

## **Part Seven**

### ***The Holy Church***

#### **TEXT**

##### **Read the Apostles' Creed as a group**

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell  
The third day he rose again from the dead  
He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead  
I believe in the Holy Ghost  
I believe a holy catholic church; the communion of saints  
The forgiveness of sins  
The resurrection of the body  
And the life everlasting. Amen.

##### **Acts 2:36-47**

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

##### **The Fellowship of the Believers**

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe<sup>[a]</sup> came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

## **STUDY**

### **1. READ**

- a. What did Peter ask the early Christians to do in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 38)?
- b. In verse 42, Peter discusses four marks of the Christian church. What are those marks? What are some examples of these marks in our church?
- c. According to verses 45 through 47, what are some other characteristics of believers and the early church? In what ways do you see Christians exhibiting these characteristics today?

### **2. MEANING**

- a. Repentance and public professions of faith, such as baptism, require great humility. Why is humility so important in building up unity in the church?
- b. Verse 44 indicates that “all who believed were together and had all things in common.” What does this mean? If we have been blessed by God with wealth, how should we approach those in our community who are in need?
- c. Read The Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20. Keeping this verse in mind, what is Jesus’ purpose for the church if it demonstrates the marks and characteristics described in Acts 2?

### **3. APPLY**

- a. What are some ways that we can exhibit the key marks and characteristics of the church Luke describes in Acts 2?
- b. In order to build the community described in Acts 2, how should we approach our relationships with fellow believers? If we have a disagreement with a fellow believer, how should we approach that disagreement?
- c. What are some practical things we can do to help Canyon Creek live up to its values of being a Gospel-centered, multicultural, and multigenerational church?
- d. What specific things can you do to build up the unity of your church today? What idols or pet concerns should you lay aside for the sake of building up the unity of the church?

## NOTES

v. 38 – **repent and be baptized.** Here faith in Christ the Savior is implied through repentance and in the sacrament of baptism, a public profession of faith in Jesus. Engaging in these acts without truly having faith in Christ will not result in either the forgiveness of sins or receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Genuine faith involves repentance and putting your trust in God.

v. 39 – Peter’s words were not just for the Jews. **All who are far off** suggests that this message was also for Gentiles who are hearing about Jesus’s healing salvation for the first time. Salvation is ultimately God’s work and it comes to those who God calls and those who genuinely listen and receive that calling.

v. 41 – The claim here that the church grew to 3,000 believers can easily be overlooked by today’s standards, but it shouldn’t. Because of God’s work in the hearts of the early apostles and early believers in the church, the church grew rapidly from 120 to 3,000 people over a short period of time. Early converts did not simply join their local church and attend on Sundays. They devoted themselves to the Christian experience and to the Great Commission, thereby multiplying their numbers even more.

v. 42 – The early church devoted itself to the **apostles’ teaching**, including Jesus’ teachings during his life and his appearances to the apostles during the resurrection. Marks of the early church also included **fellowship** with one another, **breaking of the bread**, which involved sharing the Lord’s Supper with one another, and **prayers** in house meetings (similar to our church’s Life Groups and Bible Study Groups) and also in the temple.

vv. 44-46 – **all things in common.** This likely refers to the collective giving to those in the fellowship who were in need. Today this is often accomplished by church leadership providing for the needs of church attenders and members. Some might interpret this as a form of communism. However, there are some key differences in that the giving is voluntary and not compelled by government and members of the church maintained their personal possessions, including their homes. Furthermore, the giving occurred as there was need. Glad and generous hearts are what God desires from his believers and that cannot be achieved by ordering believers to give away everything they own, although some might be called to make such sacrifices for God.

v. 47 – **praising God.** A natural outcome of the marks and characteristics of the early church would be a desire to spend time with God in worship. Naturally this worship and a glad and generous attitude to life would draw other people to the church. **Having favor with all the people** likely refers to the fact that many of these early believers engaged with and were friends with others who did not know Christ. These believers would naturally become witnesses of Christ’s saving grace for these nonbelievers. We are called to this mission as well in our daily lives.

## COMMENTS

Christianity is inherently communal. From its earliest days with the apostles breaking bread with Jesus to today, Christianity has always been practiced among a group of believers. Other Christians keep us accountable in our faith and help us grow deeper in our faith. Community is essential to our well-being, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jesus never intended for the Christian faith to be practiced in isolation. In Matthew 28: 18-20, Jesus commissioned the apostles to establish the church:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Matthew 28: 18-20

If we are to understand and build up the church (Ephesians 4), it is important to understand the key marks and characteristics of a healthy church. Acts 2 lays out many of those key characteristics including:

- People who are "cut to the heart" (v. 36)
- People who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 38)
- People who believe they have been forgiven (v. 38)
- People who have received the Holy Spirit (v. 38)
- People who have been called by God (v. 39)
- People devoted to the apostles' teachings (v. 42)
- People devoted to fellowship with fellow believers (v. 42)
- People devoted to breaking bread and praying together (v. 42)
- People committed to helping those in need (vv. 44-46)
- People devoted to praising the Lord (v. 47)
- People willing to share their Story (v. 47)

Peter and the apostles assume that as a Christian you will work out your Christianity with other believers in the church. Therefore the church is fundamental to living out your faith and growing deeper with Christ. To this end, it is important to remember that before creation, God intended to create a chosen people of his own and those people belong to his holy church. Our life on earth is intended to work out that relationship with God as well as with other believers through the church. In Scripture the church is also referred to as Christ's bride (Eph. 5:25-32), God's family (Eph. 1:19), the temple (1 Pet 2:5), and Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23).

To some people, this emphasis on being engaged in the church can be intimidating. In the Bay Area, especially, it can be tempting to be drawn away from church because of other activities that occupy our time on Sunday mornings. Alternatively, we might be drawn to one church over another because of various factors (e.g., the youth activities or the worship songs). While these are helpful considerations when evaluating churches, they are not primary. It is often difficult to discern the essential ingredients of a healthy and fulfilling church in today's culture, but it is

important to determine these ingredients and distinguish them from other features that are nice to have, but not necessary for our spiritual growth. The essential ingredients include a place where the Gospel is truly preached, the sacraments are rightly administered, and where there is oversight and accountability within the church.

To help build the church up we should engage in Christ's Great Commission with fellow Christians, while also seeking to build up and unify fellow professing Christians. Relationships are difficult and they can sometimes be messy. It is unreasonable to assume that once we accept Christ we will always agree with every Christian we meet. We are called to approach our relationships, especially inside the church, with love, humility, gentleness, and patience (Eph. 4). If we take the time to recognize our own brokenness and sin, then we can approach others with humility and gentleness to help them address their faults. These characteristics will help us approach others with a goal of building unity and harmony in the church body, rather than attaining self-serving, sinful ends.

Canyon Creek's mission is to empower people to pursue their call in Christ. At Canyon Creek we specifically focus on being a Gospel-Centric, multicultural, multigenerational congregation focused on discipleship, building a covenant family, and quality. Canyon Creek seeks to launch people into ministry to lead future development of the local church and missionary movements around the world. Canyon Creek is one of many congregations around the world that is part of the catholic church.

The word "catholic" in the Apostles' Creed refers to the church being "universal." This means that the church's message is valid and relevant to every age and every situation in every culture. The church exists wherever congregations trust in Christ alone for salvation. Just as Christians need to be in community with other Christians to live out their faith, the church needs to work together with other Christ-centered congregations to carry out their mission in the world and spread the Gospel.

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