VCBC SLG 2022 Fall Term
The Book of Acts
Session #4: The Model of the Church of Jesus Christ—Chapters 2-6

I. Introduction

The Book of Acts does provide a very comprehensive picture of how the 1st disciples of Jesus Christ lived and functioned as a "church" *(ekklesia*)—a name given by Christ in Matthew 16:17 when He said to Simon Peter
"…on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

However we interpret the role of Peter so given, it is clear that a similar charge was given to all the disciples when Jesus appeared to them behind closed doors after His resurrection:

"**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven**." (John 20:23)

The best interpretation of this charge is, in fact, how the apostles and the 1st Christian carried out this charge as an "*ekklesia*" as described by Luke in the Book of Acts.

[The Greek "*ἐκκλησία*" is basically made up of two words: "out" and "call" and the word was used to denote "the congregations of the Israelites, esp. when gathered for religious purposes (Dt 31:30; Judg 20:2…) (and) to hear the law (Dt 4:10; 9:10; 18:16)"] (*Bauer's*, 240)

Without injecting any further theological richness expounded by the Epistles into its meaning, let's simply stick to this particular "call" by the Lord to Peter and the other Apostles in terms of
(1) The charge to impart forgiveness of sins that ushers the hearers into the Kingdom of Heaven, and
(2) The traditional meaning that Peter and the other Apostles would have understood at the time of Matthew 16, i.e. the call to congregate before God as a special people to worship and to listen to His Word.

And see how the 1st Church lived out this "call" basically from chapters 2-6 of the Book of Acts.

II. The Model Church

We shall first focus on the key verse in Acts 2:42 and draw from its expanded versions from 2: 43-47, 3:1, 4: 23-37; 5: 1-16; 40-42; 6: 1-15 to gain a fuller picture of how the 1st Christians lived out the call mentioned above.

"**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer**." (Acts 2:42)

It is important to note the word used by Luke to describe how they respond to this call, "devoted" or "*προσκαρτερεω*". Again, it is composed of two words:

"*προσ":* as a preposition, when used as part of a verb, it denotes "striven towards…with a conscious purpose…of purpose, destiny." (*Bauer's* p. 170)

"*καρτερεω":* as a verb means "be strong, be steadfast, hold out, endure." (*Bauer's* p. 405)

Combining the two as "*προσκαρτερεω*".: it means to "holdfast to something, continue or persevere in something." (*Bauer's* p. 715)

C.K. Barret points out that it "**is an important word in Acts (1:14 and cf. v. 46: 6:4; 8:13; 10:7) and its meanings fit well these occurrences of the word…*persist obstinately in*…**"** (ICC, *Acts,* 162) and in this case, includes:

A. The Apostles' Teaching
B. Fellowship
C. Breaking of Bread and
D. Prayer.

A. The Apostles' Teaching

First, they *persist obstinately* in the Apostles' teachings.

- A sign of new life in Christ:

To "*persist obstinately*" in this case, obviously conveys a picture of hunger and thirst about the Word of God which is always a sign of one's new life in Christ, the lack of which either means the person does not really have a new life in Christ, hence not a born-again Christian, or a spiritually sick believer. The first believers' genuine conversion was more than obvious.

- A sign of tension

However, "*persist obstinately*" also reflects, perhaps, some kind of tension that seeks to pull them away from the teachings of the Apostles which is understandable:

(1) OT Teachings

For the longest time, their main religious teachings about God were from the Rabbis who based their teachings not only from the Old Testaments, but on hundreds of additions that had been added to the Law of Moses

- Not so much for the sake of moving their hearts to draw close to God in repentance
- But in fostering their identity based
    - On the ownership of the Law
    - On the strict observance of the Law, and
    - On being the descendants of Abraham.

Now that, all that the Law requires and points to have been fulfilled in and by Jesus Christ, the Apostles' teaching must have made them come alive like never before. And as the Apostles themselves continue to explore and discover for themselves, they and the hearers had to be totally captivated by the richness of all that were prophesied and fulfilled.

However, given time, and at the time of the writing by Luke of this some 30+ years later, many spurious writings had surfaced in the names of many of these Apostles, it is important for Luke to point out that the first Christians "obstinately adhered" to the teaching of the Apostles.

