

“FIRST CHURCHES FOUR FOUNDATIONS.”

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Scripture Texts: Acts 2:42-47

Prayer: Holy Father, no one has ever been able to plumb the depths of your Scripture or scale their heights or reach their lengths. By the help of your Holy Spirit enable us to explore the truths you have here for us, open our hearts to understand and embrace and take to heart your life-giving holy manna, may our souls be refreshed, and your Word take root for our benefit and blessing, and for the glory of Christ and His church. Amen.

Introduction.

Luke shows us a picture, a snapshot of the church in the first century. It sure looks like a perfect church, doesn't it? They are all together, they are devoted, committed, they are sharing everything, lots of hospitality, praising God, full of joy and everyone in town is in awe of them. Wow, do you wonder how long this lasted?

This one snapshot of the church in the first century shows us what a health church looks like but it wasn't perfect, it wasn't a utopia. You don't have 3,000 new converts show up at worship and have tranquility.

The rest of Acts will show us warts and all. They will be opposed and attacked. Two of their members will drop dead for lying. Paul and Barnabas will get in a disagreement. Paul's letters to early churches are full of sins and divisions and disagreements.

The Churches Four Foundations.

This is a picture of what a healthy church should be like. If we devote ourselves to these four foundations God by His Holy Spirit may be pleased to give us some of these same results. A church that doesn't have or care about these four foundations can expect none of these results.

Churches are all built on something. Some churches are built on a foundation of entertainment and relevance, being hip and cool. Some on emotion and hype, some on social justice and being man-centered. It is amazing how simple it is to build a solid, steady, stable, Spirit-filled and God-glorifying church.

These are the four very ordinary but essential commitments and marks of a health Spirit-filled church that lead to supernatural results. God delights to use the ordinary because then when the extraordinary happens He gets the glory.

A learning church, devoted to the apostles' teaching.

Jesus came to earth to teach and preach, to proclaim the good news of His Gospel. When He sent His Holy Spirit He said His Spirit would remind us of all the things He said.

John 14:26 The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, ... and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

What was the apostles' teaching? Well, if the first sermon by Peter is any indication, the apostles' teaching is grounded in the Word of God and focused on the Son of God.

The Apostles' teaching was everything Jesus had said to them over the past three years that the Holy Spirit miraculously brought to their minds and later enable them to write down.

This foundation stone holds first place, this one undergirds and holds the rest together. What if we were a church that did everything else but this? We wouldn't be a church, or certainly not for long. The backbone of a healthy church is the Word of God.

A mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit is a hunger for the Word of God. The Spirit creates this hunger to know His Word and the Spirit satisfies this hunger. Where the Spirit reigns, God's Word reigns.

I Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, *long for* the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

The knowledge of God is the greatest knowledge because it alone is saving knowledge. This is even more important in our visually driving culture that values experience over truth.

Are we are Bible-reading, Bible-loving, Bible-living church and Christians? You can't get too much, you can't overdose on God's Word. We should own well-worn, marked up Bibles.

A loving church, devoted to the fellowship.

They devoted themselves to fellowship. This is the first time this word is used in the NT, it's a word created by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

On May 31 of this year millions of people were introduced to this word. Anyone know what it is? Koinonia.

14 year old Karthik Nemmani beat 515 contestants in the Scripps National Spelling Bee by correctly spelled "koinonia." It's the Greek word meaning Christian fellowship or spiritual communion.

Where the Spirit is there is koinonia with God and koinonia with each other.

It's a word that includes all aspects of our life together. It includes sharing, intimacy, caring, loving, accepting, including. Most of all it is a word that captures the unique brother/sister family relationship there is between believers and that believers have with God. It is a spiritual fellowship that lasts for eternity.

Every time it is used in the NT there is some kind of sharing going on, sharing of life, sharing of love, sharing of resources. SERVE week will be a great display of koinonia.

It can be a little harder to grasp the power and grace of koinonia when you grow up your whole life in a small town with your family, relatives and friends. But if you were transplanted to a foreign city, you would seek out a Christian fellowship and there you would instantly find spiritual family, Christian communion, koinonia.

We live in an increasingly isolated and individualistic culture. We are losing our face to face social interaction skills. God said it is not good for man to be alone and He wasn't just talking about marriage, He was talking about society, civilization and a covenant community.

The message here is we are better together, we are stronger together. If we are drifting, if we are alone, if we are isolated, we are easy prey. Together we can, "stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24).

"The body of Christ is incomplete without us, and we are incomplete without the body of Christ" (Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, p. 126).

A worshipping church, devoted to the breaking of bread.

In the context of the apostles' teaching, fellowship and prayer, this is most likely a reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This is the fellowship meal of the spiritual community. It was a frequent reminder of why they were a spiritual

community, why they felt the bond of love they felt. It was because they had something very powerful in common, their redemption from sin and forgiveness through the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

This was a common ordinary meal, filled with uncommon meaning, full of spiritual significance, a covenant meal for a covenant people, a meal received with glad and joyful hearts.

This do in remembrance of me. Lest we forget.

This do to boast in Christ and not in our selves, to boast in the cross.

This do until He comes, as together we anticipate and prepare for His coming again.

This do as a sign of our unity with Christ and with one another.

Is it mechanical or is it a miracle every time? Does this table move you, do you remember and reflect on who Jesus is and what He has done for you and does it take your breath away? Is it truly amazing grace?

Do we behold the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world? And is that cause for worship, cause for glad and generous heart to praise God? This table is a gift that we never lose sight of our need for a Savior.

