



The Church Comes Alive:
**The Glad, Growing, and Generous
Church**

Acts 2:43-47

Rev. John Sowers

This church, with its love, joy, sacrifice, and generosity, is a foreshadow of the Kingdom of Christ. It is the church comprised of those that Jesus said would be known by their love for one another.

Scripture

Acts 2:43-47

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Sermon

The setting is this: My senior year, second football game of the season. I'm finally on the varsity, after setting records for most times on a junior varsity team. We're playing our archrival, the other school in the city, the rich kids' school. The tension has mounted all week and now we have entered the stadium, the field of battle. I see the refs come over and talk with our head coach. The coach looks around, confers with other coaches and points to me, gesturing for me to come over to see him.

What could it be? Could it be that the coach has suddenly had an epiphany of my latent value to the team and having been asked by the refs to have the captains come over, had designated me a last minute captain? That made sense to me...

I made my way over to coach, and he put his arm around me. He told me that the ref had just told him that he had noticed that our kicker did not have any pads in his pants. Without those pads, he could not enter the game. And without our kicker we were doomed. There was not enough time to send our kicker back to the locker room, pads needed to be found right now. "The team needed me," the coach said. In reality the team needed my pads.

Now here's the thing about the pads in a pair of football pants. You get reach down and pull out the knee pads pretty easy, but there is only one way to extract the thigh pads, you've got to take your pants off to get to them and to get them out. Again, there was not enough time to send me to the locker room. So the coach called the team over and they surrounded me so that my disrobing could not be witnessed by the standing room only crowd in the stands. You talk about your sacrificial giving. My pants came down, my pads came out, my contribution to the team was made complete. We lost the game. I didn't play a down even though I secured other pads at halftime. There is no happy conclusion to the story of the game. I gave it, if not my all, at least my pads and my dignity.

Yes, there is no "I" in team, and there were no pads on my pants. But that was my sacrifice for the team. Any community demands some level of sacrifice; certainly the Christian community demands an even greater sacrifice for it is founded on Jesus, the Son of God, who sacrificed himself for the good of the church, for the salvation of all.

This Stewardship service today is a celebration of sacrifice, a celebration of our communal giving to increase the health and the witness of the church. When you bring your pledges forward this morning, you are celebrating your life in Christ, and celebrating your commitment to this community, which is the Body of Christ.

Our story this morning is certainly a happier story than the story of my giving up my pads for the good of the team, though it too is about sacrificial giving. Sacrificial giving; it is the mark of the Christian life and the mark of the true church. All of Acts 2 has built to this point and what we find is that the final definition of the church is that it is a community whose members make great and willing sacrifices for the good of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

This church, with its love, joy, sacrifice, and generosity, is a foreshadow of the Kingdom of Christ. It is the church comprised of those that Jesus said would be known by their love for one another.

This church is made up of people who trust one another, or more accurately trust that the Christ who redeemed them is the one who unites them, and whose values they are living. And that does create trust.

My prayer for First Presbyterian is that we live in that same state of trust. I pray that we trust that Christ is calling us to live out his values, and trusting each other through Christ that we too shall do the same. I pray that we trust the stewards of the Keenagers, and the stewards of student ministries, that the 8:30 worshipers trust the 11:00 worshipers and someday soon, the ones who worship on Sunday evening. I hope that we are generous to those outside our own

constituencies in the church because we trust each other, and we know that Christ has trusted us with his grace.

If you believe that then when you give to this church, you can do so generously because Christ has called you to generosity but also because you know that what you give is going to the needs of this church, and through this church to the needs of others.

There are needs. There are needs in this church and needs beyond this church that we can meet as witnesses to the grace of Christ address. Some of those needs, like we see here in Acts 2 are physical and economic needs. The money that you pledge to this church is your stewardship of all that God has given you, and all that you give to this church will be used by those of us in staff and lay leadership with equally wise stewardship.

But it is not just physical and economic needs that the first church meets. There are emotional and spiritual needs that are met by our forefathers and foremothers in the faith. We meet each others' emotional and spiritual needs as well. Recently, I heard Craig Lammers speak to the powerful way this church reached out as the family of Christ to his family and I have asked him to come and share with us this morning about your actions of generous grace:

(Craig's testimony was given here.)

Notice what happens in the second Chapter of Acts when the church acts like the church: It grows. The church is blessed by the Holy Spirit with more and more people who also wish to follow Christ. May it be the same for us. May our stewardship and our generosity be blessed by the Holy Spirit with the privilege of welcoming more and more into our family of faith.