Serving 8

We have been studying the Holy Habits contained in Acts 2: 42 - 47 for nearly two years, and I still find surprises in those few verses. A point has leapt out at me with new force this week – how inclusive the first church was. It’s obvious really – written plainly in several verses. ‘*All* the believers continued *together* in close fellowship and *shared* their belongings’ (v44). ‘They would sell….. and distribute…… among *all*’ (v45). ‘Day after day they *met as a group*………. had their meals *together*…’ (v 46).

The history of the Jews was completely different. They were the most exclusive race ever. They were God’s chosen people – everyone else was pagan, heathen, unclean. But these Jews become Christians were being transformed by the Spirit of Jesus.

At the start of Acts chapter 2 we read about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jerusalem was full of pilgrims from the whole world, as they knew it then. They all heard the apostles speaking in other languages, ‘and about 3000 people were added to the group that day’ (v 41). No doubt many of them went home, to spread the gospel there, but it appears that some stayed in Jerusalem. We don’t know the precise time scale, but in Acts 6 we read that 7 ‘helpers’ were chosen to help with the daily distribution of funds to the widows among them – no pensions in those days, so the church provided for them. The 7 new helpers all had Greek names, in contrast to the apostles, who all had Hebrew names.

Racial origin and language appeared to be no barrier to the inclusion of these incomers in the fellowship. Their life together was one of the features that so impressed the outsiders looking in, that ‘every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved’ (v 47). And in a few years’ time the church took the great step of abandoning centuries of law and tradition and welcoming in Gentile converts, without requiring them to follow Jewish customs, and so opened the way for the gospel to cover the world.

Our task today is to continue that work, to join in with God as he seeks to build his Kingdom. We must do this by welcoming all, and sharing what we have equally with others. In that way we truly are the church.

As the saying goes, we don’t change the world by going to church. We change the world by being the church.

God bless you this week!

*Produced by John Wilkins on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  All quotations from the Good News Translation.  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*