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WORSHIP PLUS 2 Michael B. Beaugh  
Acts 2:43-47 August 31, 2008  
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At the Southlake Chamber of Commerce meeting last week, several people got to tell the rest of us about their businesses. I was somewhat amazed as each of them began by telling us that their business or product would change our lives in some way.

The first speaker especially caught my attention. He began by saying that if we came to his office only one time, we would walk out the door one hour later as a different person. What does he sell? Weight reduction. It's not surgery, he said. It's not liposuction. It's a new procedure that destroys fat cells. He promised a 20 pound loss of weight in one hour.

As I sat there listening to these people tell us how they could change our lives, I began to wonder what I would say if I had the chance to tell that crowd about our church. What would I say is our product? How does our product change lives? What would I promise?

Here is what came to me: Nothing less than a deepening redemptive relationship with the Creator of the Universe. Or as we have been saying around here for the past year, we are promising a life of Peace, Purpose, and Promise through Jesus Christ. No small potatoes!

**Over the next three Sundays**, I am going to be as clear as possible about the three biblical practices that God gives us to help us grow in our relationship with God so that we might experience Peace, Purpose, and Promise through Jesus Christ. I am calling these practices *Worship Plus 2*. Think of it as a three-legged stool, if you will. You have to have all three legs for the stool to be effective. And it really helps if all three legs are the same length. The Bible is clear that if we devote ourselves to three practices, we will realize potential we never knew we had. We will experience God in a way we never thought possible. We will make a difference that has eternal consequences.

Now, in Acts 2:43-47, we see what these practices are. These are the things that the very first Christians did and that they kept doing. Actually, it starts in verse 42. They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to prayer, and to the breaking of bread. In verse 43, it says they began seeing many miracles happen. In verses 44 and 45, it says they started helping one another with their basic needs. They engaged in service. In verse 46, it says they gathered at the temple for worship, and gathered in homes for fellowship and study. In verse 47, it says the Lord added to their numbers daily.

For the sake of simplicity, let's refer to these practices as *worship, growth, and service*. This is what I call the ancient simplicity that instilled hope and empowered believers to change the world. It is the three-legged stool of Christian discipleship. These are the things that our church is engaged in and provides for anyone who wants to grow in their relationship with God.

Notice what is not here. Nowhere does it say that the first Christians started committees. That's kind of an insider's joke. Just looking at the way churches operate and how much time is spent in committees, it might lead someone from Mars to conclude that being on a committee is the main job of a Christian. Now, churches need some committees, a few, not many. Here at SBPC, we are in the process of reducing the number of committees in our church. We want more people freed up for ministry. My goal is to see every adult growing in these three areas.

But here is the question I want to focus on this morning. *Why on earth did these first Christians suddenly start doing things in the name of Jesus that they had never done before? Why did they start coming together for worship? Why did they start gathering in homes for study, prayer, and fellowship? Why did they suddenly start taking an interest in serving each others' needs and reaching out to the world?*

Well, it wasn't because the church charter said they had to do it. It wasn't because Rick Warren gave them a plan for a Purpose Driven Church. It wasn't even because Jesus told them they had to.

*Are you ready for this? What motivated them was their experience of the saving grace of Jesus Christ imprinted on their hearts by the Holy Spirit.*

You see, before Acts 2 there was no such thing as a church, not in the way these people became a church. In fact, they had to borrow the word "church" to describe what they were becoming. The Greek word for 'church' is 'ecclesia'. An ecclesia in the culture at large was a gathering of people for a particular purpose. The message of the saving grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit turned these people into an ecclesia with an eternal purpose centered on Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you how it happened.

**It all started for them on a day called Pentecost.** "Pentecost" means fifty days. The Law of Moses prescribed that on the fiftieth day following Passover, there was to be a national holy day. People were to come to Jerusalem and bring grain offerings in thanksgiving to God. You can look it up in Leviticus 23.

On this particular Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, it had been 50 days since Passover and 50 days since Jesus rose from the dead. He had already

ascended into heaven. His followers were in Jerusalem that day gathered in a house, probably 120 of them. They were praying and waiting for something to happen. Jesus had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait there for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And, boy, did they get the Holy Spirit. It might have happened like this.

At first, someone just noticed the curtains in the windows begin to move. Then several of them saw the flames of the candles bending in an unseen wind. Then their hair started moving and their robes flapping. And before they knew what was happening, the whole house where they were meeting on that Day of Pentecost suddenly shook with a sound like a tornado blowing through it. As if that weren't enough excitement, tongues of fire began dancing on their heads, and quite frankly, I think that is what got them out of the house and into the streets of Jerusalem. You don't want to be inside with fire on the loose.

