

**Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35**  
**(Isaiah 61:1-3; John 20:19-23)**  
**“A New Community: The Local Dimension of Mission”**

## **Introduction**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an Anglican missionary, named Roland Allen, who served first in China and later in Africa, wrote two books – *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* and *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* – in which he argued that the biblical pattern of mission is not to establish a mission station and then continue to staff it with Western missionaries, but rather to plant churches and turn them over as soon as possible to local leadership. At the heart of his plea was the recognition that God has ordained that disciples be made and the nations be won to Christ through the agency of the local church.

We have the benefit here in the US of very large churches with specialized ministers and ministries, and with significant enough resources to allow us to set strategic goals and pursue culture-transforming church planting around the world. However, the large church is also an excellent place for spiritual consumers to hide out, without ever committing to a small group of believers in the kind of mutually accountable relationships required for healthy, biblical, spiritual growth. Such churches too often produce – not disciples of Jesus Christ - but people who simply jump from church-to-church depending on their perceived needs of the moment. The abundance of ministries offered in large churches exacerbates the tendency of typical American churchgoers not to know what things are of first importance.

So this morning I want us to think together about what are the biblical first things for a local congregation of Christians to pursue, whether we are talking about a gathered congregation such as Cedar Springs, or talking about the smaller accountability groups that often function, in effect, as house churches. Taking our cue from the early church as it emerged from the experience of Pentecost, I want us to ask two questions: First, what should mark our life together? And then, what should we expect to see the Holy Spirit do in our midst if we devote ourselves to those biblical first things?

Our text reminds us that the church in the New Testament devoted itself only to those very few things essential for its members to grow together to maturity in Christ and to pursue the mission of God by taking the gospel to the surrounding world. The apostles had been charged by the risen Christ to take the gospel to the nations, to make disciples of all ethnic and linguistic groups by incorporating them into local expressions of Christ's body through baptism and by teaching them to obey all that the Lord had taught them. But they first needed a model of the local church to replicate, and we find that model described in our text.

I hope that as you leave here today, you will be very clear as to the things essential to our life together, the things that marked the first Christians who were filled with the Spirit of God at Pentecost and who subsequently turned the world upside down.

## **Body**

### **1. What priorities should mark our life together as a local congregation(2:42)?**

*We must be devoted to the apostles' teaching.*

*We must be devoted to the fellowship.*

*We must be devoted to the breaking of the bread.*

*We must be devoted to the prayers.*

### **2. What should we expect to see God's Spirit do in our life together (2:43-47)?**

*We should expect a palpable sense of the Spirit's presence (2:43),*

*We should expect to see ministries of healing to the sick and broken (2:43).*

*We should expect to see ministries of mercy to the poor and needy (2:44-45).*

*We should expect to see ministry done as a joyful and generous lifestyle (2:46).*

## **Conclusion**

Whenever a Christian congregation is committed to these four biblical imperatives, and is marked by these four manifestations of the Spirit's presence in their life together, they have every right to expect the Lord to add to their number day by day those who are being saved (2:47). It is the Lord himself who adds to their number: not evangelistic methods nor special events nor gifted preachers, but God himself, day by day, through the transforming power of the gospel as it is lived out in the lives of his people. And he adds *those who are being saved* to the church. Note that there are no "lone ranger" Christians following him on their own. Being a Christ-follower is being part of the Body of Christ expressed in a local assembly of other Christ-followers.

How desperately the world needs for us to be the people God intends for us to be: a loving, healing, worshiping, celebrating church-on-mission, God's alternative community to the brokenness of the world around us! It is what we have longed for all our lives, because we were created for this. And how very satisfying it is whenever we get a taste of this life, for it is itself a foretaste of that "joy unspeakable and full of glory."