



## "The Spiritual Church"

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Preached on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

**Text: Acts 2:42-47**

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IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

Last week in our travels through the book of Acts we heard how 3000 people repented of their sins, were baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of their sins, received the Holy Spirit, and became followers of Jesus. The Jerusalem church grew from 120 to 3120 members overnight.

Listen to the description of that church that comes next ... (Acts 2:42-47) "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

What does a "Spirit-filled Church" look like? Is St. Marks a "spirit-filled" or a "spiritual" church? In the 6 verses I just read we have a fine description of a spirit filled church. So let's

walk through these verses and see how St. Marks measures up.

Acts 2:42 reads, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” A spiritual church is first a learning church. None were saying, “Well I know have the spiritual anointing so I don’t need human teachers – the Spirit will teach me.”

Rather we see them sitting at the feet of Jesus’ chosen apostles and learning from them. Verse 43 tells us that the authority of the apostles as Jesus’ chosen spokesmen and teachers was backed up by miracles... “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.” Just as God had backed up the teachings of Jesus with miraculous signs – so now he was giving authority to the apostles of Jesus in the same manner.

The apostles’ teaching was put in writing and we have it in the form of the New Testament. That means that one of the marks of a spiritual church is that they are devoted to the teachings in the New Testament.

One of the marks of a spiritual church is that they study and submit to the teachings in the New Testament. Acts 2:42 continues describing the spiritual church... “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship...” “The fellowship...” This comes from the Greek word “koinonia”. This word speaks to what the believers shared in common. First and foremost believers share a relationship with God. Listen to how the apostle John described this... 1 John 1:3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Each believer had been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They shared that name that fellowship – that family. We’ve all been baptized in that

name and also share that relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – this is our fellowship. But there is a secondary fellowship... that is what we share with each other... Christians share their lives with each other...

We share our time with each other, we share our talents and gifts with each other, and we share our possessions with each other.

Acts 2:44-45 reads, “All the believers were together and had everything in common (koina – the root word for koinonia). Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” Now don’t misunderstand... private property is not forbidden by the New Testament. This sharing of property and possessions was voluntary – not compulsory – and this is what made it utterly amazing. When there was a need, it was met by a willing volunteer within the church that could meet that need. John Stott puts it this way... “Christian fellowship is Christian caring, and Christian caring is Christian sharing.” Where we see our Christian brothers and sisters in need, we are called to fill that need – that’s another mark of a Spiritual Church.

Acts 2:42 continues... “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Here we have the phrase, “The breaking of bread and to prayer.” “The breaking of bread” is not just a reference to sharing a meal. It is a reference to the Lord’s Supper – where Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples... We call it “Holy Communion” today because the apostle Paul taught in 1 Cor. 10:16, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ. (NKJV)”

By the way – that word communion – the same word for fellowship we noted above – “koinonia” It’s something we

share together – we are the body of Christ, and we share the body of Christ. And so a spiritual church is a worshipping church... they celebrated the Lord's Supper together and prayed together. Their prayer was both formal and informal as their worship was both formal and informal. The church needs both private prayers and corporate prayers. That's another mark of a spiritual church.

Acts 2:46-47 reads, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts (formal worship and teaching). They broke bread in their homes (informal worship) and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." Their worship was with glad and sincere hearts – there was joy in worship.

Yet this joy was not irreverent and v43 says, "Everyone was filled with awe" The risen Lord Jesus Christ was in their midst and they knew it – they reveled in his presence and glory. So let's look at the whole picture thus far... They baptized. They studied the New Testament. They shared their relationship with the Lord. They prayed together, and shared the Lord's Supper.

Does that sound anything like what we do on Sundays and throughout the week??? I see one final mark of this spiritual church... Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." They were not to be so preoccupied with learning, sharing, and worshipping that they neglected witnessing.

A spiritual church is an evangelistic outreaching church. And we can learn something about evangelism from this early church... First – "The Lord added to their number..."

Conversion to the faith is a work of the Lord – Jesus adds to his church – the Holy Spirit of God converts hearts.

And the Lord uses the church to reach out... He works through the preaching and the teaching, He works through

the witness of church members. He works through the witness of the love of the church members for each other – their fellowship – koinonia. And he works through the witness of their joyful reverent worship.

Finally we read... “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Saved – from sin, death, and hell by Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection. Those added to the church were those who were being saved. They were not just joining a social club with caring members they were converted followers of Jesus who were repentant and forgiven.

So let’s review for the sake of comparing the spiritual church to our congregation...

A spirit-filled church follows the apostle’s teachings in the New Testament.

They are eager to believe, teach, and obey what Jesus and the apostles taught.

Secondly they share the love of God and each other... Where there are needs among them they are met. So a spirit filled church is a loving, caring, sharing church.

Thirdly the spiritual church is a worshipping church. They relate to God with joy, reverence, and awe. Prayer, the Word of God, and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are celebrated and shared.

Finally the spiritual church is a missionary church – reaching out to the lost with its gifts and love.

Biblical teaching, loving fellowship, living worship, and outgoing evangelism... That’s what a spiritual church looks like... Does that describe St. Marks? If not, then ask yourself what you are doing to make this congregation a more spiritual one?