

The Spirit-Filled Church

Rich Nathan

July 11, 2010

Acts: The Irresistible Church Series

Acts 2:42-47

We started this series from the book of Acts a few weeks ago and I mentioned last week that the reason we are going to spend the summer studying the book of Acts is that I can think of no book in the Bible that provides more hope for 21st century Christians in the Western world than the book of Acts. Last week I talked about the decline of the contemporary church in the west. By every measurable statistic church attendance overall in the west is declining. Now, there are individual churches like Vineyard Columbus that are growing, but the overall trend lines are very negative.

Not only has church attendance declined, but fewer people in the US identify themselves as being even nominally connected to Christianity. The fastest growing segment of religious opinion in America is the no-particular religion segment. About 1 in 8 Americans right now when they are surveyed say "I have no particular religion."

And as I mentioned last week there are broader trend lines that do not bode well for the future of the church. There is a strong reaction to claims of truth by anyone. There is an anti-institutional bias in which people are suspicious of any institutions – government, media, big business, unions and church. So there are some trend lines that are quite negative in the church apart from declining attendance and the declining percentage of folks who identify themselves with Christianity.

But if only the church's problems were entirely external. Unfortunately, many of the Western churches problems are of our own making. The most famous self-inflicted wound, of course, is the Roman Catholic sex scandal which has particularly affected church attendance in Western Europe. Here in America, in the evangelical world, about every other month a politician, who is a self-proclaimed family-values evangelical is discovered to have a mistress on the side, or is involved in hiring young women or men for sex?

Some outsiders look at the church and say, "Why would I want to be associated with a group like that? The church is no different than anyone else."

And as the Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, famously put it:

I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

Now, it is possible to humanly construct churches and religious sects which live in radical contrast to the surrounding society – cut people off from their families, dress people up in funny clothes, teach members secret rituals, fill church members with fear of the larger society – it is possible to humanly construct a religious subculture which lives in sharp contrast to the surrounding world. But that humanly constructed religious subculture, for whatever else it does, it never looks very much like Jesus. It will rarely be a place of grace or freedom or life transformation.

But every once in a while we get to see God the Holy Spirit create a society that really is an alternative to the larger society. Every once in a while we get to see God the Holy Spirit create a culture in contrast. And it is always a beautiful thing. It causes the watching world to sit up and take notice.

Let me tell you a story. Vineyard Columbus' recent missions trip to Brazil. You may not know this, but one of the major foreign missions involvement of our church for the past 20 years has been down in Brazil along a tributary to the Amazon called the Xingu River. Vineyard Columbus has five full-time missionaries from our church working down there along with their kids. And every year three pastors from Vineyard Columbus, Craig and Linda Heselton, and Sue Burkett, lead a missions team down there.

This year our STM team got to witness something really remarkable. There is a small village way out in the Amazon Rain Forest that our missionaries, Keith and Marsha Wilson, have started to work in about 2 ½ years ago. And at the time they started to work there, there was no expression of Christianity whatsoever. So they began to reach out to the people in this little village and about 8 adults came to Christ. Our missionaries go back into the village twice a month to hold services and to build up this little group. They now have 40-50 folks coming to one of the little house churches there.

Well, a young couple, who were potential leaders and who had given their lives to Christ, were sleeping together. There is no concept in the village of marriage. No one in the village, for as long as anyone could remember, had ever gotten married. It was a foreign concept. People live together and when men got tired of the girl they were living with, they would simply move out and move in with another girl.

So, Keith and Marsha began to work with this young couple to teach them about Christian marriage. The girl was already pregnant. They were living together. But as Keith and Marsha talked with this young couple about Christian marriage, this young Brazilian couple living in a Rain Forest village in the middle of nowhere decided they would separate for a time, practice sexual purity, and wait for their wedding day to come back together physically.

Now, again, this is a totally foreign concept to the village – not having sex with

whomever and whenever you want to have it. After a few months the wedding day came. They set up a tarp over a little shed that was made of wood. They found some carpet scraps for the bride to walk on so that she wouldn't have to walk in the mud. The bride wore a wedding dress that actually was donated by a member of this church. She wore a wedding dress from Vineyard Columbus in the middle of the Rain Forest.

