

SERMON: "DO THE MATH – ADDITION"
TEXTS: ACTS 2:14, 37-47

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INTRODUCTION

For eight years here (and 28 years before at other churches)
I've been preaching about how the good news of the Easter gospel
changes us, challenges us, opens us up to new possibilities.
Or as my ever so diplomatic mother told me more than a few times
"Son, every sermon you've ever preached is about change"

For thirty six years now, I've tried to practice what I have preached
I've preached about how the gospel changes us ... and then I've done
pretty much the same thing most Sundays after church. Not only talked
about what to have for lunch, but often had the same thing for lunch

You get 25 cents on your Fuel Saver when you get a large pizza
at HyVee on Sundays. I like a good pizza (I load it up with toppings)
and I like a good deal. I'm there after church almost every other Sunday
I've seen many of you there after church too, told you about the pizza deal

My wife says I'm predictable. I prefer to think of myself as 'consistent.'
Don't we all have our routines (or maybe even ruts)?
Aren't we all a bit predictable? Consistent?
Including what we do after church, what we do after hearing God's word?

I think so. And I think that's fine.
It's not an either/or thing ... responding to God's word.
We don't have to do things the way we have always done them
We don't have to do something new, something different every time

I'd like to think we look to respond to God's word with a balance
a balance of building on a foundation and forging new paths
certainly not a rut, maybe a routine or ritual, definitely a rhythm

I see that rhythm in how we turn to the story of the early Church in Acts
each year during the Easter season, from Easter to Pentecost
It's like a tune up for us. We get in tune, in rhythm with the patterns we see
in the early church. They've given us a flexible template that still works today

This passage from Acts, chapter two, shows us how they responded to the good news
It is an outline that I think stands the test of time because it is flexible
What worked for the early church works for the Church today
For a church that seeks to be "A Place for Everyone"

STARTING IN THE MIDDLE

The setting is just after Pentecost, when God's Holy Spirit gives life to the church, giving the church its purpose and power by creating it as an alternative community.

This is the description given of their activities, beginning in verse forty two

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ...

Plenty of preachers and teachers, including this guy, have used these four (teaching, fellowship, eating together, prayer) as an outline for sermon or lesson or committee structure. It makes sense.

Faith communities have been devoting themselves to breaking bread together for a long time and in lots of different ways. From kosher to halal to ham balls From vegetables out of the garden to a church on the corner building a grill in their back yard so we can do some evangelism by smell to five churches serving a community meal every Sunday evening

That focus on food continues a few verses later ... **“they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.”** This is, in part, a sermon about food. You know I like to cook. You may have heard me talk about, even defend or explain, my ministry saying, “If you don't like my sermon, you might like my chicken”

But this is about more than food ... It is about togetherness!

This description of the early Church tells us they devoted themselves to fellowship Then Luke, who wrote Acts, doubles down on that emphasis on fellowship

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Now that is togetherness! Talking back to my mom who said I always talk about change She is right. I have throughout my ministry pushed things a bit, tried new things But don't worry I am not suggesting we try this as our stewardship theme this year. I'll stick with this outline in verse 42 ... and add to it about addition

This outline includes food and fellowship ... and the apostles teaching and prayers. We certainly want to and need to spend time, like they did devoting ourselves to learning and to prayer. We're doing that and will keep on doing that. Just a couple of things I want to highlight here about teaching and prayers

One - About devoting ourselves to the apostles teaching.

I'm a walking talker. Don't sit and talk on the phone. I walk around outside when the weather is nice, around the Fellowship Hall and Youth Room when it is not so nice. There is a great sign in the youth room Shows a picture of what Jesus might have looked like and says “He died to take away your sins, not your mind”

DEVOTIONALS

I just came back from visiting our grandson, Leo. You knew I'd mention him, didn't you?
He is eight months old. I love how young children like that are so open and eager
to see the world. You can see them learning something new every day.
It is fun to watch. But that's not limited to little ones. I've seen so many
of my elders, my role models, have that same look – always looking to learn

And two – devoting ourselves to prayer.

