

WPC  
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Be The Church Part II: Devoted to One Another  
Acts 2:37-47

This is the second in a series of sermons called “Being the Church.” This series will function as our Inquirers’ Class – at its conclusion, those of you who are not members will have an opportunity to decide whether you’d like to join Wallingford Presbyterian Church.

Last week we looked at the foundation of the church. The church is built on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The living Christ is the foundation – without him, it doesn’t matter what kind of building you have, or how many people attend services, it’s not the church.

This week, we’ll put some walls on the foundation. To be a part of the church is to be a part of the local church – the first believers we read about in the book of Acts could not live out their faith on their own. They needed a group of believers to call their family, where they could celebrate the sacraments of baptism (to publicly join this family) and the Lord’s Supper (to sustain the family), where they could as a community pray, teach, and fellowship with one another. This group of believers is what we now call the local church.

I want to repeat something I said last week: the church doesn't exist for itself; it exists for the hope of the world. I don't believe God's particularly interested in institutional survival. But God has decided to work through the church for mission in the world. Tom Long: "How the church lives together is of crucial importance. When the world looks at the church, it should see not simply another social organization trying to raise money and keep its membership up; it should see a living embodiment of the kingdom of heaven, a community of faith where leaders serve instead of swagger, where the weak are nourished instead of cast aside, where people who lose their way are not forgotten but sought and restored, where people cultivate mercy and forgiveness as if they were the rare flowers of heaven." (p. 203).

The church is not optional for our life of faith; it's a necessity. People start to live differently because of Jesus Christ. Let's take a look once again at the first disciples. Acts 2:42 states, "They *devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

It's interesting that Luke uses the word "devoted" in this passage. The word in Greek (*proskartereow*) carries the meaning of continually devoting, remaining faithful, continuing steadfastly, being committed. It has the sense of continuing action, not for just a season, but an ongoing action

for the long-term. Usually when we think of devotion, we think of being devoted to our families, or devoted to our spouse, or devoted to our work, or even devoted to the Seahawks (they certainly need the fans' support this year!). We devote ourselves to things that are most important in our lives.

The first disciples continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. They knew that without these things, they would not survive. It's not a one-time event; it's a continual process because spiritual hunger is like physical hunger in that it needs to be regularly fed.

That's why we lift up membership in the local church. Some people say, "What's the big deal about membership in a church? We're all part of God's universal church (Jesus' big family) and can still live out our faith without official membership." There's truth in that statement – we don't need to join a church to have a relationship with Jesus. Joining a church is like baptism: it's not necessary for salvation, but it's still a very, very good idea, and it's what God calls us to do.

But many people today say, "I don't believe in organized religion. I can be spiritual but not religious." My response to that is: If religious faith is simply a solitary matter, you'll be fine. But if responding to God involves being involved in community (and that's what we're told in the Bible), then

before long you'll have a group of people doing this thing – this life of faith together. And that group is what we call the church.

Pastor Mark DeVries says: “To say that you're a part of God's family but you're unwilling to commit to a specific church is like saying you like to play football but you're unwilling to put on a jersey and get out there and play.” (as quoted by Rev. Jeff Lincecome, 1-16-11) God in his wisdom has decided that we're to work in teams, not simply as individuals. We need our teammates, and they need us.

We've got to have teammates in order to play the game of faith. We need to commit to a specific team in order to grow. So while the word “membership” is not in the Bible, the principles behind membership are. And that's what we see in the first believers in the book of Acts. They devoted themselves to God with a specific group of people. Without these committed relationships they knew they couldn't survive.

One of my favorite inventions of all time is the iPod. I love my iPod. I have my music, my photos, my games, and even some videos on my iPod. I use it often, and it's indispensable when I travel. But here's the thing about an iPod: you need to regularly recharge the battery, otherwise it will stop working when you need it. To fully enjoy one's iPod, one must get into a regular habit of recharging it. In a similar way, we're like dead batteries that

need regular recharging from Jesus (Eph. 2:1 states that we were dead in our sins). We're not the electricity, but the church is the outlet to recharge our spiritual batteries every week.

Not only is it important for us to be recharged every week at church, to be fed and encouraged and taught on a regular basis, but it's important for us to allow God to work through us to reach our brothers and sisters in Christ. Pastor Lillian Daniel tells a story of the time when she found out that her son had diabetes. It happened just days before Holy Week. Because she loved Palm Sunday, she had planned a lot for that day. There was to be the usual grand procession with the palms, the special music, and the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And because she had assumed it would be a celebratory day, she had decided that it would also be the day when new members would join the church.

Early that Sunday morning, with the news of her son's diabetes hanging on her shoulders, she sat at the desk in the front office with no celebratory feelings whatsoever. One of the new members who was to join that day, a young man who worked in the medical field, had arrived bright and early. "How are you this morning?" he asked innocuously, not realizing he would be the first person she had seen at church that morning, and that he was about to really find out.

“You know what?” Pastor Daniel said, “I’m not doing too great. My son is in the hospital, diagnosed with diabetes, out of nowhere, and he may or may not get to come to church today...So how am I doing? To be honest, I’m a little shaky.” She realized after she spoke that she had said too much, so she quickly said, “Sorry.”

“Juvenile diabetes or type-two?” he asked, appearing to know a distinction that most people do not. “Type-one?” She nodded.

“Well, I have type-one diabetes,” he said. “In fact, it’s what drove me to go into medicine. I’m passionate about helping people to live healthy lives with this condition. I think that’s why I am joining the church today. I’m going to be a friend to your son, and help you all to deal with this.”

And that’s exactly what happened. His friendship changed their lives in the years that followed, and none of that would have happened had they not been joined together in the body of Christ, not just in their good news but also in their bad.

This new member probably thought that he was joining the church that day because *he* needed it. And he was right. But in addition, sometimes the reason you are joining the church is because somebody there

needs you.<sup>1</sup> That's what teammates do for one another. And that's why  
God puts us in the church. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Lillian Daniel, *This Odd and Wonderful Calling*, "Palm Sunday," p. 208-210.