

## Who We Are

*Who We Are. Where We've Been. Where We Are. Where We Are Going. #1*  
*Acts 2:42-47*

*"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain...But upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it...For it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."*

When I think about our experience thus far, from the moment God saw fit to plant us right into the heart of this community and call us the Genesis Church of Vero Beach, until right this very minute, I can only describe our journey much like the way Johnny Cash described his: "We've been everywhere, man. Crossed the deserts bare, man. Breathed the mountain air, man. Of travel we've had our share, man. We've been everywhere. We've been to Reno, Chicago, Fargo, Minnesota. Buffalo, Toronto, Winslow, Sarasota. Wichita, Tulsa, Ottawa, Oklahoma. Tampa, Panama, Mattawa, La Paloma. We've been everywhere." Well, it seems we've been everywhere too. We started in a restaurant. Then we moved to a funeral home. Then we moved to a banquet room right next to that funeral home. Then we moved to a school. Then we moved to here. And God has been faithful in every step of the journey. He will continue to be faithful in every step we take in the future.

One of the greatest features of the Bible are the stories of the sojourns and journeys of the saints. Abraham started in the land of Ur and made his way to Canaan. Joseph started in Canaan and made his way to Egypt. Israel started in Egypt and made their way to the Promised Land. The Magi started in the East and made their way to Bethlehem. And Jesus started in Bethlehem and made his way to Calvary. And in every one of those sojourn stories, all those saints had one thing in common: they knew who they were long before they arrived at their destination.

So church, since we finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Gospel of Mark last week and have only the Passion Week chapters to go in that wonderful Gospel, I think it's only fitting that we pause for the next several Sundays and think about who we are, where we've been, where we are, and where we are going. Today, I want to talk to you about who we are. For just like the saints of the Scriptures, we must know who we are long before we arrive at any future destination. And, church, who we are directly corresponds to what God himself planted the Genesis Church of Vero Beach to be. It must be who we are today. It must be who we are tomorrow. It must be who we are 50 years from now. It must be who we are 100 years from now. And it must be who we are until Jesus comes again in all his glory. For whom we are also directly corresponding to who the 1<sup>st</sup> church in history was. To see who they were and, by extension, who we are, please turn with me to Acts 2:42-47.

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> 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, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

### *Devoted:*

#### 1. To the Apostle's Teaching

- **Voltaire's Prediction:** (1) Voltaire was a French philosopher who was hostile to the Gospel and the Bible. (2) In fact, he was so hostile, he made a bold prediction: "One hundred years from my day, there will not be a Bible on earth except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity-seeker." (2) 100 years after his death to the day, his home was purchased by the Evangelical Society of Geneva as a store house for Bibles and Gospel tracts. (3) "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord stands forever" (Is 40:8). (4) Since the Word of the Lord stands forever, we devote ourselves to the Apostle's Teaching as long as it is still called today.
- **The Apostles' Teaching Then:** (1) The word apostle at the basic level means "one who is sent out." Here, though, it is used to refer to a particular group of individuals that held a unique position: the 12 apostles. (2) These 12 were the first messengers of the gospel after Jesus' death and resurrection and were the foundation of the church with Jesus being the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). (3) There were specific qualifications: (a) witness of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 9:1); (b) explicitly chosen by the Spirit (Acts 9:15); and have the ability to perform signs and wonders as a way of confirming their apostolic authority (Acts 2:43). (4) As these individuals taught, the early church hung on their every word. (5) The church doesn't have those individuals among them in the church today. But we do have something that belongs to them: the Apostle's Teaching.
- **The Apostles' Teaching Now:** (1) We have the Apostles' Teaching in the 27 books that form your New Testament, all of which were canonized because of their apostolic authority. (2) Matthew, James, and Jude preached the Gospel to the Jews and go together. (3) Mark's Gospel is the story of Jesus from the perspective of Peter and goes with 1 and 2 Peter. (3) Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul and goes with his writings. (4) John was the disciple "whom Jesus loved and wrote four books of the NT: John, 1-3 John, and Revelation. (5) Collectively they form your NT.
- **App:** The apostles were the foundation of the church. The Apostles Teaching is the Word of God. They used the OT to identify Christ and they formulated the NT. When we preach and teach the Word, we not only honor the Lord, but we also put ourselves at the footstool of the apostles.