Hmm. Maybe that is why daily prayer books and meditations are called
what they are called ... devotionals. We want to help you with those devotionals
We've updated a prayer resource for you and yours to use in your prayer life

Give it a try. We'll have it out soon. It includes familiar prayers, classics if you will.
We've added some new prayers. A book full of prayers and ideas on how to pray.
We updated that resource, going back to how I started this sermon,
to help you stay out of the ruts of maybe mumbling through a prayer,
to help you find a rhythm for regular time with God in prayer

That's the middle. What I've called an outline – four headings that I combined into three
Devoting ourselves to breaking bread, which I combined with fellowship
Devoting ourselves to teaching / learning and devoting ourselves to prayer

A whole lot of sermons start with this outline and stop here too

Let's not do that. We get things more than bit out of balance when we do just that
Like my Baptist friend who moved to a new town and tried a church there
Friendship Baptist Church where not one person spoke to her
when she visited there. Good fellowship amongst themselves maybe
Friendly with each other ... but with newcomers, not so much

We started in the middle but what we really need to see is the beginning
and end the end of this picture of the early Church. We get this snapshot
of the Church following Peter's sermon on Pentecost. This is how the people
responded. They asked what they should do. Peter answer, "repent"
meaning to change course. And they did. Three thousand of them

That is how the Church began, opening wide to welcome lots of people
That outline in verse 42 is preceded by that addition, that welcome, in verse 41
They were adding on (and adding in) from the get go ... go get more chairs

And the addition keeps adding up. This chapter ends with ... **"And day by day,
the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."**

I know I spent some a good bit of time on that outline

But what I really want you to see is the addition that sandwiches that outline
The key here is that openness. They were doing that addition
because they were open, they were welcoming
You know what they were? They were a place for everyone!

OPEN

We strive to be that kind of place. We strive to be open, welcoming.
That means doing the math, the addition. It doesn't just happen
We have to work at it - being open, doing the math. Hope you noticed
the bulletin cover and screen ... crosses that look like plus signs

Let me try this example to try and highlight that work
I remember the very first church I served as a seminary intern
Spent a year in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia at Tinkling Spring
Presbyterian Church, established 1740. I still remember a birthday party
I went to there some 48 years later. It was from Brooks, his 80th

I was a suburban kid having grown up in the suburbs of DC, Atlanta and Richmond
Tinkling Spring was a small town church, Fishersville, VA
I had moved five by times then and have moved five times since
Always had to make new friends in new places

Brooks best friend stood up and told a story about when they were maybe 10 years old
They got in trouble because they dammed up the creek and added salt water
They wanted to pretend they were at the ocean. It was a fun story
But what hit home with me was the math. They'd been friends 70 years
Wow! Literally a life long friendship

Now I've learned over the years serving churches in towns from 14,000 people
to over a million is that people all over have those kind of long term friendships,
That is especially so in smaller communities where people tend to stay put
Who is your oldest friend? How long have you known them?
Anybody have a friend as long as Brooks? 70 years?

And how about your newest friend? Who might they be? How recent?
I admit to a certain jealousy for those who have such long term friendships
I also admit an admiration for those who are so good at making new friends
They are usually the ones doing the math, looking to welcome the new kid

A place for everyone needs both kinds of friendships and friendliness
and not just "You do the long term thing and I'll do the addition" or vice versa
We have different gifts, but those different gifts don't mean a strict division of labor
We need each other and we need to learn from each other

Going back to how I started this sermon, that is how we find a rhythm
We all do our part in doing the math. We all find ways to learn
We all find ways to be open, to be welcoming ... old friends and new friends

So for my own rhythm
When I go to get my pizza for lunch after church. Did I tell you about the deal?
It's 25 cents fuel saver on Sundays (Everything tastes better on sale)
I'll be on the lookout to say "hi" to old friends ... and be nice to the new kids