Craig and Linda said that the whole village came out to stare and gawk. People didn't know what to do. The women in the village were really excited – marriage had come to the village. They decorated this little shack with balloons.

The girls in the village watched, thinking “one day, that could be me.” The men hung back like deer caught in the headlights. “Uh-oh...that could be me!”

They threw a big party with cake and soda and had a worship service. They killed a cow and everyone in the village ate.

What that village watched was a Holy Spirit created contrast – the beginning of an alternative culture which looks like Jesus. It is gracious and loving and committed and faithful.

Today, we are going to explore what a church looks like when God really gets hold of the people in the church as he creates a society, a culture that is very different than the surrounding culture. I've called today's message “The Spirit-Filled Church.”

Acts 2:42 - 47

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

We read in verse 42:

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Over against the pluralism of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which is devoted to the apostles' teaching

Right now we live in a society which is pluralistic. What that means is that 21st century people, by and large, define truth as something subjective and personal. Truth for 21st century people is never something which is universally valid for everyone in all places. In the 21st century Western world each of us has the right to construct our own meaning, our own truth to find out way through this life somehow based on what our own hearts tell us.

Stephen Jay Gould, a paleontologist and evolutionary biologist, who taught at Harvard for years before his untimely death, once said:

We are here because one odd group of fishes had a particular fin anatomy that could transform into legs for a terrestrial creature; because comets struck the earth and wiped out dinosaurs thereby giving mammals a chance not otherwise available...we may yearn for a “higher” answer – but none exists. This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating. We cannot read the meaning of life passively in the facts of nature. We must construct these answers for ourselves.

Contemporary society says that truth is something that each of us has to make up as we go. So we live in a society where there is a cacophony of conflicting voices, a symptom of which is TV political pundits screaming at each other. There is no authority in contemporary west to which we can all appeal and say, “Here is the truth; here is the way we should think about this or that moral issue. Here is the way we should think about this or that human issue.” There is no generally agreed-upon authority to which we could all appeal in a pluralistic society.

Now, we are not the first society in which people are sort of making it up as they go. Over 3000 years ago we read this description of ancient Israel:

Judges 17:6

6 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

There is no king. There is no judge. There is no ultimate arbiter of truth. And that was certainly the case in the 1st century when Jesus came. There was a pluralism of gods and goddesses in the Roman and Greek worlds. Philosophies were pouring in from the East. In the Holy Land Judaism was divided up into warring factions – each one claiming to have the truth.

And then Christ came. God decided to step into this world by becoming a man and speaking to us and showing us truth.

Now, the reality is, friends, despite everyone’s protests to the contrary, everyone saying, “We just make truth up as we go; each one has to find meaning for themselves,” the reality is, friends, that no one that I have ever talked with

actually believes that No one actually believes that everyone has the right to define right or wrong for himself or herself. If you ever hear someone assert that, or think that, the next question to ask is, “Is there anyone in the world right now doing things that you believe they should stop doing no matter what they personally believe about the correctness of their behavior? Is there anyone in the world who is doing something right now that you think they should stop doing despite what they believe?”

If people are at all honest, and are not playing philosophical games, they will say, “Well, of course. I don’t think fathers should rape their 6-year old daughters. I don’t think that anyone should strap on a bomb or walk into the middle of a marketplace and blow up innocent people.”

The response, then, is: “Doesn’t that mean that you do, in fact, believe in some kind of moral order or reality that is there and that is not defined by us – some kind of moral structure to the universe to which all of us need to conform ourselves whatever we believe?”

This is what the Holy Spirit did in creating the church. He created a group of people who were devoted to the apostles’ teaching.

The attitude is devotion

The early church was gripped by the truth they found in Christ. They were devoted to the truth that the apostles were communicating to them. The truth gripped them; they gripped the truth. So the early church, full of the Holy Spirit, was so unlike many contemporary Christians because they didn’t think that they had a better idea than God about how to do life.

Today we read God’s Word. God’s Word says that going into debt is unwise. We look at that and shrug and say, “No, it isn’t. Going into debt is a good thing.” We read God’s Word and it says that harboring a grudge will destroy you, if you do not forgive. You will shred yourself. We say, “I’ve got a better idea than God. I think I can hold onto this grudge because I have a right to it. I have a right to be bitter. I’m not going to forgive this person, who hurt me or my loved ones so terribly. Forget about that.”