We have talked about the Kerygma (proclamation) that seeks to define the core of the gospel message that the early church had adhered to, giving rise eventually to the Nicene Creed in the 4th century. However, during likely between the latter part of the 1st century and sometime in the 2nd century, there surfaced an anonymous document called the "*Didache*" (which is the Greek word for "teaching" here in v.42) purported to be "*The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*" which addresses three main aspects of the Christian community, namely Christian ethics, rituals (or ordinances) and church organization.

While some early church fathers treated it as part of the New Testament, most, including Eusebius (c. 324) considered it non-canonical and it never made it to the 27 canonical books of the New Testament.

This example serves to illustrate the need to "obstinately adhere" directly to the Apostles' teachings as preserved by the writings of the New Testament.

(2) The source of the Apostles' Teaching

There is no doubt that many of the Apostles' Teachings originated from what they heard from Jesus during His three years' ministry, except that they were mostly ignorant of the true message at the time until after the resurrection of the Lord and upon their reception of the Holy Spirit which the Lord has promised "**will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you**." (John 14:26)

However, before the Lord's ascension, they had some 40 days in which to be taught and enlightened by the Lord Himself, like the two disciples on their way to Emmaus who was explained by Jesus about what was written concerning Him, all the way from Moses to all the prophets (Luke 24:27). I am sure, it would not be just these disciples, but all who had the privilege to be taught by Jesus during those post-resurrection days could testify that "**Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us…and opened the Scriptures to us**?" (Luke 24:32)

Of course, as the Apostles continued to study the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit continued to enlighten them so that they could continue to pass on what they learned, especially through the many epistles.

As Luke, as inspired by the Holy Spirit to highlight the "Apostles' Teaching" as the 1st mark of the first church, we will do well also to "obstinately adhere" to the study, teaching and hearing of the Word of God as the first mark of our church.

The Medieval church had downplayed its importance to the point that the average believers did not have direct access to the Scripture and even as they went to listen the Word of God, it was preached in a language (Latin) that they scarcely understood. By the grace of God, the Reformers have restored the centrality of the study, teaching and hearing of the Word, and as a symbol of the centrality of the Word, have put the "pulpit" back in the center of the church—a very significant symbol that many today's Evangelical churches have ignorantly neglected.

B. Fellowship

> It is important to point out that the verb, obstinately persist (or adhere to) "**will apply to the four nouns in the dative case** (in v.42)." (ICC, *Acts,* 162)

- Word Meaning: Let's begin with the meaning of this familiar Greek word of "*koinonia*".

Bauer's (pp.438-439) lists 4 meanings or usages of this word, based mainly on secular Greek literatures:
(1) *association, communion, fellowship, close relationship* (hence a favorite expression for the marital relationship as the most intimate between human beings)
(2) *generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism*
(3) sig*n of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity* (in abstract construction)
(4) *participation, sharing…in something*

Barret points out that "in the Greek usage generally the word often has the sense of *association, fellowsh*ip, being used for example in parallel with *philia* (love, friendship)." And he adds, "The word does not occur elsewhere in Acts…it is however used by Paul (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13) …" (ICC, *Acts,* 163)

- The Context

Barret, based on what is believed to be a contemporary community in Qumran which developed its "Rule" and applies it to this 1st Christian community opines the "There exists a fellowship or community; its nature is determined by and is expressed in the apostolic message, and one of the forms taken by this is the common management of wealth. The newly founded community of those who had accepted the Messiahship of Jesus and the belief that God's salvation of His people was being put into effect through Him. The fellowship, thus based upon common use of its material resources. That charity was not regarded by Luke as the sole meaning of koinonia is shown by the fact that it is not till v.44 that he speaks of it explicitly." (ICC, *Acts,* 164)

I find Barret's comments very right-minded.

- A Distinct Community

There is little doubt that this new community distinguishes itself from the general Jewish populace by its faith in and identification with Jesus Christ as not only the Messiah, but their Lord and Savior. This community might appear to the public as a sect, but they see themselves as Paul puts it in Ephesians 4, as bound as

- "one body" (being one *inseparable* unit beyond that of one family),
- "one Spirit" (sharing the *indwelling of the Holy Spirit* as their guide and power),
- "one hope" (sharing a common *destiny* and *purpose*),
- "one Lord" (being *owned* by one Lord and *serving* one same Master),
- "one faith" (sharing one faith this is grounded in the Apostles' teaching and nothing else)
- "one God and Father of all" (worshipping the One same God calling Him, *Abba Father*)

