

Acts 2:42-47

The early church in this passage was facing new challenges and opportunities as they were getting established following the resurrection of the Christ. It was a time of uncertainty, for the people involved did not know all that was to happen with their new faith. They knew great things could happen, but they didn't know when or where things would come from or how many people would join their faith. All they had was their faith, and the hope that through Jesus Christ they would grow so that others would know the good news.

In some ways, this situation is not unlike the current situation that we are in. This past Monday, the Board adopted a motion to begin a process of finding a vision for the church. We currently live in a moment of uncertainty for our future as Faith Church. Until the board resolution, there was not any clear plan for the future. Some folks have talked about how much longer the church will last or what will happen in the future. With the board's resolution, we have a hope for the future.

I suggested this motion to the board, because I feel that it was time for us to begin the process of discovering what God is calling this congregation to do for the mission of Jesus Christ. I have spent time this past year getting to know the congregation and learning our strengths and weaknesses and learning what the greater story of Faith Church is in our context. Just recently I have taken coursework in the field of mission and evangelism, so I have a tool set that I did not have before. Lastly and importantly, I believe I am called by God to be with the congregation in this time as we begin to work for the Glory of God's Kingdom on earth.

This process of discerning God's vision and mission for the church require us to dig deep into the Bible, pray fervently, and simply be prepared for the task that lies ahead of us. We know that through the Bible we are not the first Christian community to face a great process of

discernment and planning. I believe though that if stick to the basics of digging deep into the Bible and pray fervently, then we are beginning the process is the right way.

The community in our reading from Acts held on to several key components in finding their way in this world. I think these components can be insightful for us as we begin to form a new vision for our community. These components are Teaching/Learning, Fellowship, Prayers, Breaking bread, and the sharing of resources. These five things distinguished the community from other people and formed a Christian identity for the very first Christians.

The first component the community held was Teaching and Learning. The early Christians at this time primarily spread the news of Christ orally, for the Gospels hadn't been written down in the short time following Christ's resurrection. The stories of Christ and the stories of the disciple's time with Christ was passed down orally. To ensure that the new believers could appreciate Christ completely the disciples at this time focused on teaching. This element of teaching was a way to pass down the story from one generation of believers down to another. The folks of this time didn't have the internet where they could turn to learn about Christ. It had to come from people directly.

In this teaching of new believers, the followers devoted themselves to learning all they could about Christ. It was common for new believers to spend time almost in an apprenticeship for a while, before they were considered full-fledged members and could spread the gospel on their own. This was done so that the people they reached out to would receive the same Gospel that they had received when they were learning. The cycle would continue with each group of believers and this still continues on to this very day.

This component speaks well to the community of Faith Church to us today. I've encouraged the board that we need to dig deep in the Bible so that we can share the gospel with

those that we encounter in our future. We need to understand the stories of faith so that the new people we come into contact with will be able to appreciate the greater story of Christ.

We also need to be ready to learn from these stories in the Bible. We also need to be ready to learn from the bible and learn about the mission we need to implement in the community. For example, I believe that we should have a mission statement that we can learn, repeat, and teach to others quickly. This shows how important the message of the church is so that others may know the Gospel.

The early Christian community felt that it was important for them to have plenty of opportunities for fellowship as a community. In spending time together the community would form stronger bonds and be ready for the good times and the rough times together as one body. It cemented the dedication of those to the cause of Christ by being together in the name of Christ. We have had it told to us that when we gather together in Christ's name that indeed the spirit of Christ would be with us in that gather. The early Christian community lived this out as well.

As Faith Church, we do spend time together well. Nearly every Sunday we fellowship before and after church, and we frequently have social events. This is a good thing, because it develops bonds just like the early Christian community experienced. Bonds of the community are strong and last through the good times and the bad.

It is important that we continue to develop our bonds as we develop a mission for the church. In projects where we need to devote much of our communal energy, we need to remember that we are doing this not only that others may experience the love of Christ, but so that the greater community can be a part of the story and community that is Faith Church. We have something special in this congregation, and it should be our highest priority that we

encourage others to become a part of the this community. We are not a country club, we are a Christian community where all people are welcomed.

As we develop these bonds of fellowship and community, we must be sure to keep the precedent that we are to break bread together. I believe communion to be an act that we do together as a community. It doesn't do much good to do communion alone, because it is called to be an act where we can all gather and share in the grace that comes from God. Honoring the sacraments of the church is something that the early Christians did right from the beginning, and it is something that we need to continue to keep in mind as we build up our community and prepare to share our community with all. The table of Jesus Christ is open for all people who seek a relationship with their Creator and we should provide opportunities so that all may partake of this sacred act together.

Prayer is another component that the early Christian community stuck to as they were growing and learning how to exist as a community. Prayer is huge in any great project of the church, so it is even more critical that as we are discerning God's vision for the church that we pray as much as possible.

If there is one area of our vision process that every person of this church can do, it is that they can pray for congregation. If you aren't able to come to meetings when we discuss the vision of the church, you can pray for those in attendance. If you aren't able to help out with a new ministry, then you can pray. You can even pray that there will be people for us to share the gospel with. Prayer is key and a fundamental part of this process.

The last component that we learn from this morning's scripture passage on acts is the cooperative economics, or the pooling of resources. In the early Christian communities many people new to the faith could not make ends meet on their own. Christ's message was and is for

those who have little on this earth. Christ wasn't intentionally seeking out those at the top of the food chain who could support themselves just fine. The community was meant for all, and all came to the early Christian communities.

In order to care for those with little, the community often shared their resources with each other. This was done so that needs such as food and clothing would be met. It was an early act of charity in a time when there was little in the way of charity. The early Christian communities were pioneering new ministry opportunities early on, by the sharing of good amongst the community.

In this time of discerning our vision, it will be paramount that we share our resources together. One of the things that I brought up with the board is that this process of finding a vision will require a high commitment from the membership of the church. This commitment can be manifested in a multitude of ways, so that all can participate in this process. I envision several ways that we can pool our resources like the scripture speaks and be faithful to God in this process.

One of the ways that a person can participate in this process is by being an active part of the vision process. The process is open to all people of the church, not just the board. We need input and suggestions from the community. We are all in this together and each person has a voice that needs to be heard.

We will also need people to help carry out the new ministries or programs that come about in this vision process. I believe our time is the greatest gift that we can give to the church, because we all have a finite amount to give. I know that as a busy student and pastor my time is limited, so my giving of extra time is probably harder to give than money. Yes, monetary gifts will help the mission, but I encourage us to give beyond the dollars and give of our time.

Lastly, the last way we can give of ourselves to the vision process is to give ourselves spiritually to the task at hand. We will have to dig in and prepare to go places spiritually we haven't gone before. We have to be prepared to help people transform their lives and in the process we need to be prepared to transform ourselves. Christ's message was about transformation for a better life, and that is exactly what we need to be prepared to give and experience in this journey together.

All of this, is just a tip of the iceberg of this vision process. All the way from the teaching to the giving of ourselves we'll have many opportunities to rise up for Christ and be prepared for the love that we can spread in the name of Christ. I believe that we are up for the task. With God's guidance we can do great things for God and great things for people.

What does this exactly look like? I don't have an answer, at this moment. But we will have a better answer come this fall. Keep tuned in to what the community is working on and be prepared for the great things we'll be doing for God. Our journey is only in its beginning, so let's be on the journey together. Let us pray.