

[Acts 4](#)



Leaders Note

Acts 2: 37 – 47 Reforming Community

Thought

In a chapter entitled, “Moving Mountains” in his book Everything Must Change, Brian McLaren makes a good point:

If we disbelieve the dominant societal system, and if we transfer our trust from its covert curriculum and framing story to the good news of Jesus, a radical and transforming hope begins to form in us. Just as fearful vision reshapes the world according to that which it fears, the hopeful vision of the kingdom of God will surely begin to reshape our world in its own hopeful image. We could say that a hopeful change in our “inner ecology” will inevitably manifest itself in a hopeful change in our global ecology... At the centre of the beloved community is good news — a framing story that calls humanity to creativity, harmony, reconciliation, justice, virtue, integrity, and peace, because these values reflect the character of the Creator whose world is our home and in whose presence we live and move and have our being. Brian McLaren, Everything Must Change, pp 294-295

This hits it square. Acts 2 is not about defining the ultimate church experience for our consumption and viewing pleasure. It’s a portrait of a community launching out to reform and reshape the world. Enough of dreamy eyed pining for the good old days when the church was such a beautiful place to be; of longing glances back at the way we were; of pouting on the sidelines, immobilized by remorse or of chasing yet another “here’s how we can restore the first century church experience” tangent. The hunger in our hearts for the belonging and intimacy we see in Acts 2 are ultimately found along the way as we fully engage in a community passionately pursuing world reformation. If anything is clear from the church in Acts, this community was not about a Sunday event. A Sunday event was their launching pad, but it wasn’t their destination. Like a good virus, the Good News reshaped and reformed the lives of these first believers, changing their DNA, affecting how they spent their time, what they did with their stuff, and how they invested the rest of their lives. And in thirty years, the entire Roman world would know it as it felt the rippling impact.

Context

Baptism in the Ancient World: Ritual immersion in water, or baptism, represented a powerful and frequently used religious symbol in ancient Judaism. This sacramental ceremony was enacted to symbolize purification and/or the removal of sin or was sometimes used as an initiation rite to consecrate a change of status or conversion. In the Old Testament, rites of immersion were associated with maintaining ritual purity, especially for priests (Lev. 15; 16:4, 24). During the New Testament period, water itself and immersion in water functioned as the primary means by which ritual impurity was removed within Pharisaic Judaism (Matthew 15:2; John 2:6). During the 1st century AD, certain groups within Judaism began to practice proselyte baptism, a rite that required converts, in addition to male

circumcision, to undergo immersion in a ritual bath prior to their full reception into the community. A number of Jewish ritual baths, or miqvaot (singular miqveh), have been excavated in Jerusalem, Jericho and elsewhere. By rabbinical law these had to hold at least 60 gallons of water and be deep enough to completely immerse the body. Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1562



1st century miqveh

Cut to the heart: The Greek word is intensive and means a piercing/ striking through or transfixing. Being “pricked” just doesn’t quite do it justice. It was used of deadly or even fatal wounds. In other words this isn’t the kind of a wound that would make you say, “Ouch!” Think of something more agonizing.

And for all who are far off: The verbiage embraces people of every culture and ethnos — but Peter was probably saying more than he realized. It would take a thrice-repeated vision years later to make Peter realize this meant everyone and not just far off Jews.

One accord: “They continued with one accord in the temple...” The Greek literally means “same passion” and is composed of two key words: *homo* = same and *thumos* = passion. Think of thumos in terms of a volcanic eruption, and you have the picture (it’s also a frequent word for anger in the NT). One accord sounds a bit tamed compared with the volatile flavour of this word. This community was literally bound together by an explosive passion.

Breaking bread from house to house: Every meal in this culture involved bread, which was broken and used to scoop up the main dish. Hence breaking bread = eating a meal. Their public celebrations in the temple were intimately connected with daily table fellowship in homes involving food and worship. The community meals happening all over the city no doubt also involved the celebration of the Eucharist — the Lord’s Supper.



Learning Session

Get someone to read the passage aloud. Then ask “when was the last time you were cut to the heart by a spoken message? How did it challenge you and what did you do?” Allow a couple of folk to share, finish by sharing yourself and then split up into discussion groups to address the following questions:

- What seems to be causing growth in this body of believers? What are the implications for church growth today?
- Which aspect of this community do you like the most? What can you do to help your church body/small group experience more of this?
- What could you do to simplify your life and renew your focus to help the church community reflect Jesus more accurately?

Gather again for feedback after 15 minutes or so. You may find that one or two have a bee in their bonnet and may have one or two issues with ‘Church’. Stress that the Church is Christ’s Bride, it is also his body. We will all be hurt and let down by individuals within it, but to blame that on the Church as a whole and to turn our back on the Church is dangerous. Jesus is coming back for His Church! Disassociating ourselves from it places us in an uncertain position. It is our job to learn from our mistakes, and the pain that we have suffered, and to use these lessons to make other’s experience in the community of believers better.

Fundamentally the main challenge is this, we need to be the very thing to the community that we want the community to be to us. And when we have issues, we should remind ourselves of the plank in our eyes before passing judgement on others.

Discussion Questions

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