



The Church Comes Alive:  
**The Blueprint of the Church**

Acts 2:42

**Rev. John Sowers**  
November 11, 2007

*Fellowship is not just a word that means a social gathering of church members; fellowship means the act of being brothers and sisters in Christ.*

## Scripture

**Acts 2:42**

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

## Sermon

You have added another “foodie” to your pastoral staff. Like Kevin I love food. Unlike Kevin, I don’t write restaurant reviews, I don’t have a lot of fancy gadgets, I don’t collect recipe books many of which are either obscure, French, or both. I do, however, actually cook.

I did have to ask Kevin about “reduction.” It’s a fancy cooking technique that doesn’t usually factor into cooking cheese grits, barbeque, and fish tacos. Kevin consulted an obscure French cookbook to report back to me, in fundamental nature, that a reduction is just what it sounds like. It is the taking of a liquid (stock, or wine, or juice) and reducing it down to concentrate its flavors, to mine its essence.

Our verse this morning represents the essence of Christian worship. It contains all the key elements of worship. It is the natural outgrowth of the birth of the church. Having been empowered by the Spirit, having been introduced to, and having received Jesus and the repentance of sins and baptism, the church hurtles into worship, the starting point and finish line of the Body of Christ.

We were born to worship. It is the great privilege of the people of God. Here this morning we are in the presence of the Living God, praising God with the praise that is due exclusively to the One True God. To be here, together, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is a great joy. The Westminster Shorter Catechism captures the joy of worship with its first question and answer. Does anyone here remember that? It goes like this: **Q1: What is the chief end of man? A1: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.** That's what we men and women, boys and girls, are doing here this morning, we are glorifying God and we are in the midst of enjoying him forever.

In my initial time with you I have sensed the palpable presence of the Spirit in our worship, that we are both glorifying God and enjoying him. There is both joy and peace in our worship, to God be the glory!

So what does good worship look like, what elements are in place that defines worship? Acts 2:42 gives us a definition and it behooves us to examine this verse closely. Good worship begins with good teaching. The Reformation placed the examination of scripture at the heart of worship. We come to God's Word and we let it speak to our hearts and our souls. We luxuriate in the presence of God's Good News for us. We listen and heed the challenge for our lives that is found objectively and uniquely in God's Word. That is why in our tradition we always preach from scripture, and we always preach period. More than anything else that you have called me to do in your midst, you have called me to preach; you have given me the great privilege of studying God's Word and reporting back to you what the Spirit has instructed me regarding that Word.

It is significant to note, then, that Luke says here that the people of First Church Jerusalem *devoted* themselves to the Apostles' teaching. Worship is not a matter of attendance; it is a matter of devotion. What you do in your lives during the week, all the ministry that emanates from this church, is anchored in our common devotion to God's Word.

The first element that springs from devotion to the teaching of God's Word is fellowship. Note here how it is linked to the teaching portion. We go to the Word that is Christ and through that Word we become the Body of Christ. Fellowship is not just a word that means a social gathering of church members; fellowship in this Acts 2 context means the act of being brothers and sisters in Christ. Worship without fellowship becomes another opportunity for entertainment. You come, you hear the Praise Team or the choir, and you listen to the sermon and hope it's not boring, you bow your heads during the prayers, and you pay your price of admission when the plate is passed. Fellowship-less worship is a passive experience. But worship that is aware that you are present with *brothers and sisters* in Christ is active.

That sense of fellowship and family of Christ maybe why Luke links it with the breaking of the bread. Though that certainly means the church regularly practiced the remembering of the Last Supper, it also meant that they got together and ate with each other. For the first century church, every meal together was communion. Every meal invited the presence of Christ, and remembered that he was indeed present with them.

As I think about these family meals, I think about the Thanksgiving meals with my own family. As everyone arrives, the best part – at least to me – is before you sit down at the formal dining table and eat of the china you use maybe six times a year. As much as I enjoy that, I enjoy even more what comes before, when the family gathers in the kitchen, fixing dishes, getting out silverware, sampling different foods, debating the merits of old family recipes, and catching up on each others' lives. That is precious and the memory of it sustains us to the next family gathering.

I want for First Presbyterian and our worship to be that kitchen. I want that sense of family and community to be central to who we see ourselves to be, and at the heart of how we are viewed by others. And I believe that Christ wants more and more people who are not yet in the family to come join us in his kitchen.

Christ is there in that kitchen, in our worship. He is present with us this morning and present with us every time we gather in his name. Prayer, the last aspect of this church that Luke mentions, is the way in which we have the privilege of having God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – present with us in worship. Not just present, but prayer reminds us that God is central to our central act of worship.

So when we pray, we find ourselves in God's presence. Our prayers are spoken, silent, and sung. When we sing together, whether it is the hymns or the praise songs, we prayerfully lift our voices to ask for God's presence and blessing. It is communal prayer that blesses us as we bless God.

Worship, brothers and sisters, make it central to your weekly life. Be faithful to this discipline. If you do, I assure you that your life in Christ and your life for Christ will be deepened. Everything that we do as a church, and all that comes out of your own life, will be uniquely enhanced by faithful worship.