We read in God’s Word that it says we become like the people with whom we form our deepest and most personal commitments. And we say, “It really doesn’t matter if I deeply and closely connect myself to someone who is not a Christian – in my dating, in my marriage, in my business partnership – it really doesn’t matter. It won’t affect my faith.”

The early church didn’t see themselves as a group of individuals picking and choosing which of the teachings from the apostles that they liked and which they

didn't like. They surrendered themselves in mind and heart to the apostles' teaching. They believe it came from God.

Now, the content of the apostles' teaching is Jesus.

The content is Jesus

Look at the apostles' teaching from Acts 2: 22-24:

Acts 2:22-24

22 "People of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

We discover Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy, a miracle-worker who was crucified by the plan of God, and resurrected from the dead. The content of the apostles' teaching was Jesus.

And we read further about this Jesus in Acts 2:32 – 33:

Acts 2:32-33

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Jesus is not only crucified, resurrected, and now reigning in heaven, but he is also the one who from heaven gives his Holy Spirit. So we just don't believe in a Jesus in the past, we believe in a contemporary Jesus, who is present among us by his Spirit. We can encounter Jesus, the same Jesus that we read about in the pages of the New Testament, we can meet that Jesus today through his Spirit which is among us in the church.

The content of the apostles' teaching was Jesus and not just the Jesus of our own imagining, the Jesus of our own creation. What else did the apostles teach about Jesus?

Acts 2:36

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

Now, this is crucial. And this, I believe, is the mark of the Holy Spirit in the church. And this is what creates the sharp contrast between the church and the

rest of society, and between a Christian and the rest of the world. The church is different when the church embraces Jesus Christ as their Lord. An individual is different when an individual finally surrenders to the Lordship and mastery of Jesus Christ.

You know, no one can ever have Jesus Christ be their Lord apart from the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3

3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley, the father of the Methodist Church, went through his own conversion experience at a church in England on a road called Aldersgate. He wrote in his diary the next day:

The moment I awoke “Jesus Master” was in my heart and in my mouth.

Jesus as your Master. Have you ever felt that at the core of your being? I’m tired of trying to do life on my own. I’m tired of trying to create my own truth. I’m tired of trying to figure out life by myself. I truly with all my being am going to surrender myself to Jesus as my Master. Have you ever come to that place? Are you living in that place right now?

What sort of contrast does the Holy Spirit create in a group compared to the rest of society? What sort of difference does the Holy Spirit make in an individual’s life compared to other people living in a society?

Let’s look at this in Acts 2:42:

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Over against the individualism and selfishness of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit created a church which practiced fellowship

I love this Holy Spirit created balance that existed in the early church. The church wasn’t just full of truth, devoted to truth, the church was full of love. You talk about a difference in the larger society to come into a community that is full of warmth and affection and protects the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

Let me tell you another story that comes out of the recent missions trip to Brazil. There is a new missions base that has been started by some of the missionaries in a location called Maraba. A couple of hundred thousand people live there. Most of the people live in shacks. So the missionaries started a church and now they have about 120-130 people gathered. 80% of the folks, who gather in the church, are under the age of 15. This little church that is built right on the river has become a place of refuge and loving embrace for kids who are coming from unspeakable horrors in their own families.

The worship leader of this little church is a 14-year old girl. This little 14-year old girl, who gave her life to Christ a few years ago, comes from a family where incest is practiced all the time. She is raped several times a week by her own father. Some of the kids who are in the church have parents who are drug addicts, or who are alcoholics, or who are physically or sexually abusive. The church is a haven for them.

In contrast to the surrounding culture, the church is a little mini-society, a family of loving care. That's what the Holy Spirit does.

And I can tell you, as a pastor that I dream in my heart about Vineyard Columbus being the most thoroughly biblical church possible and also the most thoroughly loving church possible. I think wouldn't it be great to see truth and love come together in a people.

It says in Acts 2:42 that the church was devoted to fellowship.

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Fellowship comes from a Greek word, "koinonia." It comes from an old word "koinos" which means sharing – having things in common. Fellowship in the early church was not just a matter of having a piece of pie and a cup of coffee together in fellowship hall. Fellowship had to do with sharing their lives together.

