

“WHY GO TO CHURCH? III –
“FOR STRENGTH, INSPIRATION AND GROWTH”

Kim Artrip
Elkton United Methodist Church
October 18, 2015

Acts 2:42-47

Luke 2:41-52

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. “I’ve gone for 30 years now, he wrote, and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons, but for the life of me, I can’t remember a single one of them. So, I think I’m wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all.”

This started a real controversy in the *Letters to the Editor* column. Much to the delight of the editor, it went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: “I’ve been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals.

But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!” ~ *(Author unknown)*

The reading from Acts is an important snapshot of the community’s life and mission in Jerusalem. Day by day as they spent time together in the temple, they were growing spiritually, building relationships together and sharing God’s grace with others. Because of the community’s actions God added to their number. Kind of sounds like a normal Sunday morning here at Elkton United Methodist Church.

We gather together here in this sanctuary every Sunday, either at 8:30 or 11am. We are growing spiritually from the sermons we hear and the hymns we sing. We are building relationships with each other. We pray together and we share God’s grace with others. Because we are doing these things God adds to our numbers. We have been nourished by God’s word, love and wisdom.

Strength:

Church is not a just a building, it is made up of people, Christians. God’s people give support and encouragement during life’s most difficult times. We receive strength from each other.

Do you come to church for strength?

When I am with other members of the church, I am strengthened by the knowledge I am not alone, I am with others who struggle with the same questions about faith. I am with others who face similar life challenges. Acts 2:44 reads: “All who believed were together and had all things in common.” We are bought together by God because we need each other, we need to be lifted up, and we need to strengthen each other.

I am always amazed when a church member finds the strength to attend service the Sunday following the loss of a loved one. I admire their ability to be open to the love that is offered, to the acceptance of the loving arms they are wrapped in. We need the strength of others. We need each other for support during difficult times in our lives, during tragedy, when we are feeling down on ourselves. We need to be reminded we are not alone, we have each other and that we serve a mighty Lord.

We so easily forget who we are. We so easily forget what God has done, is doing, and will do. So often we try to go it alone. We neglect the Word of God, the food of God, the people of God. Why go to church? Because we need times together to remember, to affirm, and to promise.¹

How often do you sit in church and feel that the sermon is being said directly to you? Or a hymn touches your heart or a prayer of confession was written for your sins? Do you question how did they know? Are you surprised when the sermon hits close to home? It happens to me often and I know it is the Lord saying you're not alone, I am here with you. Let me nourish you.

Inspiration

An elderly Christian woman, who was crippled with arthritis, used to hobble to church service on crutches. It was a great ordeal and required of her a considerable amount of toil and pain. A friend of hers observed her regular and faithful attendance and asked, "How do you manage to be there every Sunday morning?" Her answer was, "My heart gets there first, and my old legs just follow after."²

When you come here on Sunday Morning, is the time you spend here inspiring? Does your heart leap with joy at the thought of being able to go to church? Ps 122:1 - I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." The psalmist is excited about going to church. Were you excited about coming to church this morning?

Church is a place where our hearts are filled with joy at the thought of being here. It's a place where we encourage one another, where we lift up one another in prayer. This is a place where we can come and love one another. We are family. We are one body with many members. Since we are going to spend all eternity together, it only makes sense that we should start now.

We are glad to come to the house of the Lord because it's a place of God's presence. Jesus says in Matthew, "For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there among them." He is here to answer our prayers. He is here to guide us. He is here to bless us. He is here to lift us up.

Not only do we come to church every Sunday because God is here, but because our friends are here. This is an encouraging place. We all need encouragement. Life is hard and life is difficult. We all face different challenges: health problems, financial issues, conflict within our families, loss of a loved one or loss of a job. We have an opportunity to encourage one another.

¹ *Disciple 1 – Becoming Disciples through Bible Study*

² *Illustration from Sermon Central*

Do you Come to church for inspiration?

