

The Church
Beginnings and Boundaries
Acts 2:37-41; Matthew 18:15-18

- Read Acts 2:37-47, then read the paragraph below about Acts 2:42-47, and then answer the following questions:
- It is important to know that while Pentecost marks the beginning of the NT church, it is not the beginning of the community of God's people. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, is used multiple times in the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the OT – often pointing to the community of God's people (Deuteronomy 9:10; 10:4; 1 Kings 8:14; many more).
 - What is your church background – elder led, congregational, Catholic, formal or informal liturgy?
 - What are the elements of church life that are listed in Acts 2:42-47? Why is it important for us as a church to include the elements listed here. In what ways do we as a church follow the model described in Acts 2?
 - Grace requires church membership for many (if not most) areas of service. Why do you think this is? Maybe a better question is why do we take membership so seriously?
 - Review the questions (in the notes below) that are read when new members are welcomed into our church family. How are you doing?
- Church discipline is often an unpleasant topic, but it is vitally important. Read Galatians 6:1-5 (note – the load in verse 2 is like a heavy burden too great for one person to bear alone – like moving a piano – while the load in verse 5 is like a backpack that you should not expect others to carry on a hike). Read, also, Matthew 18:15-18, then answer the following questions:
- Do you think Scripture says more about forgiving and forbearing with others in the church, or rebuking them and bringing them up for church discipline?
 - When you see a brother or sister straying, are you more likely to come alongside of them to help or do you prefer to avoid unpleasanties?
 - How does reading Matthew 18:21-35 (yes, read it) impact your thoughts about Matthew 18:15-20?
 - Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 to see how the Corinthians had dealt with a church discipline matter. What can we learn from this text?

- Have you recently met any new folks at Grace? How have you welcomed them and sought to help them go deeper into our church? Our next Discovery Lunch is October 26 – encourage new visitors to sign up online and attend.
- Have you invited anyone to Grace lately?
- Spend time praying for our church, considering the three points of application:
 1. Give thanks to God for bringing you into his family through Jesus
 2. Keep your heart tender to the Holy Spirit’s conviction of sin in your life, sometimes arriving through the correction of your brothers and sisters in the church
 3. Be grateful that God will not let you live any way that you want to live

Study Notes

Thoughts and Quotes from the Sermon

Thoughts related to Acts 2:42-47. We did not have time to address this in the sermon. We might find our way back to this text in the series:

We know that the first believers met together in the temple – well, until they began to be persecuted. They met in homes for meals and fellowship and care for one another. These were the first home groups! They shared freely. Not everyone sold property to help the poor, but some did. They participated in the Lord’s Supper in homes but realize that this many people could not gather in the temple to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in what would have been considered a direct act of rebellion against national and temple authorities. The pattern at Jerusalem seems to have been the pattern for city churches elsewhere in the Roman Empire – central leadership that oversaw groups that met in homes. Very much like our structure, although we are free to meet every Sunday and any other time we would like to. Maybe we will come back to this text.

Membership Affirmation Questions

➤ Do you believe and confess that you are a sinful person by nature and by choice, unqualified to be acceptable to your Holy Creator, and that you have no hope of salvation apart from his grace and mercy?

➤ Do you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is God, the Son, and that he is the only Savior of sinners?

➤ Have you received God's free offer of mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, and eternal life, and are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation as he is offered to you in the Gospel?

➤ Do you promise, in humble dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and enables you, that you will determine to live each day as God's obedient child and faithful witness so that your life brings honor to your God and Savior?

➤ Do you promise to be submissive to and supportive of the leadership of Grace Community Church as we lead this congregation according to the Scriptures and the bylaws and constitution of this church?

➤ Do you promise to encourage the witness of Grace Community Church in her worship and work by living at peace with other Christians, guarding the purity of her doctrine, and supporting her ministry with your personal involvement and financial gifts?

Questions to be answered during our series on The Church (with a new one this week):

1. What is the biblical foundation for the church?
2. What is the difference between the universal church and the local church? If I am a member of the universal church, why do I need to be a member of a local church?
3. Speaking of membership, is church membership biblical? Why is membership encouraged at Grace?
4. What is the biblical structure for church leadership? How do our elders and deacons function?
5. Why do we require members to attend for at least a year before:
 - being considered as a deacon?
 - leading a ministry?
 - serving on a leadership team?
 - leading a home group?

6. Why do we require membership for two years before being considered as an elder?
7. If one of our core values is “every member a minister,” what can I do at Grace during my first year? What if the Holy Spirit has given me leadership giftings?
8. Why is home group attendance expected before being considered for leadership on any ministry team?
9. Why do we observe the Lord’s Supper twice a month? Do we consider the Table and baptism to be sacraments or ordinances?
10. Why the increased emphasis on giving this year?
11. Why do we recite creeds on occasion? Isn’t that somewhat Catholic?
12. Why do we not have an invitation at the end of the sermon?
13. Should I ask the elders to pray for me if I have a chronic illness or a major need in my life?
14. Why are only men allowed to serve as elders and deacons at Grace?
15. If we offer services online, is it okay for me to watch at home rather than attend?
16. What about missions? How many missionaries do we support? How does a missionary receive support from Grace? What about short-term trips? Does membership play a role?

What is the church? The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means “assembly, gathering, or congregation.” The root word means “to call out.” The church is a “called out assembly.” This does not mean that we live separate from the world, though. It means we follow Jesus (because he is the foundation/cornerstone) while we live in the world. We do not take our directions for how to live from the world, but rather from God’s Word. This will become clear during this series.

The kingdom of God is mentioned more than 125 times in the four gospels, but church is only mentioned three times – once in today’s text and twice in a text we will look at next week, Matthew 18:15-20. **It is almost the opposite in the rest of the New Testament.** Why? Maybe we will talk about that during this series.

Scripture Associated with the Message

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each

one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load.

2 Corinthians 2:5 Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. 6 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, 7 so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. 10 Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.