

41) So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. 42) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

One of Dr. Luke's narrative techniques involves occasional summaries. In my generation, we would call it a snapshot. Some of you can remember the Polaroid camera, which would create an instant picture – a snapshot. The Smart phone is the new Polaroid. With a smart phone, you can take a screenshot. The Acts 2 summary is a screenshot of what the first-century church looked like, with the implication that this is what a 21<sup>st</sup>-century church should look like. The middle verse of the summation – verse 44, is the one-sentence statement: “*all the believers were together and held all things in common.*” All = the whole of anything, everything, and everyone. All the believers – no exception, no hold-out, no half-way, all the believers were together and held all things in common – *koina*. Immediately following the Pentecost phenomena, a commonality, a unity, crystalized and glued them together.

**A Healthy Church is a Unified Church.** An “all things common” church is a church where doctrine matters, fellowship matters, worship matters, prayer matters, supernatural matters, ministry matters, and evangelism matters.

What should a unified church look like? Consider these four evidences.

**1. A Unified Church is a Devoted Church.** Twice in the Acts 2 summary, the “all things common” church is described as being devoted – a word defining an enduring commitment. A commitment is not a “come and go” emotion, but something you hold onto or persevere through, much like a marriage relationship. A strong, enduring marriage requires this kind of devotion and commitment – in fact, our common marriage vow includes the lines “to have and to hold, until death separates us.”

The first-century church expressed their devotion – their enduring commitment, in four disciplines: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.* (42)

- The Apostles' teaching = *didache*, the first reference to doctrine in the New Testament. These *teachings* would have included the Old Testament Scripture plus all Jesus' coaching and instructions they received as eyewitnesses. From the very beginning, every time the first Christians met together they devoted themselves to doctrinal instruction. **In a devoted church, Doctrine matters.**

- The Fellowship = *koinonia*, describing a relational bond which produces a diversified association, tightly knit together. The first Christians quickly developed a relational *koinonia*. Relational *koinonia* is extremely important to God. The only thing that God said was not good about His creation in the Book of Genesis was that Adam was "alone." (Genesis 2:18) When Jesus chose His twelve disciples, Mark noted that one of Jesus' purposes was so that "*they would be with Him.*" (Mark 3:14) **In a devoted church, Fellowship Matters.**

- The Breaking of Bread = *artou*, the same word used in verse 46 – *Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*" The Apostle Paul described the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians as eating the bread and drinking the cup together. In the New Testament church, apparently they celebrated the Lord's Supper as a component of their worshipping together. And notice that their worship gatherings generated joyful, sincere hearts, praising God. Worship is not genuine and God-honoring unless it swells from an attitude of the heart that is joyful, sincere, and celebratory. **In a devoted church, Worship Matters.**

- Prayer = *proseuche*, communication which addresses God. We've already affirmed in Acts 1 the birth of the church from within a prayer meeting. **In a devoted church, Prayer matters.**

These four disciplines defined the devotion of the first Christian church. Which disciplines define the devotion of First Baptist Lafayette? What are we devoted to – to have and to hold – until death separates us?

**2. A Unified Church is a Supernatural Church.** *Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.* (43) In his sermon, Peter identified Jesus of Nazareth as *a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through him.* In Acts, wonders and signs are connected together to describe miracles – the healing of the

crippled man in Acts 3 & 4, the miracles performed by Stephen in Acts 6, the miracles of Philip the evangelist in Acts 8, and the miracles of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14. A miracle is an event which unmistakably demonstrates a supernatural act which can only be described as an immediate and powerful action of God. Supernatural is above or beyond what is natural, unexplainable by natural law, beyond normal to abnormal. **A unified church looks far beyond what can be planned, organized, or programmed and creates a culture of the unexplainable – above and beyond normal to abnormal.** We are to be the people of God who live and walk by faith and not by sight, who function in the realm of “Wow, look what God is doing!” Now hold that thought, because next week we will answer the question – “What Should Supernatural Look Like?”

**3. A Unified Church is a Generous Church.** *They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. (45) Acts 4:35* further expands this generosity: *“For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold.”* According to Deuteronomy 15, Israel was to obey God’s commands; and God would bless them so that there would be no poverty among them. Thus, in the DNA of the New Testament church, a community of equality developed quickly, embracing the Old Testament principle of shared ministry responsibility – a voluntary response to meet every need from within the resources of the believers themselves. **Generosity matters -- Without a spirit of generosity, needs go unmet.** Unmet needs produce social, economic, spiritual, and financial imbalance and inequality. A concern and compassion for unmet needs will always define a unified church. I’m an idealist when it comes to believing what the Bible teaches. If the church practiced a spirit of generosity to meet needs within members, I believe that spirit of generosity would ultimately penetrate all levels of society and community and lead to the elimination of social welfare and government assistance. **Generosity matters because ministry matters, and ministry is everybody’s responsibility.** Have you heard about the four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was need unmet and a job undone, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Now, Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.”

**4. A Unified Church is a Growing Church.** *Every day the Lord added to*

*their number those who were being saved.* (47) Peter's Pentecost sermon affirmed with absolute clarity that *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (2:21) According to Romans 10:9-10, this confession is personal – *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation."* The confession then leads to the decision – After Peter's sermon, the invitation was extended: *"Repent"* (*Metanoia*) – a volitional change of mind that leads to a visible change of direction. *"Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* 3000 accepted the preacher's invitation that day, were baptized, and were added to the 120. From that day forward, people being saved became a daily occurrence – "Every day, the Lord added to their number" = Evangelism. Our Baptist Faith and Message, Article 11, defines evangelism as "the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations... It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ."

**Evangelism Matters – Sharing Jesus with the spiritually lost and personally unchurched is every Christian's duty and assignment.** Here's how it works – we give our witness, the Holy Spirit convicts, and Jesus saves. If the Lord is not adding to the church every day those who are being saved, if not many are being saved, it can only mean one thing – too many of us are derelict in duty or failing in our assignment. The Bible is crystal clear – no one gets to heaven except through an encounter with Jesus, and on one has an encounter with Jesus without an encounter with a witness.

Let's revisit Romans 10: *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation... How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? (9-10; 13-14)* God's Spirit convicts and people get saved through hearing a witness. That witness can be a sermon – so if you are here this morning, and you need to be saved or follow through with baptism, then I'm your witness. Here's the problem – not everyone who needs the Lord are present here this morning. That's why they need our individual witness. Peter preached, and 3000 people were saved. But the Lord added to the church every day, one-by-one, those who were saved through the influence of every individual Christian. Again, hold that thought, because two

weeks from now we will answer the question, “What does Evangelism Look Like?”

**Unity is the church’s most precious possession.** We ought to guard it at all costs. Unity is more important than facilities; more important than programs, more important than projects, more important than finances.

In the comic strip **Peanuts**, Linus was watching television when Lucy walked into the room. "Change the channel," she barked. Linus responded, "Why should I?" Lucy replied, "I'll give you five good reasons," and she held up her fingers. "Like this, they are not much. But when I curl them up, they are a power awesome to behold." Linus said, "What channel do you want?" The last frame has Linus looking at his fingers and speaking to them: "Why can't you guys get together like that?" A unified church is a together church, an “all things common church”. When the world looks at us from the outside, what do they see?