With this oneness (or some put it as "togetherness"), their *koinonia* (fellowship) is necessarily expressed by

- Coming together to study, listen and explore the Word of God through the Apostles' teaching
- The breaking of Bread from house to house
    - We shall touch on this peculiar "ritual" that certainly distinguishes them from the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem
    - But for now, the "house to house", given the size of this new and growing community would mean that families take turns (in smaller units or groups) to open their house to partake in remembering the Lord's Supper
- Praying together
- Meeting each other's needs to the point that "There were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34)

As "*προσκαρτερεω*" grammatically applies equally to all four areas, I shall defer the consideration of breaking of bread and prayer to their respective headings, but simply consider what this *koinonia* looks like, its importance to the life of the believers and its impact to the world, including the implication to the charge of proclaiming the gospel.

- What does this *koinonia* look like

Imagine that all of a sudden, within a very short period of time, a new religious sect appears in Jerusalem, several thousands made up of men and women

- who pledged their allegiance through public baptism to be the disciples and believers of Jesus Christ.
- However, unlike any Messianic movements before, they are non-violent. In fact, they are a bunch of happy, singing, genuinely kind and devout Jews
- who now gather daily (at least in the beginning months) to study the Bible, to listen to the preaching of their leaders (the Apostles), and
- while they would be praying as they gather (and certainly privately), they also go to pray in the temple at the usual time of prayer (3:1) occupying the large portion of the temple court (the temple had never seen such a large attendance for a long, long time), and
- what appears to be a special emphasis in the first few chapters by Luke, is that this is a community marked by genuine love and care for one another, as sharing things in common is repeatedly mentioned (2:44-45; 4: 34-36 & 5:1ff).
- The emphasis that "There were no needy persons among them" is highlighted by the "daily distribution" of food to the widows among them in chapter 6 which is likely a continuation of a Synagogue's practice, except that they are now proactive

in making sure that no one is left needy. And presumably, the needs are quite substantial that many are moved by the Holy Spirit to sell their "personal and real" properties to meet those needs, apart from not claiming "that any of his possession was his own, but they shared everything they had." (4:32)

Let's set aside our skeptical mind for a moment, without thinking of those religious cults that are open to abuse and secrecy, but more like the early Mennonites who fled to mountains in regions like Switzerland as pacifists who avoided religious persecution and were determined not to fight back, but to maintain their religious devotion to the Lord, emulating these 1st Christians in sharing things in common, and in living a simple life.

Whether we agree with the Mennonites or not, that's really a reality lived out by the 1st Christians—a distinct, devout community of faith that seeks to live out, in every aspect, the reality of their oneness in Christ (as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4).

- Its importance to the life of believers

The impact to the believers is very obvious: not only were there no needy persons among them in terms of physical needs, but there were also no lone rangers spiritually speaking.

- Everyone is grounded in the Word of God
- Everyone bears one another's burden (Galatians 6:2)
- Everyone is necessarily immersed in prayers, learning to pray both privately and publicly
- Everyone is constantly sharpened in their purpose of life, living for God and for the gospel
- And while conflicts obviously would happen in such closeness, they were more quickly detected and dealt with

True Koinonia in Conflict

On that note, perhaps it is helpful to see how this *koinonia* is being worked out in time of conflicts as Luke, as directed by the Holy Spirt, would not paint a picture of complete harmony of the 1st Church.

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."

Allow me to simply point out the following:

- This passage shows that the early Christian community included quite a number of "overseas" Jews, and they were necessarily Greek speaking Jews (Hellenistic Jews) and that is understandable, as many of the initial converts in Acts 2 came from places totaling more than 12 different languages
- In his first letter to Timothy in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul mentioned about a registry for widows. It appears that as the gospel spread to the gentile (Greek) world, while the gentile churches were not able to gather together as "one" as the Jerusalem Church due to their locale, customs and other practical factors, they did emulate the 1st Church in caring for the needy, especially the widows.
- As the size of the faith community grew, not only in number, but in demographics, neglect and misunderstanding would happen, because it was still a human community, but how to deal with such issues and quickly would be the key.
- The solution to this problem provides an excellent precedent even to today's church life
    - The response was spearheaded by all "Twelve" Apostles who obviously prayed and conversed on the issue—not the sole decision by Peter who was obviously taking on the role of Chief Apostle
    - Their insistence of their single focus on "the ministry of the Word and prayer" is an extremely important reminder of the first and foremost task of the church today, but without neglecting the physical needs in the faith community
    - But in solving the conflict they selected 7 deacons (table-servers)
        - Who have to be filled with the Spirit and wisdom—no ministries within the church are not sacred—even table-servers are handling sacred duties.

