

SERMON: "Healthy Growth" – April 13, 2008  
Text: Acts 2:42-47

I find it amazing how technology can touch up photos to get rid of red eye, brighten and lighten as needed, add color where needed, and even insert someone else image into a picture that they were not originally in. All these techniques are used to put forth the best image.

This is what our Acts text is, a snapshot of the early church at its best. This memory has been touched up and colorized by Luke to form a biblical image that showed the pattern of the church's corporate witness to people around them outside of their community. What I would like to explore today is not the perfect picture of a Christian community that we cannot live up to, but to highlight the biblical images of a church that is thriving and alive witnessing to the resurrection of Christ which is what they all had in common, what was their motivation for their life together, and what lead them to healthy growth. The three areas I would like to highlight are learning, worship, and fellowship.

So as we explore these three characteristic of a nurturing, thriving, healthy and growing community where amazing things happen, let us be mindful that we will never, due to our humanness live this perfectly, but it can guide us to live faithfully in our times now.

First was learning, "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching". The apostles were the ones who were taught by the Lord, Jesus Christ; and they were the eyewitnesses and carriers of the lessons to teach and pass on to the early church, who would pass it on to the next generation. Learning and teaching are backbones to a nurturing Christian community. IN a nurturing growing

community, we study, we ask questions, we share together our understanding of faith issues and how this intersects with our lives today. Here at Kent First Presbyterian Church there are many opportunities for learning. We have an adult class on Sunday morning who study weekly the faith issues of the faithful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have Kerygma Bible Study of Acts, beginning May 3. We have Women circles that study the Bible and faith related issues. Now ask yourself, what do you take advantage of? The more we are a learning community the more we become a nurturing, thriving, healthy, and growing community.

Second, is worship. Their worship wasn't just going through rituals, it was filled with awe, the Greek literally means fear. When they encountered the largeness, the power of God they were in awe, holy fear. They were seeing everyday the way of the Spirit move and drastically change people's lives. They were able to see these plain ordinary men and women perform miracles because of the spirit of the resurrected Jesus was alive and among them. The question for us, is do we sense the awe of God as we come to worship? I agree that some weeks are more awesome than others, but I wonder if we miss the awe, the magnitude of God, because of toning down things through our scientific rational thinking.

In our presence today is the Creator that created everything in this Universe. If I was able today I would have brought picture from space telescopes that send brilliant pictures from deep space that show a birth and death of planets, to give us a sense of the power behind our creation and the delicate

balance of maintaining life on our planet. When I have seen those pictures, I sense that I have seen see the creative hand of God. As we watch the blossoms bloom on the rhododendron, azalea, and bulbs, that bloom the same times each year, do we see it as routine, or do we see the wonder and glory and mystery behind the greatness of their blooming? When a child learns how to walk or speak for the first time, or when we witness the birth of a child or grandchild do we see the wonder and mystery behind such a wonderful creation?

Do you see the God's awesome love when you look at the cross, and when we eat of the bread and drink of the cup in communion during worship? Yes the church is a community of people who see the awesomeness, the largeness of God, and worship God with great praise and joy. Does the spirit of worship express our appreciation of all that our Good Shepherd has given us to flourish in and enjoy?

The third characteristic is fellowship. The Greek word is Koinia. This fellowship is different than just saying how are you and getting to know a little about our lives. It is a deep friendship. It is knowing each others faith journey in the past and what our joys and struggles are today. It is caring for each other in spiritual and in concrete ways like giving food when some of us may be hungry. It is praying for each other. It is caring so that each person is cared for in Christ's love. Not just in word but as well in action. This doesn't remain just within the particular community, no this care reaches beyond and serves anyone who is in pain and in need of nurture, healing, and care. The familiar hymn, "They'll Know We are Christians by Our Love", speaks of the truth that living out Christ's love

isn't for just ourselves it is to be lived out in all dimensions of our life to be seen and experienced by others. We are to extend Christ's love to all: men women, boys and girls, the wealthy and the poor, the healthy and the ill, those who are heterosexuals, or homosexuals, those who are of different races and cultures, those who are Christian and those who are not. They will know us by our love. That is Evangelism at it's best.

This occurs every week in ministry from this faith community. Last Thursday a man by the name of Roy came in the church because the sign said, "Begin New Life". He explained that he and his wife, Gigi, were coming to join his brother in Bremerton from Oregon to begin a new life. He felt that maybe this church would help them. Their car broke down and they had spent all their travel money on repairs. The last two nights they slept in a truck stop and was wondering if we could help put them up for one night in a hotel. I just happen to have cash from the rent that AA gives us. It was exactly what one night may be at a hotel, \$80. I prayed for Roy and Gigi and he prayed with me. After the prayers I gave him the money. He was shocked and he said thank you many times over to me and to session members as they were leaving. He told me with tears in his eye, there is a loving God! We showed him God's love through our compassionate action.

Luke in this passage portrays a picture of a unique, healthy, thriving, and growing community. It is not because they strategize to do these things. They lived this unique way because of their deep faith in the resurrection Lord. I think this community at Kent First Presbyterian Church has rich nuggets of this kind of

Christian community. Are we perfect, of course not! We will never be perfect. But we can continue to have faith in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, let his resurrection spirit lead us in our life together, so that we can witness with our life together to those outside of our faith community.

As we look at the picture on our brochure outside the church what does it tell you? I pray that as people get to know us they will find the risen Lord among us and discover a faith community that will feed their souls by connecting them to our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Let us pray.