Fellowship involves sharing

Here is what we read in Acts 2:44 – 46:

Acts 2:44 - 46

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

46 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...

They met together in big meetings in the temple, and in small meetings from house to house. And this pattern of meeting in the temple and then meeting from house to house is a New Testament pattern of what we have tried to imitate here at Vineyard Columbus. We meet together in a large gathering at our weekend worship services for worship, teaching, for taking the Lord's Supper, for baptism, for prayer. But these large meetings are not the place of sharing. See, fellowship is more than gathering in a large group for worship and teaching and the Lord's Table. Fellowship means sharing.

You are not engaged in fellowship unless you share and it is more than shared common beliefs, shared common values. Fellowship is one Christian sharing their own secrets with another Christian. Fellowship is sharing problems, sharing childcare, and sharing food, sharing resources, sharing spiritual gifts.

Friends, the Bible talks about prophecy, healing, tongues and interpretation, and helping. These gifts don't get to be shared in a huge group of people. The early church shared those gifts in little house churches which at most had 30-40 people. A large villa might have been able to have as many as 70 people. But that's it.

It is in these home fellowship groups that we call small groups where you can come and share and experience spiritual gifts to one another. And it is this small home fellowship groups that we call small groups here that you learn the Christian life. Your life cannot be successfully transformed by participation in a large gathering. We can do some things, but we cannot share life together. You can't get to deeply know other Christians and they can't get to deeply know you or your families and your strengths and heartaches. The only way I've ever seen Christians successfully grow is if they are deeply connected to each other in Christian fellowship. That is why we press everyone in this church towards getting every single one of you involved in some kind of Christian group. That's where you will grow.

And not only did they share relationship, they shared money with each other. Look at this with me.

Acts 2:44-45

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

They didn't give up all their private property. I will talk about that when we get to Acts 4. But there was an incredible generosity in which people gave money to each other.

Now, I believe that generosity begins with a tithe which according to the Bible, a tithe is 10% of your income. I'm not as a pastor of this church ashamed to encourage you to give financially to Vineyard Columbus. If you consider yourself

part of this church, you need to support the ministry of the church. If you believe in this church, you believe in what we are doing, you like hearing the stories of the missionaries in Brazil, the stories coming out of our community center, small group ministry or weekend services, then get behind what we're doing by financially giving. Some of you rarely give financially to Vineyard Columbus. And others of you give sporadically, but you don't give anything like a tithe. You need to step it up and give.

When the Holy Spirit comes, he creates generosity. Generosity should begin with a tithe, but it doesn't end there. Part of fellowship is that we share resources with each other in the church. Some of you know, brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit did a miracle in this church just a little over a year ago. It was a miracle that was written about in our local paper and when that article hit the wire service, the story of Vineyard Columbus went out across the country and was published and republished in newspapers all across America. Do you know what the miracle was?

We did a recession response offering in the depth of the recession a little over a year ago. We took up an offering here on a Sunday morning. No fan-fare, no big campaign, we just said we wanted to collect money to help those in the church who had lost their jobs and had been deeply affected by the recession. In one weekend we collected \$625,000. And over the last year we decided we wanted to leverage that money to bring the most benefit to the most number of people. So we hired a few people on staff here. For example, we hired a man named Bill Canonico, who had 25 years of experience in job placement. Bill is on our staff now and he has been able to find 129 individuals in this church jobs. If you need to find work, contact Bill. 129 people!

We could have taken the \$600,000 and chopped it up and given it away to those 129 different individuals - \$5000 a piece. After two months it would have been gone. Now, 129 individuals are able to supply their families needs because they have jobs.

We hired Kent Irwin as a financial advisor. He has met with 276 different individuals for financial counseling.

We hired a social worker, Christine Childers. She has met with hundreds of individuals to assist them in putting a game plan together for meeting their needs and the needs of their families.

Let me tell you one story. This is fellowship, friends. I will call the woman Kim.

Kim was raised in a Christian family, but walked away from Christ. Her parents are Baptist pastors. As a result of her poor choices, she found herself as a single parent trying to make ends meet as a home health aide. And she is going to

school full time. She began to attend church here and her life started to turn around.