Since the complaint was lodged by "Hellenistic Jews", all seven deacons bore Greek, not Hebraic names—a sign of respect and genuine desire to listen—not even equal representation was enough!

- Its impact to the secular world
    - While the charge of secrecy eventually happened in the succeeding centuries which was used as an excuse to persecute Christians in other parts of the Roman world
    - The more immediate impact to the non-believing Jews is quite refreshing
        - As the 1st Christians lived out their distinctiveness, they enjoyed the favor of all people (2:47)
        - The people were filled with wonder and amazement at the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar by Peter and John (3:10)
        - When the Apostles continued to perform more miraculous signs, "No one dared to join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people" (5:13)
        - While not joining them, "people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some

of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed." (5: 15-16)

- Its implication to the spreading of the gospel
  - It appears that during this initial period, it was mainly the Apostles who were performing these miracles (5:12), and
  - When it came to the proclamation, "With great power the Apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33)
  - However, it appears that given time, as the non-Apostles came to Christ and learned from the Apostles' teaching, "lay" people like Stephen would also be actively proclaiming the gospel as well and also performed "miraculous signs among the people' (6:8)
  - While it was only till 8:4 that it was explicitly mentioned that non-Apostles (lay believers after the great persecution began in Jerusalem), preached the Word wherever they went as they scattered, it would not be unthinkable that the gospel was proclaimed just by the Apostles, and not by other believers as well even before the great persecution.
  - While the impact of proclamation of the Word and the performance of miracles undoubtedly were key to leading the people to come to Christ, Luke appears to attribute the increase in number of converts simply due to how they lived out this *koinonia*:
    - Following the description of their communal life, Luke adds, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (2:47)
    - After describing that "And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade" and that they were highly regarded by the people while some maintained a distance, Luke adds, "Nonetheless more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number." (5:)4)
    - Then, after resolving the Grecian widows' complaint, Luke says, "So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." (6:7)

There is no doubt that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and He works through primarily the proclamation of the word, but "validated' by the authentic gospel-life of the koinonia of the 1st believers.

Even today, the gospel message itself is definitely the power of God (Romans 1:16), but in this Post-Christian era, in order to gain an audience to the gospel message, an authentic *koinonia*, unlike anything the world can offer, serves as an important bridge. It is important to emphasize that such authentic *koinonia* cannot be lived out in isolation, but only through a total commitment—*obstinately adherence*—to a visible "togetherness" to one distinct community—a community that is definitely marked by differences or even conflicts from time to time but is won over agape love of acceptance and forgiveness.

C. **Breaking of Bread**

It is worth noting that the term "breaking of bread" (*κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου*) "was not a Jewish term for a meal, its use in this sense must have been a Christian development." (ICC, *Acts*, 165)

The use of this term in 10:7, "On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread" at Troas, further confirmed that it was a technical term referring the Lord's Supper instituted by the Lord Himself. To say that only "bread" is mentioned implies that this ritual only involved the breaking of bread and not the drinking of wine which, as some insisted, was only a later development, likely in the time of Paul is unwarranted. (Lenski, 116).

All three Synoptic Gospel clearly record how the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper as a command that includes both the breaking of bread and the drinking of the wine, and Paul also insists that the Lord's Supper comprises both the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the wine and he received this instruction form the Lord. (I Cor. 11:22)

- Its meaning:

Since the 1 Corinthians passage is more comprehensive, let's focus on it for our purpose:

"**For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes**." (I Cor. 11: 23-26)

Before we consider this passage, perhaps, it is helpful to ask the following questions:

(1) Why did Luke choose to make the "breaking of the bread" a distinctive mark of the 1st Church?
(2) Is the "breaking of bread" a distinctive mark of the church of today, including ours?

In other words, the "obstinately adhering" to the "breaking of bread" should be the mark just as important as the "obstinate adherence" to the Word, to Fellowship and to Prayer. It is an integral and important feature of the life of the church.

