

Text: Acts 2.36-47
St Stephen's

Sept 16, 2007
Sun

New Life Breaks Out

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:41 (RSV)

Life always expresses itself... hydrangea's in our back yard... we look for signs of growth...

Look at Acts 2.42; these are **essential signs of life.**

Discipleship

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

Acts 2.42

Bible Study...

Fellowship

*And they devoted themselves... to fellowship... And **all who believed were together...***

Acts 2:42,44 (RSV)

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts...

Acts 2:46 (RSV)

Together in small groups, sharing their faith and lives...

Ministry

*And all who believed **were together and had all things in common;** and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need...*

Acts 2:44-45 (RSV)

No one had to face life alone...

Worship

*And they **devoted themselves... to the breaking of bread and the prayers...** And **day by day**, attending the **temple** together and breaking bread in their **homes**, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts...*

Acts 2:42,46 (RSV)

*And **fear** came upon every soul...*

Acts 2:43 (RSV)

Mission

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were **added that day** about three thousand souls.*

Acts 2:41 (RSV)

*and having favor with all the people... and **the Lord added** to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Acts 2:47 (RSV)

Discipleship, Fellowship, Ministry, Worship, Mission...

These are the **signs of New Life**. If one is not there, give it careful thought. **Signs** of life became **a way** of life. When someone **walks in these paths**, their new life **grows**. When someone wanders from these habits, your new life **diminishes**.

Notice: They were 'devoted' to these things, and... **they grew...** Here is a **question** that jumped out at me as I prepared...

Why were they 'devoted'?

I spend a great deal of my ministry trying to provide opportunities like this for people... **opportunities** to sit under the Apostle's teaching, to fellowship, to worship, to minister to one another and to reach out to the world...

I spend as much time encouraging people to take advantage of these opportunities... To **persuade and attract** and encourage and celebrate and push and pull...

Did you notice that there was **none of that** in these opening chapters? **No push, no pull.** No pressure. No guilt! No manipulation. None. They just did it. **Naturally.** Supernaturally. Every day. They **didn't want to miss it.** They were '**glad**' about it. They were in 'awe' of what God was doing.

How did that happen?

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 2:36-37 (RSV)

I think a key to my question on how this happened is the little phrase, '**cut to the heart**'...

I want to take a look with you at **how that happened**...Remember that these were **devout Jews**. Jerusalem swelled during the feasts from a normal population of some 50,000 people to almost 500,000 people sometimes. A crowd of **thousands** had surged into the streets that Pentecost morning, drawn by the thunder-noise of God's Spirit wind. They

saw the tongues of fire on the Apostles. They heard them praising God in foreign languages. They were surprised and startled and **wondered** what it meant.

And then **Peter preached**. What happened was that under the preaching of Peter they saw that all that drew them on pilgrimage to Jerusalem year after year - all they had hoped for, all they had longed for, had been given to them in '*this Jesus*' – that is Peter's phrase for him. All their hopes and dreams and aspirations – and **they missed him**. More than that, **they had murdered him**. Look at the phrase again: "*This Jesus whom you crucified...*"

What would Peter have meant by that? Well, some among them that Pentecost had been in **a different crowd** some 50 days earlier that shouted, '*Crucify him, crucify him*'. Peter knew that. And some in the crowd that day had been **his friends**, but had denied him and fled. Peter certainly knew that. But above and beyond that was the dawning reality that **every one of them** (every one of us) were the reason he was crucified. That it was **our sin** that put him there. That it was my blindness, my hardness, my brokenness, **my failure that put him there**. I am a **co-conspirator** in his death. Had I been a disciple, I'd have fled. Had I been in the crowd, I'd have shouted. I'd have missed. I'd have murdered.

What '*cut them*' that day.

was the Word of God about the Son of God.

was the Word of God about them.

Sharper than any double edged sword, it cut deep.

Ever had a moment like that? – when you realize that the best, the deepest, the truest of your dreams and aspirations and

hopes – that you've been living in such a way as to not just miss them but murder them? And all of a sudden, **God cuts you** with his truth about life, and **you see it all. It's crushing.**

The most **crushing moment of my conversion** was when I realized that my biggest problem in life was not all those people out there – and I had a long list – that my biggest problem was not them, but me. Me. I was my biggest problem with life. It cut deep.

Look at vs 40.

And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

Acts 2:40 (RSV)

That's the kind of sentence I used to think just old-fashioned... Let me explain it.

Your generation is what forms you. It did me. I grew up in the counter-cultural revolution of the 60's, and it formed me. Your generation formed you, shaped how you think, what you think, what you dream about and long for. **Your generation is the matrix** of your **culture** and your **city** and your **family** and your personal **chemistry** and your own **character**. You are an American who lives in a multi-cultural post-modern secular society at the start of the 21st century. That is a generation that has the power to shape you.

It is possible, Peter says, for a generation to be '**crooked**', twisted, bent **in what it teaches about life**. Growing up in a generation like that can **make you crooked** and twisted and bent. So crooked that you can be looking for the right thing and be totally blind to it what it comes. **Miss it** – even **murder it!**

That is what happened to these Jews. And it all **crashed in on them** that day. As Peter preached and charged them with **complicity** in the death of Jesus, they saw it in a flash. Their world collapsed, crashed. They were **horrified**. "*What shall we do?*"

The answer was clear when they found out who cut them.

It wasn't just Peter who cut them, but behind Peter was *'this Jesus'*. This **risen Jesus cut them with his word. Cut them free** from a crooked generation. So they could come to him for the life they longed for.

They found out that **'this Jesus' who cut them was cut for them**. That *'this Jesus'* was in on it – in charge of it – all the way along. That *'this Jesus'* came not to judge them but to rescue them, to welcome them and forgive them and fill them. What they found out was that this risen Jesus was **devoted to them**.

And in that one majestic day, they became **devoted to him**. That's why. When they asked, 'What shall we do?' When they saw who it was who cut them and freed them, the **answer was clear...**

More than anything they wanted to get to know him... "This Jesus', whom they had **misread, misjudged, missed**. Get close to him. Come to him. So they *'devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.'* Because they **didn't want to miss him**. Not ever again.