But then she hit a crisis. She deposited her paycheck into her checking account and paid her June rent. According to the bank, if the account was dormant for more than 60 days the account would close. So her rent check bounced. She had the money, but the account, unknown to her, was closed. She couldn't pay for her car.

Her landlord said he was going to bring felony charges against her. He threatened to throw Kim and her son out onto the street. He said he would have her car repossessed.

She came to the church in tears and said, "I know I could make money going back to doing some of the things that I used to do." She used to be involved in prostitution. She said, "I could go back there and make fast money."

But the folks we hired as a result of the recession response offering counseled her, encouraged her, prayed with her to be strong in the Lord and not turn her back on what God had done in her life. She met with our financial counselor. Kim is an amazing person; she followed through on every bit of counsel that we gave her. Most people don't, but she did. We were able to financially assist her through her temporary crisis. She is now part of a small group in this church. She is walking with the Lord. She has a place to live. She has a job. She has her car. And it is because individuals in this church under the impetus of the Holy Spirit decided to share our resources with each other. That's fellowship.

In a hostile, selfish, individualistic world about the only place that people can come and be loved and cared for and get good counsel for living well is the church.

What else do we read about this Holy Spirit created church – people who live in contrast to the larger society? Verse 42:

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Over against the activism of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which spent much time in worship and prayer

These days it is not hard to get people to go out and do a bunch of things. Go and make a difference with your life. That is the counsel that every graduate receives in commencement speeches. Go and make your mark. Make a difference. Do something significant.

Talk about a contrasting society. Of course the Holy Spirit wants us to go out and make a difference, to share our lives. But there is a wonderful balance in a Holy Spirit created community. God, in a society given to human activity, calls us to spend extended periods of time in worship and prayer. It says of the early church that they were devoted to:

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Literally it means the "breaking of the bread." Some people translate this to mean "the breaking of the loaf." And it would be distinguished from the "breaking of bread" in v. 46 that doesn't have the article "the bread." It just says they broke bread, which means they ate together. But here I think Luke is talking about the Lord's Supper. He uses exactly the same phrase that we read in Luke 24:35:

Luke 24:35

35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

It is the church joining together around the Lord's Table. You know, so much of contemporary life rests on our human activities. That's why so many Christian churches are worn out and dried out and burned out.

Again, I love the balance that is present in a Spirit-filled church. Luke moves from teaching to fellowship, truth to love, and then from love to worship. It is very possible, friends, to get so caught up with each other in fellowship that we lose Jesus in the process. Listen, I've been there. This church, Vineyard Columbus, was there in its beginning. At the early stages of this church we were absolutely committed to loving relationships and building community with each other.

This church, in its origin, practiced amazing community together when we were really small. About 15 of our families moved into an urban neighborhood in Linden right off of Cleveland Avenue and Hudson Street. We lived within a few blocks of each other. We shared childcare. We shared meals. We shared tools. We had a co-op together. We helped fix each others' homes. Folks would always cook meals for others when someone was sick or had a baby. We had an incredible practice of sharing life together.

But I remember in a very real sense that our relationships with each other began to take priority over our relationship with Jesus. I recall very distinctly what happened when our little fellowship group got in touch with the Vineyard movement. Because the thing that the Vineyard brought to us was worship. And we would meet as a group of about 100 people to sing simple Vineyard worship songs like "Isn't He" which goes this way:

Isn't he...beautiful...isn't he
Isn't he...wonderful...isn't he
Counselor, Almighty God
Isn't he

I remember as I used to sing those simple Vineyard worship songs standing there with my hands up weeping because the Holy Spirit was coming and it was like I was coming out from being under water. I had a spiritual experience that was like I had been holding my breath for 10 years. But as I learned to worship, I began to spiritually breathe again.

Friends, as you learn to worship, as you give yourself to worship God and open your heart to worship, you will absolutely live in contrast to the surrounding society.

It says they gave themselves to the Lord's Table, but also to prayer.

Acts 2:42

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

They came together to pray; they prayed privately. Have you ever wondered why so much was happening in the early church? Why so many people were converted? Why in a hostile society this little group of Christians was able to grow and expand and take over?

