

Sermon Transcript from 22nd June 2025 – Church Beginnings

References - Psalm 2 & Acts 4:23-37

Sermon TLDR

This sermon explores the **foundations of the early Christian church** as documented in the Book of Acts, specifically focusing on how the disciples responded to persecution. The speaker highlights three key practices: **praise, prayer, and power**, demonstrating how these elements were intertwined in the disciples' experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the sermon examines the **radical unity and generosity** exhibited by the early believers, who shared their possessions and prioritised the common good, embodying a selfless love for one another. It concludes by encouraging listeners to apply these principles of faith, prayer, and communal love in their own lives.

Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

Three people Pontius Pilot | Herod Antipas | Barnabas

<https://youtu.be/1gqTdMDp1-I?t=1281>

Main Message (transcript below)

<https://youtu.be/1gqTdMDp1-I?t=2475>

Sermon Transcript

Well, in preparing this message, I thought I would base it on three Ps. And when I was talking to Ann on the phone about the order of service, somebody in my household was eavesdropping and said to me, "I think we've had the three Ps recently." And then she thought back and she said, "Yes, two weeks ago, Jim had three Ps for his service. Um, now I'm not going to be horrible enough to say to you what were his three Ps because that might cause a little embarrassment, but that was that anyway.

So, I thought I would change it. So, I tried to create a message on three Q's. Three P's and three Q's. Mind your P's and Q's. Yes. Anyway, in the end, I decided that that was possibly not a very good idea. And so therefore it's three Ps and we'll come to the three Ps in a minute. Hopefully we'll be able to put them up there but not yet.

What was last week please? Anybody? What happened last week? Last Sunday was... Father's Day.

What else was it last week? The week after Pentecost in the Christian calendar is called Trinity Sunday.

So, there were two things and what was really um a coincident was the fact that Father's Day and Trinity Sunday happened to be on the same day. That doesn't normally happen. And of course, what we're talking about in terms of Trinity Sunday is our heavenly Father; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our heavenly Father as opposed to our earthly father last week. The understanding that God who came before the world and formed the world sent his son obviously to as we know to walk the earth to be humble a special kind of human person. And then of course we know that he was predestined to die for each one of us taking on our sins in order to give us um the freedom of eternal life.

If we individually say yes to God and to Jesus, then when all seem lost, God sent the third part of the Trinity, of course, the Holy Spirit to be with us, with us and within us. And of course, in the old days, it used to be called the Holy Ghost, didn't it?

I use the word predestined, and it is this that we need to think about when we research and we understand the role of Pontius Pilate which we were have looked at already and of course of Herod.

We believe that the writer of the book of acts was Luke and he was known as a gentile physician and the idea of the book of acts is to chart the history of the creation of the church. In the first three decades after Jesus's death and after his resurrection. It is the connecting link if you like between Christ's life and the life of the church, between the gospel and the letters of the New Testament.

According to some notes at the bottom of the life application Bible, it says Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke because Acts ends so abruptly. It is believed that Luke may have actually planned a third book continuing the story so to speak, but that we will never know because it didn't happen. You may know of a key verse, not necessarily in Acts 4, but a key verse in Acts that you may be familiar with when we read this in chapter 1:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So our bit really is the end bit, isn't it? To the ends of the earth. I believe we have two kinds of relationships. We have vertical or or away from us if you like, not necessarily right up there. We have our relationship between God and ourselves. And we have that relationship between you and I of other believers. And if we get those two relationships right, our relationship with God and our relationship with each other, that can transform the community in which we live.

So what were these events taking place before those few verses in Acts? And it does say what is the context of it? And the first three words that Wendy read was on the release. You see Peter and John had been put in prison. They've been put in prison because they held a man at the temple gate. And they did it on the understanding that it was through Jesus, that they did this and of course they would preach the gospel and they upset the leaders of the time and so they were put in prison.

They thought that the religious leaders they were a threat to them and their position and so by putting them in prison would silence them and that that's what they thought they would do. So here was an issue between on the one side about Peter and John obeying God and preaching and teaching and healing under his name and obeying the law of the land.

We also read outside the courtroom and our courthouse there were thousands of people praising God and celebrating the fact that what they were seeing and how successful the ministry of Jesus's disciples had been. But because of this, the authorities had to release them.

That's fine. But how do you and I think those disciples were feeling if you were in their shoes? You probably would have been really afraid for your life. As you know, not long before that, the authorities had come for Jesus. They'd arrested him, falsely accused him, sent him to die on the cross. Now, if they weren't mistaken, the authorities of course could quite easily come for them, for their lives. They'd arrested Paul, Peter, and John. How long would it be before they were coming to arrest and perhaps execute them? The fearing of for their lives. There must have been anxiety. The needing of reassurance to what their purpose was as their as Jesus's disciples.

