

Acts 2:41-47 - 8th after Pentecost. 10.7.2016

Fellowship of Believers

⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church - about three thousand in all. ⁴² They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshipped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. [NLT]

'We should do this more often' - there have been a number of occasions when members of the congregation came up to me and said this. What is it that we should do more often? It is about getting together for a meal, and spending time where we meet together, listen and share.

The congregation is not meant to only be a place where we attend church services on Sunday morning - and then we all go our own way again. This passage underlines what was important for the first church - and what should determine us today also. It is about living as a

Fellowship of Believers

We hear here of the early believers in Jerusalem, **They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.**

The first part of the sentence is as important, as what follows after it: **They joined with the other believers ...** We as Christians have not been called to be loners - our faith is not just a matter between me and God. By our Baptism we were joined into the *Fellowship of Believers*. So it is hardly surprising that people think, that we should 'do this' more often.

Getting together regularly is part of who we are - or are meant to be. Our

social interaction is important to find out more about one another, and also to know what other members are going through.

But we should not just meet to have a nice social get together - as important as that is. We hear of the early church:

They "... devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching."

Receiving a good education is very important in our time - and rightly so. Future prospects depend on getting a good result in the final exams. So it is not surprising, that parents go to great lengths in ensuring that their children get the best possible start.

Devoting a great deal of time - and money - to ensure that our children get a good education is important. There is more to life, however, than having good job prospects.

'Devoting ourselves to the teachings of the apostles' - is a basic aspect of our Christian life. We need to spend time hearing, reading and learning what it is that Christ has done for us; what he has given us; what he has made us to be. [Unfortunately at present the Bible-study groups in our congregation have shrunk to only 1 that meets regularly - 'we must do this more often']

The 'teachings of the apostles' are not something like maths - which you had to learn at school, but often find no real use for in later life. The teachings of the apostles remain important for our entire life. They are our link to God - here we hear who he is, and what the life is, that he has given us. They are not just for some people who are interested in finding out more about the Bible - they are of utmost importance for our life as followers of Christ. These teachings draw us ever closer into our life with God, and to living in the fellowship with him that his Word shows us.

Together with this fellowship with God the pillar which follows is

"They devoted themselves ... to the fellowship"

So often people devote themselves to a wide range of interest groups - they have friends where they live, they belong to clubs; they are devoted to their

hobbies. And there is nothing wrong with that.

But what about our fellowship as members of this congregation - as members of the church? I hear sometimes that people have a complaint that the 'church' only calls them when it wants something from them. Or there are others who just don't 'feel at home' in the church, because they find that they can't fit in with other members.

Of course these complaints should not just be taken lightly - we have often failed to make people feel at home. But, by the same token, it is very difficult to feel at home anywhere, where you don't make time to be with other members of the family. I know that it's not always easy to do so, but we need to make space in our lives to meet with one another. Those who don't spend time after the service to mix with other members, are missing out on an essential aspect of our life as a congregation.

We hear here of more than just having good get-togethers - it is about 'devoting ourselves to fellowship'. That means making new members feel welcome and helping them find their place here with us. It means getting to know the needs of the people with whom we have been joined together in faith. Being devoted to fellowship - giving of ourselves, but also receiving in this fellowship of believers.

Being devoted to fellowship - not to breaking it down! So often we have been guilty of separating ourselves from other Christians. Should we not look much more to restore the fellowship with others, rather than building walls to keep people out? Jesus, after all, prayed for unity among his followers, because this unity would have such a powerful witness for his message.

Having fellowship - and from this follows a third pillar:

They devoted themselves to **sharing in the Lord's Supper**. There is no one right way of doing this. In the early church it was a case that they **met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity**. Obviously the early church did not yet have places of worship, so their celebration of the Lord's Supper was a lot less formal than we know it today.

Perhaps there is something for us to learn here also - not to strictly separate the way in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper from other aspects of our time together. This is something which I experienced in house services a lot more than in our services here in the church building. The table with cake and other eats was clearly visible before the service started - and so we had fellowship around the Lord's Supper, but this was taken further into sharing **meals with great joy and generosity**. Somehow the way in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper should reflect more joy than it often seems to be - after all celebrating has to do with rejoicing and having a bit of a 'party'.

Living together as the people of God it is good also for us to devote ourselves **to prayer**. And yet it is something we so often struggle with. That is not new to us today - Jesus' disciples had asked him to 'teach them to pray' (Luke 11:1). As a result **Jesus said, "This is how you should pray ..."** (Luke 11:2), and he continues with the words we now know as the Lord's Prayer.

Devoting ourselves to prayer is about more, however, than reciting this prayer together. In the following verses in Luke, Jesus teaches the disciples some more about prayer - to keep at it, and to trust God to provide us with good things, just as children trust their parents for what they need.

'We should do this more often' - we certainly should as we devote ourselves to those things which we by the grace of God have received.