What we see in the book of Acts was that the church was constantly praying. They were praying for fresh power from God. They were praying for open doors for the gospel. They were praying for healing. They were praying for direction. The apostle Paul, in his letters, can hardly write a sentence without saying, "Oh, by the way, I've been praying for you."

Why was there so much life in the early church? It was because the early church was directed by the Holy Spirit to pray.

I want to read to you something from the spiritual writer, E.M. Bounds, who is talking here about the prayer life of Jesus. Listen to this.

The praying of Christ was real. Prayer pressed upon him as a solemn all-imperative, all-commanding duty, as well as a royal privilege. Prayer was the secret of his power, the law of his life, the inspiration of his toil, the source of his wealth, his joy and his communion and strength. To Christ Jesus prayer occupied no secondary place, but was exacting and paramount, a necessity, a light, the satisfying of a restless yearning, and a preparation for heavy responsibility.

Nothing is more conspicuous in the life of our Lord and nothing is more conspicuous about the life of the disciples than their frequent praying.

You want to know why the American church doesn't look like the church in the book of Acts? I have an inkling that it has something to do with the lack of our praying. We are not tied into the Spirit's power.

Over against the techniques of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which depended on God

I am just going to touch on this before I close. We'll look at this more next week. But we read in Acts 2:43 these words:

Acts 2:43

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

Talk about the opposite of technique orientation. I mean so much of the church today is so given to the latest and greatest gee-whiz technology and marketing schemes to bring success. I am not opposed to marketing. And I am not opposed to getting a message out by using contemporary technology. What I am against is relying on that technology; relying on human technique; and, moving away from placing the weight of the church on God.

The early church drew people in because the early church saw miracles.

Everyone else in society has technology. Everyone else in society has been marketed to death. But everyone in society has not seen miracles. Miracles are not something that apostles just did. Miracles are a gift given to the church.

I remember some years ago one of our physicians in our church was married at the time for about 15 years. He and his wife couldn't get pregnant. They tried all the technology, all the techniques – and, still, no children. We had a conference on the Holy Spirit here at the church. They went forward for prayer so that they could have children. And while they were simply looking to God, God's Spirit touched them and they got immediately pregnant. They had a few kids. He tells this story everywhere to all of his physician friends. We did everything humanly possible and then God did what only God could do.

Finally, you talk about building a contrasting society,

Over against the bad news of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which preached and demonstrated good news.

There is so much bad news. If you want to be depressed, just read the newspaper. Turn the news on and you will get depressed. The oil spill is still

gushing oil into the Gulf. Two wars are still going on. Suicide bombings are happening Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. An endless war in the Congo. Our economy is still fragile. High unemployment.

There is so much bad news – not just in society. There is much personal bad news. People live with personal bad news – the bad news of divorce, the bad news of romantic breakups, the bad news of job loss, the bad news of the death of a loved one. There is so much bad news.

The difference that the Holy Spirit makes is that he creates a good news people – a people who believe in their hearts that there is still a reason to hope, there is still a reason to believe.

Listen, the early church was not perfect. All you need to do is read Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. The early church was not perfect. That's not what made it a contrasting society. The early church was not a church without sin. The early church was a church which had a hope because their sins were forgiven. The early church was not a church without divisions. The early church was a church that learned to practice reconciliation despite their divisions.

The early church was not a church without suffering or without a cross. The early church was a church that was able to embrace suffering and embrace the cross because it also embraced the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was from this warm center that the early church was propelled out and began to transform the rest of society. The truth that they were gripped by was so compelling; the fellowship was so loving; the prayers were so powerful; the worship was so attractive; and the miracles that they saw were so awe-inspiring that it was infectious. From this hot center people were drawn in. It says in verse 47:

Acts 2:47

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

God, by the Holy Spirit, created a vortex that pulled people into the church. And from the people of the church out to change the world. Let's pray.

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Rich Nathan
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Acts 2.42-47

- I. Over against the pluralism of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which is devoted to the apostles' teaching
 - A. The attitude is devotion
 - B. The content is Jesus
- II. Over against the individualism of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which practiced fellowship
- III. Over against the activism of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which spent much time in worship and prayer
- IV. Over against the techniques of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which depended on God
- V. Over against the bad news of contemporary society, the Holy Spirit creates a church which preached and demonstrated good news