Sunday morning is where fellowship begins. It begins here in this sanctuary. Being in Sunday school classes, in Bible study and serving on committees is where you get to know people on a deeper level. But it starts on Sunday: the launching point to fellowship and community is in church services. Every Sunday that you come, there are going to be people who are looking for you, wondering if you're there. You will be setting an example the longer and more consistently you come. You will be an inspiration for others; your regular attendance will inspire others to attend church too. Today's reading says, "and their numbers increased. I am inspired very Sunday morning when I come church and see all of you!

Growth

In today's Gospel reading Jesus is a 12 year boy, sitting in the temple among teachers listening and asking questions. Mary and Joseph had traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and when the festival was over they left with their group not knowing that Jesus stayed behind. When they were one day into the journey they started to look for Jesus and could not find Him. They immediately returned to Jerusalem and searched for three days until they found Jesus in the temple. Mary says, "Child why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." Jesus said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand.

Even Jesus' parents could not fully comprehend the events they were witnessing. Thus Luke shows that even the most faithful must grow in understanding and faith.³ Jesus grew, too. He returned to Nazareth and He increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. He matured spiritually.

Spiritual growth takes effort; it is not something that just happens. In order to experience any type of growth you have to step out of your comfort zone. When I first joined the church I would come on Sunday morning, listen to the sermon, sing the hymns and politely say goodbye to all of you as I left. I held this church and its members at arm's length. I did not engage in fellowship, because I was afraid I would be required to serve. But something happened. The more I came, the more my heart opened, and I grew spiritually. Then I served on Staff Parish Relations, I joined a Bible study and I lead a Sunday school class.

Do you come to church for spiritual growth?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Church is not a past time, a hobby or something you do when you have nothing better to do. It's a priority. When we step out of our comfort zone and into God's comfort zone. When our priorities are in line with God's plan for our life, we will be blessed and we will have life abundantly.

Joe and Mike have been friends for years and Joe invites Mike to church every week. Joe really wanted Mike to come to church. One morning Mike, under God's conviction, decided to surprise Joe and show

³ *The Discipleship Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*

up at church assuming that he would be there. When Mike arrived at church he discovered that Joe was skipping church that morning.⁴

Jesus didn't think he was lost, Jesus thought it was obvious where he would be. Is it obvious to you where you will be on Sunday morning? I think back to the first time I walked into this church. I was invited by a friend and like Mike in the story, I decided to surprise my friend one Sunday morning. When I arrived I scanned the room for my friend and I found her sitting right in the middle of the church. What if she had decided to skip church that day? What if I had walked in and she was not here? I would have missed so many wonderful experiences, so many grand adventures to the women's retreat and I would have missed the chance to grow my faith.

Because my friend was here that morning, I joined this church, I have built a relationship with Jesus and I have grown beyond measure. When I joined this church, I could count on one hand the amount of friends I had. Today, because of this church, the amount of friends I have are too numerous to count and my hearts swells with love each time I think of the valuable friendships I have because I attend this church.

Not only have I gained friends through fellowship, I have grown spiritually. The nourishment I have been filled with during regular attendance has strengthened me and given me the ability to lead worship today.

Why go to church? Because when you need Strength, Inspiration and spiritual nourishment look no further than Sunday morning services. Realize that this smorgasbord, this springboard of love and encouragement is the Lord at work in our lives and in our church. But it only happens if we look for it, ask for it, and contribute to it.

Never minimize the importance of your presence here or the contribution you make to the Body of Christ. We've each been equipped and gifted by the Lord to fulfill a role in building one another up and in bringing the Gospel—the glad tidings of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial, redeeming love—to the world. We can't fulfill those roles nearly as effectively with only part of the Body. Each of us is essential. Each of us walk as light bearers for the Kingdom of Heaven. Together we create a lamp set on a hill that cannot be hidden. By God's grace that light warms us, and helps guide others to Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!

Amen!

⁴ *Illustration from Sermon Central*