

Wangaratta Wesleyan Methodist Church Sunday 21st June 2015

Life in the Early Church

Bible passages: Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:23, 28-35; Ephesians 4:2-4, 5:15-18

Intro: Ordinary people – extraordinary God

Have you ever looked at a very talented or gifted person and thought, they are so good at what they do, I could never be like them as they are way out of my league.

Well they grew up needing their mother's milk, they sucked a dummy or their thumb, they needed others to show them the basics of life, they asked dumb questions, and they made mistakes and doubted their ability at times.

You see everyone starts off as ordinary. What makes them extraordinary is the things they learn through the people they meet, the books they read and the experiences they have.

I love the verse in Acts 4:13 that says: 'When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.'

- Explain why I love this verse
- Well what ordinary people need is an extraordinary God! Expand.
- The religious leaders thought: They're not educated, they have no relational skills with people, they not skilled at public speaking, they're just fishermen!
- What made the difference to Peter and John? Being with Jesus!

If you take nothing else from this morning but this you will be blessed; The book of Acts shows us what unschooled, ordinary people can achieve when they spend time with Jesus and seek the empowering of his Spirit.

Nothing has changed in the last 2,000 years. God is still looking for unschooled, unskilled, ordinary men, women and young people who desire to spend time with Jesus and allow his Spirit to flood through your lives. The Holy Spirit will transform your life from being ordinary to extraordinary.

Let me pray for us.

So what was life like in the early church? Let's check out...

1. What they did

Well it seemed that they did the...

a. Simple basics

There was nothing flashy about their gatherings.

Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the,

- Apostles' teaching
 - What Jesus taught,
 - the gospel message, His death, burial & resurrection.
 - We have that today in the New Testament
- The fellowship
 - The believers as they gathered for worship together
- The breaking of bread

The Lord's Supper (as opposed to verse 46 which seems to indicated eating a meal together at home)

- And to prayer
 - Prayer together, they seemed to do lots of it
 - Granite Flats Community Church

Four simple things that they did when they gathered together. Church seemed simple back then. I wonder have we complicated it too much.

- Alan's book for the board to read: Simple Church
- How often did they do these things? Initially it was every day! By Acts 20 at least it seemed that the church met on the 'first day of the week' (Acts 20:7)

Why were these four things so crucial for the Christian in AD 30's and why are they still crucial today?

- If we are not constantly surrounded by biblical teaching we will default to the teachings of those around us. Our standards will simply reflect the society we live in and we will let the world squeeze us into their own mould. This is even happening in the church and in Christian families. May we protect against this by surrounding and immersing ourselves in the Word of God.
- If we neglect meeting together for fellowship and encouragement slowly we will grow cold spiritually as a fire is not sustainable with just one log. It's a tough world out there and we cannot survive on our own.
- If we neglect the meal that reminds us of the Lord's death, his forgiveness and resurrection we are at risk of forgetting what grace is all about, the cutting edge reality of our walk with the Lord.
- And if we neglect prayer we will become dependent on self instead of realising that we live on earth but are totally dependent on heaven.

Let's keep the simple things alive as we do church.

They also...

b. Ate together in homes

'They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.' (2:46-47)

- Is this a bit like what we do when we gather in homes for home group?
- There is something about eating together that binds people together as one: Café Church, Be Church, inviting people over for a meal.

And they...

c. Shared what they owned

'All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.' (Acts 2:44-45)

'All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.' (Acts 4:32)

Why was being generous a hallmark of the early church?

- God had been so gracious and generous with his love and compassion that the least they could do was pass this grace and generosity on to others.
- Did they not own things in the early church? No, they still owned houses and they still struggled to be generous as we find out in the story of Ananias & Sapphira

So they did church simply, they ate together in homes and they shared what they owned but how about...

2. How they lived

They chose to live...

a. Together in unity

Unity has always been something the Church has strived for even though it hasn't always done a good job. In fact it seems that often the church is characterised by disunity rather than unity.

Well the early church seemed to get it right...

'All the believers were together and had everything in common.' 'All the believers were one in heart and mind.'

Unity is a beautiful thing but it's very hard to hang on to, and I wonder how long the early church shared this unity. Let me share a few things that affect unity:

- Selfishness, lack of team work, owning a vision by yourself, not listening, thinking that you are better than others.
 - I own some of these... Expand

So what enhances unity?

- Humility, encouragement, team work, consensus, being slow to react, not being dogmatic to name a few Read Eph 4:2-4 from Grapevine
- Can we work on these things?