As they joyfully celebrated the sacrifice of Christ for them and with gratitude recognized they were a blood-bought fellowship of redeemed sinners, this spilled over into their relationship with each other.

As the recipients of so much grace *how* could they not share and show the same kind of love that Christ showed them on the cross? They were a community of the cross. That changes everything.

A praying church, devoted to the prayers.

The early church started on the right foot, or should I say on their knees. The infant church knew her utter dependence on her Father. They brought this over from their Jewish roots. There were daily times of Temple prayer. Our text mentions how they continued daily to attend the temple.

The early church quickly developed the habit of frequent prayer together away from the temple, whenever and wherever they were gathered. Their old prayers no doubt took on new meaning.

Do you know one thing that was different in the early churches prayers that they hadn't known before? Jesus taught them to pray, "Our Father." Abba, Father. Jesus introduced an intimacy, a depth of love they hadn't known or dared to pray before. The Holy Spirit taught them and enabled them to pray in this new way.

Galatians 4:6 God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Some of you grew up with a set prayer at meals, some a memorized one, some of you the Lord’s Prayer. Expand on that at home. Pray the Lord’s Prayer but add a few of your own petitions after each of the petitions. Pray the Ten Commandments, pray the Apostles’ Creed. Google Paul’s Prayers and print them out and pray those. By doing these things at home and at meals you will be building your own and your children’s repertory of prayer and were to turn in times of need.

Expand your prayer vocabulary. Move past just saying your prayers. Just saying your prayers is not praying. Move past praying without your heart involved. Pour out your hearts to God.

Pray out of a deep sense of your spiritual need, of your dependence of God. Apart from Him we have nothing and are nothing. People who are self-confident don’t pray; people who can stand on their own two feet doesn’t get down on their knees.

Let us be a people who express our complete dependence on God, and nothing expresses our understanding of our dependence on God more than prayer. May we never forget that apart from Him we are nothing and we can do nothing.

Do we really think we can do life on our own without God’s help? Do we really think we can do our marriages and raise our kids and do our jobs and make our decisions on our own and get victory over sin with the tools we have? Prayer says we get it that God is God and He is our creator and we are dependent creatures.

Unless Lord builds the house, we labor in vain. What we do is worthless without God. When we work, we work; when we pray, God works. As the church prays, so goes the church. The church on her knees is a powerful force.

I credit the success of last year’s SERVE to the many prayers, both cooperate and individual.

This year’s SERVE week will succeed on the backs of many prayers.

A giving and growing church.

A church that is doing life in the Spirit built on these four foundations will see much fruit. Luke piles up at least eight phrases just trying to capture what God did to this church. We control the foundation, God controls the results.

Everyone was in *awe* of this people that took God and His Word seriously.

When there was a *need* they did whatever was necessary to meet the need. It was a mark of Christians that their faith didn't stop at their wallet. Fellowship was more than coffee, cookies and punch.

I think we do this pretty well, the Benevolence Fund is well supplied and available to meet needs as they arise. The Tuition Assistance fund is another. Project Hope and New Way. And then there is a lot that goes on unnoticed. Through the years when there have been large needs, God has provided through your generosity.

They practiced *hospitality*, eating together with glad and sincere hearts. There has always been a social side to Christianity. Eating and drinking together in Christ honoring fellowship is good for the soul and strengthening to the body and pleasing to God.

In an increasingly fragmented and socially isolated world, may your table be a place of joyful sharing of life.

They were *good hearted people*, they were genuine, open hearted as well as open handed. They made allowances for each other, they spoke well of each other, they didn't consider themselves better than others, they didn't have a critical spirit, or gossip. They actually liked each other and enjoyed each other. They were Christ-like.

God *added* to their number daily those who were being saved. How did that happen? Most likely through the daily witness of the believers, being salt and light, letting their light shine.

Do you ever pray that God would add those who are being saved?

Do we ask for souls to be rescued from hell?

Do we long to see sinners save? In our families, in our schools and work, in our community?

Implications and application.

Graduates, you have made it, you have accomplished a big milestone in life, and now a whole new chapter awaits you. What is ahead for you will be one of the biggest challenges to your Christian faith. You are going to have more freedom to make your own decision and choices.

The enemy of your soul is going to try to get you to abandon the faith that has been handed down to you. I urge you to remember your soul, and to make decisions and choices that will cause you to grow in your faith and in your love for God.

The author of Hebrews wrote about this very thing:

Hebrews 3:12-14 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

If you are leaving home and heading off to college don't do what many college students are tempted to do and sleep in on Sunday morning.

Christians don't flourish on their own, they need a fellowship of believers. Find a strong Christian church that has these four marks, starting with strong Biblical teaching and preaching. Don't just go for the entertaining kind, where you mostly just watch. Find one that makes a priority of preaching the Word, keeping the sacraments and makes prayer a priority.

All three of those are disappearing in many contemporary churches.

One key to the preaching is if it is through books of the Bible, not just lots of topic. You need the Word to strengthen your faith against all the worlds lies and temptations.

One key to the Lord's Table is if it is practiced together and if it is made clear who can come. You need the sacrament to remind you who you are and whose you are, what Jesus did for you.

One key to prayer is if they have a prayer of confession. You need prayer because your needs are bigger than you.

God has given us His church as a means of His grace and a sign of His love. Don't neglect so great a grace and so great a provision for your souls. This is preparation for eternity. This matter now and forever. These ordinary means have supernatural results.

Holy Father, make these four foundations stronger and clearer at First CRC. Make us to be a fellowship that increasingly desires and loves these and seek to build them and strengthen them.