We in Langley, I'm sure, I hope do not fear of being arrested or executed for our faith. But we shouldn't, of course, stop thinking about our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world that do do face that possibility of on a daily basis. So the disciples at this stage needed I think a sense of perspective and purpose. And in verse 24 that was read to us, it says, "And when they heard these things, they lifted their voices together to God."

My first P is the word P for praise, right? P for praise.

The disciples acknowledge the sovereignty of God quite clearly. And we normally start the service as we did today. As we come together to worship God, we sing praises to God in thanksgiving and awe and in

wonder. And what is the first thing that you do when facing a really difficult situation? I wonder. Is it to praise God, that doesn't always feel like the immediate response that you would give. To help them in their praising, the disciples focused on God's position over all the world. And they drew on Psalm 2, as it were, to reaffirm what their own minds were, that God has always been sovereign and always will be sovereign. They also wanted to celebrate of course the release of both Peter and John in their praises to God and at the same time they wanted of course to hear what had happened in prison and how they were treated and so forth.

So praise is our first P and the second P is prayer.

Prayer was such an important part of the early church. We read it in many places in the New Testament. And of course it's just as important now as it was there at that time. And in 20 in verses 24 to 30 that were read to us clearly shows how the disciples acknowledged God and Jesus clearly emphasized to us the importance of personal prayer.

Personal prayer life is important and while prayer Private prayer is what we can call the foundation. Our public prayer time and life is the structure that is built upon that foundation. So if we have a strong foundation that will manifest itself in being eager to pray with others when the occasion arises. Perhaps we should be thinking like this that public prayer is for what is on our mind. And private prayer is for what's in our hearts.

Say that again. Public prayer is for what's on our minds and private prayer is for what is in our hearts.

When the disciples heard that Peter and John had been released, they immediately prayed together. And it was spontaneous. There was no fanfare, no setting up a meeting. And so we observe here coming together in corporate prayer as these disciples did, praying together. Sometimes we shy away from prayer because we think we need some fancy language or to be a bit eloquent in the way we speak. No, it doesn't. Don't let that put you off.

So to help us, what did the disciples pray about? Here are a few thoughts.

Thinking of them in the position that they were two of their people had been in prison. They'd come out. They're praising God, but they're concerned. And this is what we could think about that may help us. They acknowledge that God is master. Pretty straightforward there. They acknowledged that God made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. They acknowledged that God spoke prophecies about what would happen to the Messiah referenced to the Acts verses and also to Psalm 2.

They recognized that what happened to Jesus is to the fulfilment of prophecy. They acknowledged that they see God's plans unfolding in their day and time. They also acknowledged that God's will and ways have been predestined. They acknowledged that the for the need of God to empower them to speak uh boldly and they acknowledged that God is the one who brings healing, signs and wonders. So what we read in Acts 4 is that the disciples at that time knew that there was a God.

Basically, they knew he was in control and they knew that they needed him. In other words, they had great faith and It's interesting also to note from that reading how the disciples prayed for those who opposed both Peter and John. They didn't pray for condemnation against them. They didn't pray that fire be rained down upon them. They simply prayed these words; *“And now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”*

So once the disciples had praised God and glorified him in prayer, they then told God their specific problem and asked for his help. What is worthy of us noting is they did not ask God to remove that problem. But then but they had help them to deal with it.

And this is a model for us that if God doesn't remove the problem, he helps us to deal with it. We may ask God to remove it as we say, and he may choose to do so.

But we must recognize that often he will leave the problem in place and then give us the strength and the encouragement each one of us to deal with it.

If we think clearly about this then we might each of us be able to answer someone who makes the comment why is isn't God answering our prayers?

Which reminds me of a man who's been struggling to find somewhere to park his car. And he's been going around for 20 minutes trying to find a car parking space. And finally, he prays to God and he says, "Lord, if you help me find a space, I promise to do good deeds, a good deed every day for the rest of my life," he said. Just then a space opened up. right in front of him whipping into the spot. He said, "Never mind, Lord. I found it myself."

And there was this four-year-old boy. Christmas time. He was asked to give thanks at the table for the Christmas lunch. The family members bowed their heads in expectation, and he began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then Thank God for mom and for dad and for brother and sister and grandma and grandpa and all his aunts and uncles as well. And then he began to thank God for the food that was in front of them. So he gave thanks for the turkey, the dressings, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, and the fruit salad. Then he paused and everybody waited in anticipation. And after a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the Brussels sprouts, wouldn't he know I'm lying?"

There we go. We can be sure that when our heart reflects his heart, when he affects God's heart, we can be sure that our prayers will be answered according to his perfect time. The American Express slogan says, "Don't live out life without it." Interesting point.

So, they trusted that God was with them, and he would work out all things. They had great faith. So, the question for us is do we have faith that God is in control of creation? Do we have faith that God is sovereign over all that his will and hand has predestined? Do we have faith that God can be with us when we face difficulties, persecutions or threats? Do each one of us have faith that God can use us to do wonders by his power. Do we have great faith?

