“People Who Made a Difference; The Church”

We come to the final part of our series on “People Who Made A Difference.” The passage is from the Book of Acts.

Acts 2:37-47

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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Sometimes it’s the Church that makes a difference in a person’s life. That has certainly been the case for me.

I have vivid memories of the church for as far back as back goes. As a child, I remember that little white-framed church in Washington, NC. Covered-dish dinners on the lawn after church with fried chicken, potato salad, sweet tea and lots of desserts! Running around in the cemetery. There was always an awareness that people cared about you. You belonged.
Sometimes it’s the Church that makes a difference in a person’s life. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, powerful worship services have all impacted my life, and probably yours. On that Tuesday evening, September 11, 2001, churches were filled to capacity all over our nation. Four coordinated terrorist attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others. Millions of people came to church.

Every *natural disaster* has a church attached to it. Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes. People know that somehow, someway, the Church will show up. Volunteers, money, resources will all flow from the Church. And that happens all over the world, all the time! It’s consistent.

Can you think of a *hospital* where a church doesn’t show up? Waiting rooms, ICUs, births, deaths, accidents, even a kid’s broken leg, the Church is there.

Every place that needs a word of hope, some encouragement, prayer, confession, patience, forgiveness, the truth, or some love, the Church miraculously makes an appearance!

Prisons, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, nursing homes, impoverished countries, recovery programs…somehow the Church finds its way there. And they don’t come once and leave. They keep coming, over and over again.

You ever wonder why that is? Why would Christians be motivated to make a difference in anyone’s life? It’s been in our DNA from the beginning.

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Something happened in that church way back there in Acts. There was some power in that church. It wasn’t political power or even financial power. There was a *power of Spirit*. It says, “…they were cut to the heart…” (2:37a).

What does that even mean? To be “*cut to the heart*” is more than an intellectual exercise. It’s more than preserving history or tradition. To be “*cut to the heart*” is for something to happen at the core of your being. What does a person, or a church look like that has been “*cut to the heart*”?

Did you see what that crazy church in Acts did?
“They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship. To the breaking of bread and the prayers. All who believed had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (2:42,44-45).

All that happened after something happened in the heart. They may have been generous, but they weren’t that generous! Something happened there. “Cut to the heart.” That’s more than mere charity. More than paying your dues. It goes way past all that. Something has to first happen in the heart!

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So, is this a formula for Christians? Are we all supposed to sell all we have and distribute it to all who have need?

Joseph of Arimathea didn’t do that. He used his political clout to secure the body of Christ and put it in his private tomb. There was no mention of him giving everything he had away.

Lydia didn’t do it either. She opened her home to Paul and the others. She was a strong businesswoman and a leader. God used her to open the door for Christianity to spread through Europe! She didn’t sell everything.

Zacchaeus gave half of all he owned to the poor, then repaid all those he had swindled four times as much. That’s different.

And the poor widow put in everything she had. Two prutas. That’s all she had to live on.

The church in Acts sold everything they owned and distributed to everyone who had need. Something happened in their hearts, and then they devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, and prayer. And out of that came a generosity, a responsibility, for the welfare of their neighbors. The money followed the heart, and the heart belonged to God. The money was a means unto an end, and not an end unto itself.

Without the heart, I can write a check that doesn’t hurt me but nothing’s changed in me. It’s not the money Christ is after, it’s US! If you get my heart, you’ve got everything else.

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There was an old country preacher who preached the same sermon every Sunday for months. Same sermon! One day an elder of the church came and said, “Preacher, you know how much we all love you at this church, but you have been preaching the same sermon every Sunday, for months on end.” The old preacher looked down at his shoes and then up at the elder and said; “Well, I figure when all of you get that one, I’ll move on to the next one!”

Have I been preaching the same sermon for the past five weeks? Yes, I have. Joseph and Lydia, Zacchaeus and the poor widow, they all made a difference. They were all stewards, managers of all they had, and who they were. They were responding to God’s love and grace poured out for them. They weren’t trying to appease God, they were trying to thank Him.

It wasn’t about the money. It wasn’t a formula or a requirement. It was about heart, for every one of them. It is the same sermon. If we get this one, the rest falls into place.

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To whom, or to what, does the heart of Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church belong? That question needs to be continually asked of the elders, the deacons, of all of you, the staff and the pastors. And the answer determines who we are, who we will and will not be.

A heart that belongs to Christ will produce a different kind of life. Like these people we have considered, we might be more radical with our love, more generous with our abundance, and more willing to take risks. We might stop doing some things that are no longer effective, and start doing things that make a difference.

We may even come to be known as that “crazy church in Sequoyah Hills!” Wouldn’t that be something! Crazy with the power of God’s radical love and grace.

Lord, “cut us to the heart”, that we might be that crazy church that devotes itself to you, and to all your people in need.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Congregation; Amen.