We need to develop unity much more than we do at present:

- As a church we probably do a reasonable job
- As the body of Christ in Wangaratta I'm not so sure. I feel challenged about this...

Some examples of unity across the body of Christ in Wangaratta

- Loaves & Fishers Christians Caring
- Praying down the street: Tuesday 7:30am
- My chat with Louie from Enjoy church

The early church Christians lived...

b. In awe of God

Verse 43 of Ch 2; 'Everyone was filled with awe'

- Admiration, respect, amazement, surprise, wonderment, astonishment, reverence.
- Here is something that fills me with awe: PP slides

These early Christians were filled with awe simply by being at church!

- They were blown away by God's love
- By the sacrifice of his Son Jesus
- And by the power of the Holy Spirit being manifest amongst them

Let me ask, do we need the latest and the greatest building, music, preacher to be filled with awe? No we simply need to do the basic things and be devoted to them: The bible, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and to prayer. We need to let the extraordinary flow through the ordinary. We need an expectancy of the unexpected.

- As the Israelites looked on as Moses ascended and descended the Mountain of the Lord they were in awe of who God was.

- When the Israelite army watched in disbelief as a teenage shepherd slayed the giant Goliath they were in awe of their God.
- When Jesus died on the cross and earthquakes roared across the land, the sun disappeared and the curtain ripped in two people stood in awe of God
- For 2,000 years we have stood in awe before a risen Lord Jesus
- When a prodigal child comes home to Jesus we stand in awe of God's grace and mercy

Let's come to church with the expectancy to be awe-struck by who God is and what he is doing as we gather each Sunday.

They also lived...

c. With boldness and courage

It was this courage and boldness that made the authorities take note that something had transformed these ordinary men. The Holy Spirit had transformed them to the point that they had courage in the face of persecution and boldness to speak out God's message.

- Moses said to Joshua: Be strong and courageous.
- Peter showed boldness as he told the crippled man to walk.
- Peter and John were courageous as they faced the Sanhedrin for speaking about Jesus publically.
- The believers prayed for boldness as they considered the authorities threats.

Does it still happen today? I'm sure it does. In thousands of places around the world...

- Andrew Chan and other death row inmates showed courage and boldness as they sang Amazing Grace before the firing squad.

May we also find courage and boldness by the power of God's Spirit as we face challenges in life. Ex. Illness and grief amongst us

So what happened to the early church as they endeavoured to live this way?

3. (What happened?)

Firstly...

a. Grace descended upon them

Something significant was happening to them as a body of believers as they spent time together loving and being generous towards each other.

- Acts 2:47 says they were enjoying the favour of all the people. Expand:
 - As people serve one another,
 - Giving away things instead of being selfish with their resources,
 - Excitement of being together, energy,
 - Attractiveness, people will be drawn to this.
- And then in Acts 4:33 it says 'and much grace was upon them all.' Expand:
 - Grace is the favour of God. They had just enjoyed the favour of the people, they were also enjoying the favour of God.
 - God was delighted with them
 - He was enjoying pouring out his blessing upon them

Example: When I see my kids playing nicely together I just want to pick them up and cuddle them and tell them how much I love them. I want to release my favour upon them.

- When God sees us as a body loving one another, including one another, sacrificing our own needs for others, sharing our resources it gladdens his heart and he wants to pour his favour upon us. May we cause our God to be delighted in us.

They also experienced...

b. Many signs and wonders

It is interesting that the people seemed to expect the miraculous in amongst the ordinary. Why should it be any different today? Remember we started by seeing that God does extraordinary things through ordinary people like you and I when we ask him.

- Read 4:29-31.
- Why shouldn't we see signs and wonders as we pray before the Lord?
- Healings and blessings, forgiveness and restoration, boldness and courage
- Can we be men and women and young people who ask and expect God to do mighty things

Finally they saw...

c. Incredible growth

Now growth is not what we worship but we worship a God who desires that his Kingdom grows.

May we also see incredible growth in numbers, in spiritual maturity, in spiritual power and authority.

Conclusion: Wind beneath our wings

Bette Midler wrote the song, 'Wind beneath my Wings'

Nathan's helicopter: Dad what makes it fly the motor or the blades?

The wings are useless without the wind beneath them or the air to push against.

What will make us soar and do mighty things for God? It is the wind beneath our wings, it is the power of God's Holy Spirit.

Message by Pastor David Lloyd