In verse 31, we read, "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

So, this brings me now to the third P, power.

So, we've had praise, prayer, and [now] power.

We, you know, must never belittle the power that comes with the working of the Holy Spirit. And in this passage that we read that God immediately answered their prayers. He also gave them boldness by filling them with the Holy Spirit. God seemed pleased with them, with their motivations, with their hearts and their prayer. It sounds to me very much like what the disciples experienced on that day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to them.

To what extent do you think there is a link between these three Ps?

Prayer... praise... and the power of the Holy Spirit.

What do each one of us understand by the term being filled with the Holy Spirit? And should we expect to be refilled and filled afresh? And if so, what drives this?

In the passage that we see that after being filled with the Holy Spirit, We see a radical response from the believers. They proclaim the gospel with great boldness and power, experiencing great unity and show great generosity and sacrifice. Sustain what power company says powering sustainability lighting the way. And they also say powering stability empowering lives.

So this brings me to the last bit you will be pleased to know. I'm sure that we read today from verses 32-37 and this is about sharing everything in common and we read that these disciples were of one heart and one soul and we read in 30 and verse 32. “As people were filled with the spirit, the zeal and zealous of the of the gospel, God gave them great unity.”

He gave them peace. He gave them harmony. He gave them love and generosity filled their hearts. They were family. Probably not the family like our families, but it was a special community. And I believe that this is the type of unity God wants us to have with other believers.

Sin and selfishness can create divisions. Sadly, we find this too often, I'm afraid, in churches today. Factions and divisions are all too common. But after all, we are a body of sinners. What we sometimes forget, I believe, is that the closer we as individuals get to God, the closer that we can get to one another, the more we love Christ, the more that we can love other people.

So, let us be diligent in pursuing the unity with others.

For instance, there is another is there another person you have a relationship issue with or a conflict What can you do to start moving toward peace? So we read that people shared everything and I don't think God particularly requires them to share everything that they had with each other. It was voluntary for them to do that and this is sometimes and this sometime is that uh that they wanted to do it in fact because they loved one another and the more they loved they love one another more than they actually love themselves.

They put others needs first. Living out Paul's instruction in Philippians. And in Philippians, it says this, “*Do nothing from selfish ambition or deceit, but in humility uh count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*” So in these last few verses from that chapter there was no needy people among them. We read landowners including Barnabas which is referred to remember his name was Joseph Levi from Cyprus sold their land and donated the proceeds to God.

One manifestation of their unity was their willingness to give of their own positions to the common good. In today's world where personal rights, possessions, and the pursuit of personal happiness tends to dominate and it's hard, isn't it, to find such extreme examples of generosity. Some people do live totally selflessly for others, but it is not common and here I include myself.

Would you like to live in a commune for instance where everybody shares equally with everyone?

I wonder today whether you can think of someone who has selflessly practiced the gift of generosity. Perhaps you should spend some time prayerfully evaluating each other's attitude towards our material possessions and money. Are we giving to God? Are we giving with joy or under compulsion? Does your giving plan need to be adjusted moving forward? Mine certainly does.

So, I hope you will take away this morning something about these three Ps.

To come to God with praise and adoration to consider how important it is to pray as individuals and with others corporately and remembering the power that God has given each one of us when we accepted Jesus Christ as our saviour and Lord.

And so finally a very thought that I read in our daily bible study daily bread by Emilyn Williams and he says this about prayer meetings and he says there is plenty for us to groan about today in the world, in politics, the environment, wars and disasters and in our own lives. Drop into a prayer meeting. You will quickly become aware of our present sufferings. He says, “Sometimes it seems as if the whole of creation is on the road to destruction, but there is hope. We know that we have this sure hope of liberation. Just now we must each of us be patient. Amazingly, the spirit and Christ himself intercedes for us before the father even when we can't find the words. In this time, God is at work in us making us like Jesus and He will bring us through. And because of Jesus, we are more than conquerors. Yes, there may be troubles, but

our lives are not confined by the despair of this world. Nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.” Amen.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you that Christ died for our sins and rose again so that we could receive the Holy Spirit and become part of the body of Christ. We pray that we may walk in spirit and truth today and in the days that lie ahead so that we do not only not only those things that you would have us do, but we will actually do the things that you want us to do because we want to do it.

This we ask in Jesus name.

Amen.

Our final hymn is one I hope that some of you will know. It's we have a gospel to proclaim. It's possibly a slightly more traditional than some of the hymns you sing here, but what it is we have is a gospel to proclaim. It's as simple as was that that's the first thing and then the other verses that follow just remind us of what happened and how Jesus lived and what happened to him at the end. And so it talks about his birth and his ministry and his death and resurrection in that same hymn.

We have a gospel of Paul to proclaim.