

“A Matter of Trust”

1 John 1:1-2:2
Acts 4:32-35

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Years ago, an evangelist was traveling through South Alabama on one of those hot, sultry Alabama days. He stopped at a watermelon stand, picked out a watermelon, and asked the proprietor how much it cost. "It's \$1.10," he replied. He dug into his pocket, found only a bill and said, "All I have is a dollar."

"That's ok," the proprietor said, "I'll trust you for it."

"Well, that's mighty nice of you," he responded, and picking up the watermelon, started to leave.

"Hey, where are you going?" the man behind the counter demanded.

"I'm going outside to eat my watermelon." "But you forgot to give me the dollar!"

"You said you would trust me for it," he called back.

"Yeah, but I meant I would trust you for the dime, not the dollar!"

"Mack," Parker replied, "You weren't going to trust me at all. You were just going to take a ten-cent gamble on my integrity!"

We have a real trust issue in our society at every level. We don't trust our government, we don't trust our schools, we don't trust the news media. We certainly don't trust strangers. We don't even trust our churches, maybe even especially our churches.

A recent survey conducted with non-church people only revealed a pretty ugly perception of the church in general. 87% view the church as judgmental. 85% as hypocritical. 75% say the church is too political. 72% the church is out of touch with reality. 70% viewed the church as insensitive to others. They are not willing to take a gamble on the church, because they do not trust in its integrity. If the church is supposed to be about loving others, then why do so many people feel unloved by the church?

What this survey says to me is that we need to carefully examine ourselves as a community centered around Christ and led by the Spirit. First, let's look back to the early church as a model community.

The writer of Acts gives us a good picture of the church in its first form. The church was formed through the apostles by the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They begin to preach the good news and testify to the resurrection of Jesus. 3000 people believed- they trusted and were baptized on the first day. Even Billy

Graham would be pretty impressed with that. But then what? Did they just all go home feeling good about being saved?

No. A new community was formed. Luke writes that the believers were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything was held in common. In our post McCarthyism world, we are very nervous of this kind of talk. Communism doesn't work, we say. But the real problem is a lack of trust.

We trust the church with our dimes, but not as much our dollars. And certainly not our whole property. I don't know anyone who has the deed of their house in the name of the church. I don't know anyone who has signed over their 401k to be managed by the session. (Could we really do worse than the banks and investment firms??) The idea is so absurd to us because we are so far away from that level of trust that not only can we not share at that level, but it is not even our goal or hope to share at that level.

This early church laid everything at the feet of the Apostles to distribute as needed. In the next chapter, it says that all the people (even the non-church people) held the Apostles in high esteem, so much so that crowds would gather anytime Peter was around just so they could have his shadow cast their way. Through the years, though, public opinion of church leaders has greatly eroded thanks to more than a few popes, preachers and priests who have greatly abused their power.

2nd century church father, Tertullin, wrote, "Our care for the poor and our active love have become our distinctive sign before the enemy...See, they say, how they love one another and how ready they are to die for each other." The church was a champion for the downtrodden and also a model of community so much so that its enemies could admire it.

I wouldn't be serving as a pastor if I did not believe with all my heart, that the church can once again be what the early church was. I would like to share with you how I believe we can better resemble the church God desires and people need.

First, we should always remember that the church begins with the Holy Spirit. It doesn't begin with a great leader. Peter and company were not great. They had no vision. They are only regular, even uneducated people. Their one distinction is that they followed Christ, and they failed even at that when times got tough. But on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit blew through them; they became inspired and bold leaders. And by the Holy Spirit the church grew from 12 to 3000 in a day. There was no marketing plan or great music program or day care. No fancy building or manicured grounds. Just the power of the Spirit.

Let us open ourselves up to the power of the Spirit. Let us even pray that the Spirit would fill this church and each one of us. It all starts with the Spirit.

The Spirit not only starts the church, but also unites us. The Spirit gives us one heart and soul. It doesn't mean that we agree on every little thing. But it does unite us in

a single purpose, to be a living representation of Christ in the world. That means that whatever we do, whether it be on Sunday morning, Martha's Kitchen, CareS, Project Joy, or even each of us in our work places and schools, must remind people of Jesus. And this starts with getting to know who he is. A good way to start is to read about him in the Bible. But we can take the next step and invite him into our own hearts. We can know him through the Spirit. Little by little we will begin to resemble him.

And this means that we will not be judgmental, hypocritical, too political, out of touch with reality, or insensitive to others. We should be a community that resembles Christ, rather than the world.

There is a deep hunger for community in our society. People are reaching out to each other online by the million. But they are not flocking to churches. Perhaps it is because we bicker with each other like a congress. Why would anyone want to join into an argument? The press prints lots of stories on churches splitting, but very little on church unity.

The early church was a model of community. Their love for each other was visible and obvious. They were a community worth joining. One of the ways they showed their love was by sharing their possessions and their money. They did it so that no one in their community would be needy. They trusted their leaders because they saw their leaders using the money to help others. And they knew that if they were struggling that they too would receive help.

Let me suggest that this kind of radical sharing is not the solution to having a truly Christ-centered, Spirit led community. It is the evidence of a truly Christ-centered, Spirit led community. It is the natural result of a community built on trust, being of one heart and one soul. That one heart and soul is Christ's heart and soul. Because we trust in Christ we can trust each other.

Being a community is about trusting. It is about removing the distance between individuals and learning to share a life. Christ came to make us one. One with God and one with each other. And we have a society that desperately needs the same oneness. If church is about anything, it is about separate individuals becoming one body. It's about sharing our blessings and our hardships. It's not just another club with benefits. It's a community who by the power of the Holy Spirit resembles Christ, the only true uniter in this world. Trust him to make us into the community that we were meant to be for the sake of a world that needs to trust.