for a church to be healthy, there needs to be balance.

Last week we had the grand “Celebration of God’s Faithfulness.” And grand it was. Which is cause for us to take a moment to pause and to consider where we are as we go forward.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 2:42-47

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Our text stands in the midst of a flow of events so some review is worth doing. This is immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - an event long prophesied and also promised by Jesus in the Upper Room and during the 40 days after his resurrection. Now, after his ascension, he has fulfilled that promise with the outpouring of the Spirit upon the church. Miraculous signs are given and questions are raised. Peter answers, explaining what took place.

That’s a bit of review. Our text is really then a summary, making the point that, as the Holy Spirit applies the gospel message, conversions take place. New birth and new life come which brings a deep shift in the heart, a deep shift with irrepressible external marks. Our focus and priorities change. (READ Acts 2:42) This is speaking to a shift of the devotion and core of a person’s life, a profound change to our identity, meaning, and purpose. Think with me. The Spirit of God has the ability to shift the gravitational center of our lives. And the effects of that shift cannot be contained. The Lord leaves marks, the marks of his work, marking us as his own. He has made these marks unmistakably clear. And we should desire them for ourselves.

What are those marks? What is it we should look for and desire? Let’s break this down into two groups. First, the marks of the interior life. And second, the marks of exterior growth.

I. INTERIOR LIFE

First, the interior life. Supernatural changes were taking place, a revolution of affections. (READ Acts 2:42) We are always devoted to something. And here we see an astonishing shift.

A) Learning

1. Clearly not

So one of the marks is that they were now a learning church. Clearly, the presence of the Holy Spirit does not bring a foolish absence of human teachers or an attitude of anti-intellectualism.

2. But rather

What we see here is a submission to the authority of the apostles and their teaching - an authority clearly demonstrated through miracles and signs, just as had been before in Jesus' ministry.

B) Fellowship

So this was a church marked by learning. But also by fellowship ([READ Acts 2:44-45](#)).

1. Clearly not

Love always demands sacrifice. Let's be clear. This was not communism but a common life.

2. But rather

Theirs was a community of sharing. They shared together a common relationship and a common partnership. And, because of that, they were compelled to share their lives and their possessions.

C) Worship

So they were marked by learning and fellowship. And worship ([READ Acts 2:42](#)).

1. Identifying

The definite article with "the breaking of bread" points to a shared meal and the Lord's Supper. We see the same with "the prayers," implying prayer services and meetings of various kinds.

2. Describing

These were formal and informal gatherings ([READ Acts 2:46-47a](#)). They met in the temple and in their homes. It was structured and unstructured, planned and spontaneous. And what was it like? Joyful and reverent. Their hearts were glad and generous. And yet filled with awe.

Learning, fellowship, and worship - these are the marks of the interior life of a church as the Holy Spirit does his devotion-shifting work. And we should expect much the same today.

Application:

Wherever we see this, our hearts should be filled with wonder and praise. Such things can reassure us of God's promises, purposes, and the power of the Spirit at work in our midst.

Thinking back, we have seen such things even here - never perfectly but at least partially. And for that, we should be deeply thankful and encouraged. And all the more bold to work and to pray expectantly towards even more such interior life - longing for such work of the Spirit.

The Lord has made clear the marks of his people. Where we see this, we should be glad.

II. EXTERIOR GROWTH

Which brings us to the second point. With interior life comes exterior growth ([READ Acts 2:47b](#)). This too is the Spirit's work. On this, John Stott wrote in his commentary ([READ](#)):

Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing and worshipping, that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church. As Harry Boer expressed it in his challenging book *Pentecost and Missions*, the Acts 'is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit.... Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is a missionary church'.

A) The One at Work

1. The instruments

Let's start with who was the one at work. There were instrumental means in play - preaching and teaching, the shared life and sacrificial love of the community. And later, the courage of these Christians and their steadfastness in the face of horrendous persecution. All very compelling.

2. The Lord

But those were all instruments in the hands of the one actually doing the work, the Lord himself.

B) The Pace of the Work

Jesus was the agent doing the work. What of the pace? What did this look like?

1. Clearly not

(**READ Acts 2:47b**) Clearly, this was not sporadic, episodic, or just occasional. Not at all.

2. But rather

It was regular, ongoing, and continual - day by day. Even the Greek verb tense speaks to this.

The interior life was daily present. And so too was the external growth.

Illustration:

That is cause for a pause. Imagine your annual physical. The readings have been taken and blood has been drawn. There's a different range for each of us. And that needs to be kept in mind. But if your doctor comes back and says, "Your body-mass-ratio is good but your blood pressure and cholesterol are way out of wack," she can't give you a pass. It has to be addressed.

"But I feel fine," you say. That may be. We often do. What have become accustomed to? The exterior growth is just as miraculous and as much of the Spirit as the interior life. And just as much a sign of spiritual health as everything that has gone before. It's a package deal.

Application:

If we long for and cherish the one, we should do the same with the other. Now there are two sides to consider. On the one hand, this is the Lord's work. I heard of a pastor who said, "At my first church, when I got there we had 120 people. When I left, it was 100. At my second church, we started with 150. When I left, there were 140. With my third church, we started with 180. And now it's exploding. What did I do differently? Not a thing. It was all the Lord."

So, on the one hand, we have to consider that. But on the other hand, there is our role. And sometimes our resistance. We can become comfortable and complacent about outreach and growth. We don't invite folks to church or our CG's because we like things as they are and we don't like the disruption of change because of all the disruption in our lives the rest of the week. So we cordon off this little thing we call "our church." I'm not sure that will hold up with Jesus.

He has made clear the marks of his people. We should desire those marks for ourselves.

CONCLUSION:

"Hospitality" can mean a host of things. It need not mean "looking nice" but rather "making space." I think back to last year's Inklings Beyond group. We had a young lady who was allergic to pet dander. We have two dogs. So, given we wanted this young lady to enjoy her

time in our home, Sarah wisely insisted that we make preparations. Each week, before the group arrived, we made sure the dogs were put up and then we dusted and vacuumed the room. Again, we wanted to make space for her. Which in that case meant taking extra measures for her.

What would that look like for us as a church? It might well start with adjusting our assumptions as to who belongs here. Think about what we see in the book of Acts. Who do we see enfolded into the church? Men and women, young and old, civilian and military, rich and poor, Gentile and Jew, progressives and conservatives. It's all there. They're all there.

For the Gospel message cuts across all lines. Which means we should expect to become more diverse in every possible sense. Are we ready for that? Are we ready to make space? Ready for various bumper sticker slogans in our parking lot? For various perspectives, histories, giftings, and opportunities? I hope so. We should long for the day when people ask, "What on earth do you all have in common?" To which we say, "It's not what. It's who." It's Jesus.

He has made space for us. So then we make space for others.

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