Then the oddest thing of all happened. Every time someone on the street asked them what was going on, they found themselves explaining it in the language that the stranger could understand. There was no communication barrier when sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Some observers thought these Jesus-followers were drunk. Look at those Jesus-followers, they said. It's only 9 in the morning and they are already drunk. And in truth, they were drunk. They were drunk on the love of God. And I think part of what happened in their prayer time inside that house is that while they were waiting for something to happen, they experienced a kind of clarity about what God was up to in Jesus, and they experienced a redemption in their hearts that they had never known before, *and they went crazy with love for God.*

But that's not all. Peter, the Apostle who had more than enough to be ashamed of because of his denial of Jesus back when Jesus was arrested, started the first ever street corner preaching mission. Maybe he found a fish basket and turned it over to stand on, or a bench, and from this impromptu pulpit, he started explaining to the people out in the streets about Jesus. He didn't talk about Sunday School classes or promise donuts if they would only come to his church or the latest in contemporary music. He told them straight out that they had actually crucified God's Son. But that God raised him from the dead, and they had seen him, and now he is exalted at the right hand of God. And just for good measure, in case they had missed his point, he told them one more time that they were the ones who crucified the Lord and Messiah on the cross.

Not exactly the best way to win over your audience, these words of Peter. But I can imagine that there was total silence throughout the crowd. Peter saw heads bowed in shame. He noticed tears running down some

cheeks. He waited. . . . Then someone from the back of the crowd shouted out, "What should we do?" And Peter, with a lump in his throat, said, "You need to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, and you too will receive the Holy Spirit. This is for you and for your children and for all who believe in him."

When the people heard Peter's explanation, it says in Acts 2, 3000 people repented on the spot, and then Peter and the other apostles spent the rest of the day and probably the next baptizing each and every one of them.

And that brings us to verse 42. **What do you do after the Holy Spirit imprints on your heart the saving grace of Jesus Christ? Well, you become a church.** These people began inventing the church. They didn't know that was what they were doing. It was just that they were being drawn by the Holy Spirit like a moth to a flame into worship, into home gatherings, and into service to others.

Let me tell you something so you don't get to heaven and tell our Lord that no one ever told you.

*If you do not feel drawn to Worship Plus 2, if there is no desire in your heart to be a part of the things that God has set out for us so He can raise us up to be the light of the world and salt of the earth, so he can heal us, then you need to go back to the beginning, to the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you need to pray for the relighting of your flame. Until our hearts bow before Christ and we hunger for more of his life, church will be little more than a place to get married and buried or something to complain about or a place to serve on a committee.*

When people tell me they are Christians, but they don't go in for church, I feel sorry for them. Or when they say they don't need to grow, I feel sorry for them. I know they are missing the regenerating power of Christ's forgiving love in their hearts.

I have seen how this power works in people. All my ministry, I have been awed by believers, many times closer to God than I am, who never let anything stop them from participating in church.

*There was Fred who never missed a Sunday service, or choir practice, or his Sunday School class, even though he had been living in a wheelchair since he was 18 years old.*

*There was Lula who insisted on being in worship, when she was up to it and could find a ride. She read the Bible daily and prayed her heart out in spite of the fact that she was totally blind.*

*There was Paul, a little crazy, those were his words, who never missed worship and hung out with the staff in the church kitchen during the week, and went to Sunday School and put out pencils, in spite of the fact that he was schizophrenic and sometimes would fall over asleep in worship.*

*There are people in this congregation who stand out for me as diehards who shame me when I feel like I have something to complain about or am just too tired to do church and they just keep at it because Jesus lives in their hearts. They are hungering for God, loving the church, loving the Lord.*

**So, let me make this practical.** If you live in a family where you have to drag your children or spouse to church, it may be because they have yet to experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ. They may believe in him, but they have not experienced him. Or they have forgotten that first experience when they first came to know him; they have forgotten how they once loved him, and how he loves them. *They need to fall in love all over again.*

I think a lot of times we forget that church is not an obligation, a duty. It is simply the gathering of people like you and me who have met the Lord of all creation. And we hunger to know him more. And we want to grow as his followers. And we want others to know him so that they too may begin to experience the Peace, Purpose, and Promise of God. And it is not all that complicated. All it takes is a three-legged stool: Worship Plus 2.