

**SERMON: "DEVOTED TO ... THE APOSTLES' TEACHING"**  
**TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9**  
**NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 2:37-47**

**October 15, 2023**

**Dr. Dave Kivett**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I just got back from continuing education at the Presbyterian Church's Conference Center at Montreat in the North Carolina mountains  
Great conference on how much and how rapidly the context of ministry is changing  
It probably won't surprise you to learn that while I was that way  
I had a chance to go to a football game in Athens, Georgia

I had that chance because I told you when I came here, I plan on taking my continuing education in the fall and combining it with some football  
I also had that chance because I have season tickets for Georgia football  
I've had them for 30 years. They are not easy to come by

We got ours because my dad wanted to visit my little brother, 12 years younger than me, when he was in school there. He could not get them on his own  
He had to get them in my name as an alum. Not easy tickets to get  
Not only that, to buy tickets, you get to (meaning have to) make a contribution to the university every year, a four figure contribution. Then you can buy tickets.

I know you are marveling at how once again I managed to get Georgia football mentioned in a sermon (He does that so easily and so often).  
I actually tell that story to talk about what devotion looks like  
To be devoted to something is to put time, effort and money into it  
To make a generous contribution so you can then spend more money on tickets

Being 'devoted to' something means being committed to it. It is a time commitment.  
The passage that serves as our stewardship theme this year is one that describes how the early church did things, how they spent their time  
It is Acts chapter 2, verse 42

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

Over the next few weeks we will take time to talk about each of these four things  
We begin today with being devoted to 'the apostles' teaching.'  
We will drill down on that in a bit, but first let's back up for some context

## OPEN TO

This description of the early Church follows the story of its birth with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It gives them the ability (and the courage) to share the good news. And the people respond! Luke, who wrote Acts and the Gospel according to Luke, tells us that 3000 people responded and were baptized.

So before we focus on the four things mentioned in verse 42, we need to remember a couple of other very important things.

One, this devotion we read about is a response to the story of Jesus. The people are devoting themselves to Jesus by doing these things because of what God has done ... God's initiating and amazing grace comes first. Then our devotion to Jesus by committing ourselves to teaching, fellowship, etc. Faith is a response to what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth.

Two, these four things mentioned in verse 42 are sandwiched by two verses we do well to remember, esp. as we seek to be 'A Place for Everyone'. Verse forty one, right before this – **“and that day about three thousand persons were added.”** And how this chapter ends, the last part of verse 47, **“And day by day the Lord added to their number.”**

You see what else they were devoted to? Openness! I told you it is best we think of those verses about adding to their number as a sandwich, let's push that further to say 'an open-faced sandwich.'

David Steele, who wrote a regular column for the Presbyterian Outlook, offered a great image of the church of what the openness does and does not look like. His imagery is good for all times, I think, but it was especially timely when he first wrote it, back when the denomination was arguing about human sexuality, when we were talking about who belongs, who stays, who might go.

He shared his love for birds and suggested that the Church, the local one, and the one with the capital C, might think of our ministry as being not a birdcage (a big beautiful cage, but still a cage). He suggested a birdbath instead – full of water, open and refreshing and inviting for all sorts of different kinds of birds.

As we focus on devoting ourselves to Jesus Christ by devoting ourselves to the four things spelled out in Acts 2:42, beginning this morning with a devotion to 'the Apostles' teaching,' I don't mind one bit if your mind wanders and you wonder about being a birdbath.

Oh and one more thing about birdbaths. In order for them to work properly, you need to keep refreshing the water.

## THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

That brings us round to being 'devoted to the apostles teaching.'  
taking that 'refresher course, being nurtured and nourished by that teaching.  
What is the apostles teaching? And what does it mean to be devoted to it?  
The apostles teaching mentioned here is a focus on the good news,  
the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection

The connection here is to the message Peter just preached earlier in this chapter,  
The one where 3000 people responded by repenting, believing and being baptized.  
I've been preaching for almost 40 years, haven't had that kind of response yet  
That would be something, wouldn't it? We'd need another capital campaign!  
Haven't had that kind of response ... but I've tried to preach that same message.

I think the clearest way to talk about the apostles teaching  
is to move away from a question of 'what.' What might that outline look like  
What is that syllabus? What are those lesson plans?  
And move to a question of 'who?' It is teaching about Jesus ...  
who he is, what he has done? Who Jesus is to us?

That is the subject the apostles are teaching – Jesus  
That is what / who we are majoring in ... the core curriculum of our faith  
That is what / who we are studying, what we bring our children here to learn

I know many people come to church looking for a place to help raise their families  
We want them to learn some core values, some building blocks  
We want them to learn the difference between right and wrong  
Who better to learn from than Jesus? Talk about a role model!

And that learning how to live and love ... that's not just for kids  
I tell you it is such a joy to serve a church full of life-long learners  
This is a vibrant and vital church because we have families with children  
who are active in ministry and in leadership  
You've heard me toot our own horn about that

Let me also add the other part of that combo platter, what makes this church strong  
We've got a bunch of older folks (people who remember phones with cords)  
who are eager to share what they've learned ... and eager to learn something new  
It is like the last verse of a favorite hymn says, *'I love to tell the story  
for those that know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.'*

I've seen both of those things here – both a focus on the building blocks of faith  
and a desire to build on those, 'hungering and thirsting' to keep learning

I saw it last month with the 'Text and Context' series about what Jesus said,  
what the bible says about human sexuality. Yes, the divisions of our day and time  
are real and they are scary in a way ... but why be defensive. Or worse, offensive  
We listened to God by spending time together in the bible  
I think that is a fine example of being devoted to the apostles teaching

## SUMMARY

I mentioned the image of the Church as a bird bath earlier  
Being devoted to the apostles teaching is about refreshing that life giving water  
It is recognizing that we need that water, that we need to share that water  
and that the water needs to be refreshed regularly

Your being part of this church community help us refresh that water  
You being here, you playing your part, you learning and listening and loving  
Your living, your giving keep that water (the water we all need) fresh

Maybe you have noticed I usually have a glass of water in the pulpit  
I often take a drink just before and after I preach  
Sometimes I need to take a drink when something pulls at my heartstrings

I try to fill my glass from the water fountain or the bubbler just before worship  
I remember one Sunday, one hectic Sunday, I forgot  
But I still had my glass from the last week ... with just a bit of water in it  
Relieved to have some water, I took a deep gulp

Week old water that has been sitting out ... not so good  
Yes, the apostles teaching is the old, old story of Jesus and his love  
But is not old as in dusty and stale ... quite the opposite really  
It is life giving, refreshing