

SERMON

Acts 2:42-47

Living in the Church

Nunawading and Waverley, 29-5-22

Dear friends in Christ,

The church has been my life and will continue to be after my retirement. It is like this for many of you. I have conducted funerals of elderly, faithful believers who attended every Sunday, served in numerous ways, visited others, were witnesses to Christ, loved the world as Christ does and their non-practicing children will say in the eulogy, "Oh, we mustn't forget that mum had her interest in the church." We know that life in the church is about a relationship with the living God, being filled by the Holy Spirit and living in the grace of Christ.

To live in the church is a gift of our baptism for baptism is a union with Christ and of all believers past and present. And so, the first thing we have to say about living in the church is that believing in the Lord is the foundation. The Holy Spirit has established a new gathering of redeemed people, declared to be saints through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. Norman Habel wrote in his song, with music supplied by Robin Mann, 'When I consider God's own church, sinful sort of saintly band, I hold my breath'; these words are so true for we are 100% sinners yet 100% holy people of God, perfect in every way, beautiful and healed, full of the very life of Jesus, destined for immortality and total restoration at the resurrection. Naturally, we want to confess this faith. To fully belong to God's people means to believe what we state in the Apostles' Creed. **They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread,** alludes to this believing.

What is in the mind must also reach our hearts and change them so that in the church we share our experiences and nurture each other in this faith. Knowing that our Father cares for us and his love is there no matter what we are going through, is shared with each other. We can grow cold, the presence of God diminishes, we are hurt by life, carry burdens and are sometimes under strain; we need each other's help, a word that gives us hope or something to remind us that Christ is near us. Life in the church is about supporting each other and carrying each other's burdens.

You can see how a new way of behaving is intrinsic to living in the church. **They devoted themselves to prayer** tells us why we have a group praying for those in need. Many are reporting wonderful answers to prayer. Prayer is our way of holding up a person before our Father and saying, "your problem will become mine and I'll work with you on it". **Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles** reminds us that the Lord Jesus is in our midst as he promised. Today we heard about the groups coming to use our place and the chance for us to show hospitality, make friends and be a witness to them. That these people are here is not a chance event but miraculous arrangements of the Holy Spirit. Life in the church is about the Spirit's miraculous power and leading amongst us.

To live in the church involves, the desire to live sacrificially as Jesus did. **All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people.** Life in the church means devotion to the Lord but also, devotion to each other. There is a sharing in the Holy Spirit taking place in our congregation, where we help each other with the resources that we have, especially noticeable when we take on roles and tasks in the church. We share our knowledge of the Lord; we share our material things and money and we share the gifts of the Spirit we have. There is a kindness towards those we meet at church, a willingness to introduce ourselves and get to know others. Those who live in the church strive to speak well of others and appreciate others, no matter how they may appear or different they may be. Sometimes conflict can arise but we forgive as the Lord forgave us. We learn to give up old habits that can hurt others by endeavouring to file off the rough edges we have. Transformation takes a long time. Addictions can cling to us and we will have to live with failure but we can trust our Saviour to be gentle with us and restore us to where we began in our baptisms.

Accepting change in the church is not easy but as society changes, we let go of old traditions and start experimenting and making mistakes in our efforts to reach out to them. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.** This will only be true if we hold on to the gospel but adapt our approach. We need to be tech savvy, use social media, develop a congregational app, start an online congregation, a Chinese congregation and be multi-cultural. Churches find it hard to hold on to the young so we have to do something about that, which will mean change. Living in the church means adapting to new generations. Change is hard but with the Spirit's strength, we can do it.