

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – September 27th 2009

Acts 2:42-47

Ian began by talking of an incident at a civic carol service when he put out a fire that had started in the hair of a choir-member when she brushed past a church candle. His secretary joked about how he may have put out the Holy Spirit! And indeed we get so caught up in the tongues, the signs and the wonders that we tend to conclude by the end of verse 41 that this is the end of it. But Luke goes on to talk about the immediate embodiment of the charismatic in the routine, daily activities of the church. Signs and wonders are a given, and the churches indeed continued to speak in tongues, but the early church did not continue with the big spectacles. Luke understands Pentecost as a means to an end, the end being an actual community of believers who devote themselves to the teaching; who remember the Lord's death every time they meet and break bread together; who immerse themselves in prayers and the Psalms and teaching.

The idea that the pentecostal life of the Spirit and the Word are opposed to each other or that enthusiasm and routine are two different things – this is just not true. The Spirit's fire has its fullest manifestation in a Church committed to the Word and to prayers.

Having seen 3000 added to their number that day, the apostles did not devise an evangelistic strategy, or a busy church programme, or organise a conference on church growth; no, they devoted themselves to, and persisted in the apostolic teaching. People devote themselves to all kinds of things, to the flower show competition, to a football team, or to the weekly visit to the High Street, but here the people devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and to the prayers. But most significantly, to a fellowship that goes beyond just meeting together, but also begins to work out the vision Jesus gave in Luke 4. Even in the Old Testament there are hints of 'having everything in common, selling their possessions and giving to everyone as they had need.' (cf. the idea of Jubilee)

This is not a nice holy huddle, - every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. Pentecostal life is embodied in the life of the Church, and the Church grows, expanding in direct proportion to the depth of the life of the Church. It's not how lively your worship is, or how good-looking your leader is, or the number of activities you run, but when we present an alternative community to the one that is destroying people's lives. The rampant individualism is overcome by a people who love. As we deepen our life in the gospel that saved us, so people will come flocking even as we are going out. In Keith Millers' book *The Scent of Love* he describes how the church grew because they had discovered the secret of community. They did not have to lift a finger to evangelise. But the way they spoke or laughed was strangely appealing, and gave off a scent of love. People want to be a part of that.

We have lost faith in the power of the Spirit to challenge and to overturn that which is most precious to us, namely our property, money and possessions. This does not mean setting up a commune, but that these resources should be used for the Kingdom of God. In the real world today, property has the highest importance, and gets to the heart of what people live for. But for Luke the real world is the Kingdom of God, but it means to give up and relinquish everything in order to bless and be generous to those in need.

Prudence to us means not taking risks. But Prudence comes from the word Providence meaning that God is in charge of our destiny and will bring all things to completion. This is the real miracle of Pentecost in that they sold their possession and gave to everyone as they had need, and there were no needy people among them. There is nothing more spiritual than this!

We want to move towards this. How deeply have we been baptised? It's not about salaries but at what level does God want me to live, not heeding what the world, the neighbours say. Our conduit for God's grace does not have to be lined with gold. Copper will do.