The reasons for such obstinate adherence may include

(1) It is the clear command of the Lord. There is no other option. The church must obey and observe.
(2) It is for remembrance of Jesus: It is important to note that twice Paul points out that it is to remember Jesus (the person), meaning that while there are other reasons and merits

for this ritual, the primarily purpose is relational—the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. One can imagine, for the first church, especially those who had met Jesus in person, as they shared the broken bread and the wine, they could not help but "remember" the person who lived and die for them. It is not unlike us holding a photo of those loved ones who had passed away, it carries far deepen significance than simply visiting their graves.

(3) Of course, the remembrance of the accomplished work of atonement by His broken body on the cross, and the remembrance of the total forgiveness brought about by His blood so shed is significant—a reminder of the certainty of both our new life in Christ which now dwells in us, symbolized by the intake of the bread (of life), and our inclusion as part of the Covenanted People because of the cleansing of our guilt by the inward covering of the blood of Christ, symbolized by the intake of the wine. Every time we partake of the bread and the wine, apart from drawing us closer to the love of Christ, it also acts as what Paul refers to as "the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6: 14)—we have been declared righteous before God.

(4) But Paul gives up another dimension when he finishes this part of the instruction with these words, "**proclaim the Lord's death until he comes**." (11:26)

i. Yes, the very act of observance of this Lord's Supper is, in itself, **a proclamation** of the gospel (the very meaning of the word, proclaim in Greek)—it is a pictorial presentation of the very essence of the gospel!
So, it is not inappropriate to make an altar call at the end of the Lord's Supper, appealing to the seekers in our midst to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

ii. "**Until He comes":** yes, every Lord's Supper should direct us to hope, to look forward to the consummation of His plan of salvation and orientate our lives accordingly.

I always wonder how the Apostles observed the Lord's Supper, as they had not only known and met Jesus, but they also witnessed the institution of the Supper itself. Apart from bringing to mind vividly how the Lord broke the bread, shared the wine, but His tender voice and sorrowful countenance, I am sure they couldn't help but ask, "When, Lord Jesus, when could we see you again?"

- Its observance

It is likely that the breaking of bread was a daily event as indicated by v.46 as one continuous sentence. Allow me to quote from the Greek-English Interlinear Bible:
"**And from day to day continuing steadfastly (obstinately) with one mind in the temple and breaking from house to house bread, they shared food in gladness and simplicity of heart.**"

As I commented earlier, given the size of the church, it is likely that in small groups, they took turns in sharing food, and at the same time, they remembered the Lord through the breaking of bread. It is also very likely that, as much as the breaking of bread was a separate event, it took place while they were having their common meal, as I Corinthians 11 alluded to.

The narrative of the event in Acts 20;7 that "**On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread**" (at Troas) seems to indicate that it has evolved into a weekly observance on the day they came together to worship. It appears that for the longest time, to observe the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis has been the most consistent practice in the last two millennia.

- The Church Today

It is obvious that the Church Today has not continued to "obstinately persist or adhere" to the Breaking of Bread as a mark of their communal life:

- It is only when a church fervently hungers and thirsts for the Word of God, bonds herself intimately like a inseparable body that draws the admiration and desire of the world around her and with prayers (which we shall look at finally) dominating their private and corporate life, the sheer observance of the Breaking of Bread loses its depth and its meaning!
- But to slight the meaningful observance of the Breaking of Bread still is no excuse.
- And perhaps, the resumption of "obstinate adherence" to its observance might rejuvenate our entire community life, as what better way to "remain in His love" than a persistent, meaningful time of remembering His body and His blood.
- The least we should do is to follow one of the following examples still practiced by many Bible-believing churches
    - Some still obstinately persist in making it a weekly observance, every Sunday
    - Some hold the Lord Supper twice a month,
    - Some, while observing it only once a month, have made sure it will be a meaning time that included self-examination
        - Either by allotting enough time during the service as the most important part of the worship during that particular Sunday, or
        - Having a separate Lord's Supper time after the Sunday service.

Food for some serious thought!

D. Prayers

Finally, they "obstinately persist" in prayers.

You have just spent a good season at SLG to study this subject, so I do not intend to say much about "prayer" itself, as it will take another 3 months to consider it.

Allow me to simply highlight how the 1st church expresses their stubbornness in making prayers an extremely important part of their communal life.

