

Pentecost Sunday 2010

The Church, the making of a new people. **Acts 2:42-47**

Have you heard of a man called Jack Harris? He was in the news earlier this week because he spent seven- and-a-half years doing a 5000 piece jigsaw puzzle, which he could not complete because the last piece was missing. Fortunately for Jack although the makers no longer produce the design he was doing, they made a copy of the missing piece for him and sent it to him by special courier.

To do a jigsaw you need all the pieces but you also need the picture on the box. It provides an image of what you are trying to do. Have you ever bought anything that you needed to put together yourself. It may be for fun like a jigsaw, or for serious like a piece of furniture? If you are going to be able to do it you need a picture of what it's supposed to be like – only then can you tell if you are making it rightly.

Acts 2:42-47 gives us a picture of what a church is to be like – it's our model for getting things right. What is the model it gives us?

We are to be devoted to:

the apostles' teaching or bible and fellowship,
the breaking of bread [that is communion] and to prayer
being together and sharing all things in common.

Selling their possessions and belongings and giving to any who had need.
attending the temple together ie meet in public worship
breaking bread in their homes ie in private worship
eat together praising God.

As you put your jigsaw puzzle together, as you build your DIY piece of furniture you keep looking at the pictures you have to check out if you are doing it right. As people called to be a church, we can look at this picture of what a Church is meant to be and ask ourselves: how does what we have compare with this picture, this model of what we should be like?

When we ask ourselves such a question, we will see, if we are honest that there is something of a gap between the model of the church and our reality as a church. When we see that we may have four responses :

[1] we may say the world's changed. That was the church for then, but it cant be the church for now. But are we really saying that today God doesn't want His people to get together for Bible teaching and fellowship, for communion and prayer, that God thinks it's OK for us not to have glad and sincere hearts so we can let some of us suffer in utter poverty while others rejoice in riches; that God doesn't want us to meet in public and private worship? Well as soon as we ask that we know the answer.

[2] the second response is we'll walk away. Sometimes when you put a

jigsaw together you pick up a piece which you are convinced must go where you believe it should go – even though it doesn't go there. You pick it up, you try to fix it in, you turn it around and have another go, you look at the picture, and you try again, you may even conclude: it should fit but it doesn't, so the picture must be wrong. We may even give up doing the jigsaw. This is what we sometimes do with churches. We look at the pieces and we try to make them fit the picture we have but when they don't fit we blame the picture and we may even give up the church, because it doesn't fit together the way we think it should. But do we really believe that God deliberately gave us a model of a Church so we could justify not being in it? Doesn't the Lord instead say to us in many places, bear with each other in love, do all you can to keep unity together, speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.

[3] the 3rd response is the call to responsible action. This is the model and this is us. Let's identify the differences between the model and what we have and then ask ourselves what can we do to help our church be more like what the church should be? This is clearly a better response to than either of the first two. It recognises the call as Paul puts it in Ephesians to live a life worthy of the call we have received. And it appeals to our human desire to be active. And it deals with our tendency to guilt. If we see that these are the differences between the church we are supposed to be and the church we really are, then we are likely to feel we have let God down, and that we are not good enough Christians, that our problems are down to ourselves, that we must do what needs to be done to sort ourselves out.

And while this is an improvement, I want to ask you, is it right? If we are not being the church that God calls us to be isn't it our fault and shouldn't we take action to solve the problem? The answer is Yes and No and Yes.

Yes because the fault is ours – for the church is not designed as a home for perfect people, but as a hospital for sinners.

No, because we can't solve the problem - the Church is God's creation and God is the only one who can deal with the problem.

Yes, because the way God deals with the problem is to give us all we need to be the church of His calling.

[4] the 4th response is to see that it's not by our doing for God that we become the Church He wants us to be but it is through our being with God. God solves the problem. By giving us Himself. We are the Church because we are a fellowship in the Holy Spirit. We are brought into the Kingdom, as Paul says in Romans so that we might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Our becoming a church like the first church flows from our being a church like the first church – a Holy Spirit filled people. That leads to our Yes for, again as Paul says those who live in the Holy Spirit have their minds set on what the Holy Spirit desires. Our doing as church depends entirely on our being as a church.

Let me offer you an illustration which I hope will help us to understand that our doing as God's church flows from our being God's people. And unless we open ourselves to being His we cannot do His doing.

Yesterday some of us went for a prayer walk of encounter with Jesus Christ. The idea of such a prayer walk is bring ourselves into the presence of Jesus through taking time out of everyday activity, hence the walk, and to reflect, as led by the Holy Spirit on scripture verses. The first verses we were given were Isaiah 49:13-16 which ends with God saying: see I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

I invite you to imagine God writing your name on His palm. You might like to make that real by using your finger – even a pen if you like - to write your name on your own palm. Your name is written on God's hands, therefore wherever God is, you are, and whatever God is doing you are in the doing of it with Him. When God uses His hands to make a difference in the world, to provide comfort, to feed, to heal, to grace, to love – you are there, you are touching what He touches. This has nothing to do with you deciding to be where God is, or to do what God wants done. It's all to do with your just being with God. All that we do in the world flows from our being in God. Mark tells us that before Jesus sent out His first disciples to do for Him, to tell and heal the world, he first called them to be with Him. Before we can be like the first church in devotion to God, in fellowship, in care, in worship, in sincere and glad hearts we are first to be like that church in being filled with the Holy Spirit.

All our doing as a Church for God flows from all our being as a Church in God. The closer we get to being with God, the closer we will get to being like the first church – because God the Holy Spirit will empower us so and we being filled with the Holy Spirit will desire it to be so. Everything we are to do as Church and Church members flows from our being God's. And we can only be God's when the Holy Spirit is with us. As Paul says in Romans, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ, but those who are led by the Spirit are children of God. Today is therefore a day to offer or to re-offer ourselves to God the Holy Spirit, to commit ourselves to walking with the Spirit and to let the Spirit grow us into a new person filled with all His fruit and power so that in Paul's words we will be transformed into the likeness of Christ Jesus with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Let's pray.