When we neglect the Word, deny its authenticity, or scoff at its relevance, we remove ourselves from our foundations. If that ever happens here, we may as well close the door and write I Chabod on the door post.

## 2. To Fellowship

- **Church Lingo:** (1) I didn't grow up in church, so it took me a while to learn church lingo. (2) When someone said "brother," I looked around for my actual brother. I soon learned it meant a fellow male believer. When someone said: "he's got a servants heart," I had no clue what that meant at first. But I soon learned that when the preacher said that about me, he's got some chairs in the fellowship hall for me to stack. (3) Fellowship is one of those church words we use a lot. And understanding "fellowship" is vitally important.
- **Fellowship Then:** (1) In Jerusalem at the time Luke records the formation of the early church in this passage, there were not a lot of Christians. As a result, those who believed in the Lord Jesus sought out others who held the same belief. They were united to each other by common beliefs, purposes, and goals. (2) This fellowship they called "koinonia." They used it to refer to the mutually beneficial relationship between Christians. (3) This "koinonia" was the iron that sharpened iron and helped each of them exercise their faith in love and good works when faith in Jesus was rare. (4) It was this "koinonia," this mutually beneficial relationship between Christians – where we get the terms "brother" and "sister" (in Christ) – that allowed the church to expand.
- **Fellowship Now:** (1) God's recipe for expanding the church hasn't changed in 2000 years. (2) It happens when we are united by the Apostles Teaching and have common beliefs, purposes, and goals. (3) Our hearts and minds are "kingdom minded" because we follow Jesus Christ, who said his kingdom isn't of this world. (4) We know that we are strangers in this world and we long for the time when we will be with Jesus. (5) But until that time, we will "koinonia" with "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ for the mutual benefit to each other.
- **App:** Of the four characteristics of the early church here, "koinonia" (fellowship) is the one characteristic that cannot be faked. It must be real and genuine. It must be genuine in relationships. It must be genuine in conflict resolution. And it must be genuine in love. People will know instantly if it isn't genuine. And they will know instantly if it is.

## 3. To the Breaking of Bread

- **Bread:** (1) One of the hardest things to do in life is cut bread out of the diet of someone who loves to eat bread. That would be me. I like white, wheat, rye, pumpernickel. You name it, I like it. In fact, I like it so much I'm trying not to eat any of it. (2) But there is one thing made from bread I have no intention of cutting: The Crouton's at Ruby Tuesdays. To God be the Glory. (3) The breaking of bread is also important to what we do as a body of believers.
- **Breaking of Bread Then:** (1) The "breaking of bread" was an important custom in the world of the NT. If a person ate alone, he did not need to break the bread because there was no one to share it with. But if you were eating with another person, the bread loaf was broken and shared. (2) It is this "sharing" aspect of the bread that was important to the early church. (3) Therefore, the question becomes "what did this bread symbolize and who do we share that with?" (a) "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never go thirsty" (Jn 6:35). (b) "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me (1 Cor 11:24). (3) Just as Jesus body was broken, the bread was broken. And the breaking of bread wasn't just a shared meal, it was identification with and participation in that story. (4) They knew themselves to be broken people in need of the redemption Christ offers seen most clearly through this act of the "breaking of bread."
- **Breaking of Bread Now:** In 2000 years, there is nothing new that we need to add to the story. It's relevance and essence are just as applicable to us today as it was for the original church.
- **App:** "Truly I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven" (Jn 6:32)

## 4. And to Prayer

- **A.C. Dixon:** (1) The great evangelist A.C. Dixon once proclaimed in a rousing sermon about prayer that "when we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely upon education, we get what education can do. When we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely on prayer, we get what God can do." (2) We are a people of prayer because we are a people who get what God can do.
- **Prayer Then and Now:** (1) Remains unchanged as well. (2) Jesus: "my house shall be called a house of prayer" (Mt 21:14). (3) Peter: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). (4) John: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." (5) Paul: "And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God (Eph 3:17-19).
- **App:** Who are we? "And they devoted themselves to the Apostle's Teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." It must be who we are today. It must be who we are tomorrow. It must be who we are 50 years from now. It must be who we are 100 years from now. And it must be who we are until Jesus comes again in all his glory. Amen.