Chapter one: Prayer, a process of waiting and preparation

"**2 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying… 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer**,"

I believe Pastor Brian has already addressed this first prayer meeting of the believers in detail, so I am not going to elaborate, except to say that it is more than obvious that they were praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit to come and the Lord answered their prayers powerfully, and that time of praying and waiting certainly has contributed to the preparation of their boldness and wisdom in "handling" the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter two: Prayer: a distinct mark of a church
"**[42]They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer(s**)."

Chapter three: New wine in Old skin
"**One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon**."

It appears that as long as they were not driven out of the temple and the temple still stood, it was still the "House of Prayer" for all God's people. That would be in addition to prayers offered as the 1st Christians gathered, likely in homes.

The Jerusalem temple set time for public prayers three times a day—at 9:00 AM, 12 Noon, and 3:00 PM which was the time of this particular incident.

The Apostles would have abandoned temple worship as the priests had turned it into a "den of robbers' and they should have nothing to do with it. However, to them, it was still the "House of Prayer" and irrespective of whatever others, even the religious leaders had turned it into, it did not distract me to offer the right sacrifice (in this case prayer) to God. As it turned out, the miracle so performed in healing the crippled bagger had generated true and genuine praise of this person and that of others in the temple courts, and likely had contributed to the conversion of other priests (6:7).

Chapter four: The power that comes with prayer
"23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.'
27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31 After they prayed, <u>the place where they were meeting was shaken</u>. And they were <u>all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."</u>

As much as Peter and John suffered persecution (for the first time)—they were imprisoned, (likely beaten) and warned, they stood their ground and reported back their experience to their "own people"—the congregation. Some, we can imagine, were afraid since this was the 1st time they met with such persecution, but it was through "prayer"

- that came to be reminded that not only has God has gained victory over the kings and rulers, but Christ's sufferings also as well as theirs had been decided "beforehand" by God in His word.
- And now they prayed not for avoidance of suffering, but for boldness to "speak your word" and
- For God to continue to perform signs and miracles through the name of Jesus.

And the result of their prayer?

- The place was shaken
- They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and
- They spoke the word of God boldly!

I had watched a video many years ago of the result of a prayer meeting at a remote Indigenous town north of Quebec that their prayers against the enslaving evil spirits ended in the filling of the Spirit of their place of worship and ended in the repentance of many and the burning of books and CDs voluntarily by many of the youth in the community.

Yes, the power of the Holy Sprit is still alive and well, except that He awaits "Watchmen" to pray with contrite and broken spirits that are willing to cut ties with sins and evil spirits!

<u>Chapter six: Prayer that imparts the gift needed for ministry</u>

"**They presented these men (the seven deacon) to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them."** (v.6)

- Commission prayer: Paul reminded Timothy that "**Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you**." (I Tim. 4:14)
- We often take such commissioning prayers lightly (and the same with Benediction at the end of the service), but Paul gives us spiritual insights into such prayers of commissioning in that it is not just for show, but as God is the One who chooses, He is also the One who hears our united prayer through the laying on hands and imparts the "gift" necessary to do what is being commissioned.
- And in the case in Acts 6, it is not just the gift needed to handle the food distribution, but the anointing of the Holy Spirit who gave Stephen boldness to preach and to suffer, and Philip to bring the gospel to Samaria.

▪ Private and Public Prayers

In summary, we see in these early chapters of Acts that in a functional way, the 1st believers had learned to use prayers

- To worship and praise God
- to activate the power of the Holy Spirit
- to prepare themselves to do the work of the Lord
- to understand the will of God
- to gather strength to preach and boldness to suffer, and
- invoke the name of Jesus in the performance of miracles and signs.

While private prayers are a given which is not the emphasis of Luke's narrative in the first few chapters, the Holy Spirit definitely inspires Luke to give us an important emphasis on public prayers—Prayer truly defines the 1st Church.

What about us today?
Is our church defined by our prayer-life?

Well, it has, whether a church is filled with the Holy Spirit or a church is in slumber—it has been defined by her prayer-life.

"We work, we work, if we pray, God works!"

Conclusion:

But praise God, I see an awakening of church's prayer-life in Hong Kong, due likely to an increased sense of potential loss of freedom. One sister who has asked for my prayers over the last year as her husband is struggling with cancer treatments. As God has seen fit to answer our prayers in rather miraculous fashion time after time, she was prepared to give a public testimony and thank the congregation for their tireless prayer support, she sent me an audio recording of her testimony at the church "Prayer Meeting" and I discovered that this prayer meeting was attended by more than 100 people which was the norm every week.

There is hope!