

Sermon for 3 Easter
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Holy Nativity, Plano
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There is a verse in our reading from Acts that blows by very quickly. It's one that is quoted in our Baptismal covenant, so we should probably think about what it means. After the three thousand souls were added to the church on the day of Pentecost, how did they behave? The next verse tells us: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

At our confirmation, and each time we reaffirm our baptismal covenant, we each promise to do what those first converts did. The language we use there is "continue". "Will you continue in the apostles' teaching", etc. But when we promise to continue in something, that is a promise to persist, hold fast, devote ourselves to it. So that's the first thing that we should see in this passage. The rest of the passage makes it clear that these people's lives were changed by the experience. Remember that there were Jews there from all the reaches of the Roman Empire, native speakers of many different languages. When it says that they were all together, holding things in common, that cannot have an easy transition for many of them. But they thought it was worth it. They devoted themselves.

To what did they devote themselves? Well, first of all, it was the teaching of the apostles. They committed themselves to what the apostles taught. How do we know today what the apostles taught? It's the New Testament. That's the teaching of the apostles. And the New Testament itself commends the Old Testament as the foundation for understanding the New Testament. So the first thing to which we have all promised to devote ourselves is the Bible, as the teaching of the apostles.

There are so many ways in which we have broken that promise. The easiest ones to point out have to do with our institutional apostasy. But that's probably not helpful at this moment. Perhaps I should just say that if we are truly devoted to the teaching of the apostles, then we should be studying it regularly in some capacity. The Bible should be part of our daily lives, not just something that sits on a shelf so that someone else can read it to us on Sunday. Whole generations of our forefathers learned to read, just so that they could read *this* book. And there are days when I just don't want to be bothered. How about you?

Second, they devoted themselves to the fellowship. We've taken that word and turned it into a "nice" word. Fellowship. It means having coffee and donuts together, or maybe having a drink together and telling a few jokes. Sometimes it means actually having dinner together. Gasp! But the word here means much

more than that. The word is *koinonia*. It is also translated “communion”. And it refers to the connection we have as being all members of one Body. It means sharing our lives, because they are all part of one life, the life of Jesus that he shares in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In this kind of fellowship “having all things in common” might very well develop naturally. It’s interesting that later on it seems clear the apostles didn’t ever require anyone to sell their property. It just happened, because they devoted themselves to the fellowship, the sharing of their lives. How devoted are we to that?

Thirdly, they devoted themselves “to the breaking of bread”. This isn’t just hanging out and eating together, although that’s not a bad idea. This is the Eucharist, the common meal that binds us together in Christ’s body and blood, the pinnacle of our fellowship. We do a little better at this one. We’ve attenuated this one to about an hour a week, so that we can get on with our real lives, but at least we do it. But then we hear about the Eucharistic services of other countries. In Africa, a service is considered short if it’s not at least three hours long. And that doesn’t even include a whole meal, which would have been included in the earliest church. People sometimes walk for miles just to get to these gatherings. It should make us ashamed of those times when we just don’t quite make it to church.

And finally, they devoted themselves “to the prayers.” These were probably originally the daily prayers in the Temple. The point is that they were in prayer together every day. Not just when something painful or scary happened, but every day. How do we do at being in prayer every day?

We’ve all made the promise to continue in these practices, to hold fast in these practices, to devote ourselves to these things. I understand that we all fall down on our promises sometimes. I fall down on my promises sometimes, too. But what sort of community would we be, if even just most of us intended to keep those promises? Perhaps it’s time we started.