



Early Church Hospitality

Read Acts 2:42-47

Introduction:

In general, while Jesus is viewed positively, Christians are viewed negatively by mainstream pop culture. Why? What would it take to change that perception?

One reason is that most people do not know all of Jesus' teachings. They focus on the superficial applications of "love one another," the golden rule, and the beatitudes. However, sadly, it's much our own fault. We fail to speak the truth "in love." We fail to live according to God's will. We fail to be an Acts 2:42-47 church! The top four adjectives to describe Christians by non-Christians are: judgmental, hypocritical, sheltered, close-minded. Yikes! Tell me how you really feel! St. Augustine said, "No philosophy can be properly judged by it's abuse." In other words, the problem is not with Jesus, it's with us. Motivated by the Gospel, we need to exercise hospitality like the early church so that we "enjoy the favor of all the people." (See Matthew 5:16 – let your light shine before men that they may see...and praise. 1 Peter 2:12 – Live such good lives among pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.) Answers will vary about what that looks like.

Into the Text:

1. The early Christians devoted themselves to four things. Explain how each promoted the unity they needed to reflect Jesus to their community.
 - **Apostles' Teaching** *Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit creates unity. (See Ephesians 4)*
 - **Fellowship** *Gathering together, especially in worship, unifies people as they rub off on each other.*
 - **Breaking of Bread** *Partaking of the Lord's Supper strengthens our faith and gives strength to face the challenges of Satan.*
 - **Prayer** *"Those who pray together stay together." As we unite around the Word, that Word unites us in the desires of our hearts as a church community.*

2. Describe what your experience would have been if you were to visit this congregation. *You would be struck by how much they love each other and love to spend time together. You would have been welcomed, no matter who you are. You would be overwhelmed by the kind of generosity they displayed, not just to their own members, but to anyone who had need. Their faith had an impact on their life and mood. They love the Word and love gathering around that Word to praise God.*

Emperor Julian, the apostate (4th century), was angry about how generous Christians were and what it was doing to the worship of Roman gods.

“Atheism (i.e., Christianity) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Applying It:

1. Hospitality is literally, “love of strangers,” in the Greek language. To love strangers means that we as a church need to be outward focused. It is easy for churches to lose that perspective and focus on inward concerns. What are ways that our church could become too inward focused? (i.e. How do we insure an outward focus?)
Answers will vary. Perhaps it’s taking a look at the church budget. One can tell a lot about priorities by looking at a check book or credit card statement. Does the budget have a generous amount to fund an aggressive outreach program, benevolence fund for members and non-members, generous CMO, etc? A good reminder to church leaders is to realize that a church’s approach to CMO is modelling for member’s approach to offerings. If it’s the first thing to get cut, what do we expect our people to do when budgets tighten?
2. The early church was “all for one and one for all!” They were generous with all of the gifts God had blessed them with. They were willing to share everything, and others noticed. Come up with at least three ways that our church can reflect that early Christian spirit of hospitality.
Answers will vary. Community food pantry, members helping the elderly with home projects, benevolence fund at church for members and non-members, etc. I’ve heard people recognize us as “oh, the church that was giving lunches for school kids.”