

# After the Party

**TEXT:**  
**Acts 2:42-47**

April 13, 2008

**W**e had a tremendous party here last Sunday.

Then, as a community, we had another one on Monday that carried on well into Tuesday and even a bit into Wednesday. The celebrations of KU's National Basketball Championship will culminate today with the parade down Massachusetts Street. Good feelings will undoubtedly linger as students and fans proudly flaunt T-shirts around town and as Coach Bill Self is seen around campus, gracing KU with his continued leadership as he stands by his team and sticks with the school for whatever comes next. But what comes next for Coach Self and the Jayhawks is a little ways away. Truly (after this afternoon) the party's over.

Our party, too, is over. 150 years – all the run-up, the planning, the preparations, the re-planning, and the sheer faith that everything would come together indeed came together in one phenomenal celebration of our life and ministry together, standing on the shoulders of those who've come before us, gazing into a wide open future for our children and for our church.

If you left early Sunday, you may have missed the final moments of the day. Perhaps you missed the cake after dinner or the video interviews with wizened members wrapping up

the program or the tearing down of tables and sorting of gifts late in the afternoon. By about 4:00 pm, the party was over, and – like Massachusetts Street on Tuesday morning when the storm ended and the crowds had dispersed – all that was left to do was clean-up.

After the party, with the throngs of people gone and just a few folks remaining, all that's left is to put away the remainders and the reminders, wipe up and sweep away the mess, and get back to life as usual, get back to church life that's normal.

Here's something I've learned, though I fruitlessly fight it on occasion. After each major event in our lives, we must redefine our normal.

After an event, after a celebration, after a tremendous milestone in which we've invested ourselves heart and soul, there is no returning to normal. We're affected. We're changed. And we hear that very message in our Scripture today, as we hear how the apostles and the crowds carried on after that first great birthday celebration of the church.

Though somewhat out of order for our liturgical year, the lectionary plays into the ethereal hands of FPC perfectly today. We read in Acts about the events immediately following Pentecost, which we won't actually celebrate as a family of faith for four more weeks.

Our lesson this morning comes after thousands descend upon Jerusalem for the Holy Festival of Weeks, the original Pentecost that fell 50 days (or 7 weeks) after Passover and marked the harvest season.<sup>i</sup> People have come in from different cities, regions, and states to celebrate God's abundance and give thanks for good harvest and good life together. The atmosphere is nothing less than riotous, as many accuse Peter and James and the rest of being drunk at 9:00 am. And the reality is nothing short of miraculous when the Spirit descends, the people are united, Peter stands up to preach, and following the benediction ~~~ no one leaves. Instead, after the party is over and the large festival crowds have dispersed and disappeared, many remained.

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."<sup>ii</sup>*

In his commentary on this passage (and indeed on the behavior of those after the party), Douglas Wingeier writes: "Some point out that Luke's snapshots of the early church are idealistic. Maybe that's true ... the church would soon have problems and challenges ... however ... something profound had happened to these people. They had been transformed. And through them and those after them the world would begin to be transformed as well."<sup>iii</sup>

“Something ... happened to these people. They had been transformed ...”<sup>iv</sup>

When the Spirit descends on the gathered crowd, when the worship and the praise and the sharing of food and the belonging in fellowship all blow together into the perfect storm of faith, you get what those first new disciples found in the days after that first Pentecost; and you get what we have here centuries later – a long standing family of faith reinvigorated for the work and worship that comes now that we can no longer return to normal.

After the party, there’s a new normal.

Last Monday morning, when I walked into the church, I was asked by more than a few people if I was glad it was all over, if I felt better, if I felt that things were settling down. And, I will admit to you, that for about an hour, yeah, I did. Then, we were off to the races. In addition to all the committee meetings, Boy Scout meetings, music rehearsals, preschool classes, Small World classes, pastoral care calls, and continued clean-up that went on inside these walls this past week, I saw more of our members out and about in the community sharing our Good News than I’ve seen in quite a while.

Wednesday and Thursday found many of you at KU or downtown for *The Faith Club* events. We as a church were well represented – in sheer numbers of attendees, as well as in amazing leadership from those on the steering committee and by the great display set up alongside those from other faith partners proclaiming all the ways we at

FPC care for our community and for each other.

After tearing down and cleaning up from that great interfaith event, we rolled right into the weekend as partners in the *Fair Trade Conference* held at ECM and the *Theologian in Residence* programs that brought the acclaimed Bart Ehrman back to his home town. All these events picked our brains, challenged our faith, and pushed us to claim our convictions for biblical literacy, theological understanding, and social justice.

On the heels of those events, we roll right back into this Lord’s Day, where we have all gathered together again – breaking bread in Eucharist and fellowship time, meeting in this sacred place for the prayers and for our worship, and connecting with each other and with the Spirit that recharges us and sends us back out into the world for the next week of work and worship that lay before us.

And if you think it gets back to normal now, I’m afraid that maybe before we even read this morning’s Scripture lesson, we’d already taken it deeply to heart.

*“[We’ve] devoted [ourselves] to the ... teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... wonders and signs [are being] done ... All who [believe ... have] all things in common: [we share] our possessions and goods ... [with] all, as any [has] need. Day by day [we spend] much time together in the [church], [we break bread from house to house] and [eat our] food with glad and generous hearts, praising God ...”<sup>v</sup>*

After the party, there’s a new normal. Look at the list of gifts given in honor the ministry this

church has done over the past 150 years in an effort to provide for further ministry in future years to come. The gifts are varied – just as we are – and exemplify the incredibly practical (151 oz of dish soap) to the incredibly heavy (150+ lbs of sand for the playground sandbox) to the incredibly funny (a single 150wt light bulb) to the incredible monetary gifts large and small and mathematically confusing (150 pennies, 150 dollars, 150 ½ dollars).

After the party, there’s a new normal. Look at the growing ways we gather together to break the bread and share the fellowship of table with each other. If that language sounds stilted and “churchy” think of it this way. How often do we joke that Presbyterians absolutely cannot get together without eating? Again, Wingeier astutely points out that, “Christians have always found strength and a renewed sense of unity by sitting in fellowship around a table.”<sup>vi</sup> And we do – gathering as a full church family last Sunday over the incredible luncheon catered by Maceli’s, gathering with all the saints at the communion table in first service to share the weekly Eucharist, gathering in small groups this afternoon at Zig and Mac’s to support mission in Nicaragua, gathering with other grad students at local restaurants every month or so to support and encourage each other, gathering in each others homes for ‘Dinners for 8’ to know and serve each other better, gathering each week for coffee and cookies and doughnuts and healthy foods of fruits and veggies as the children run wild through the room and the older generation sits watching the legacy they leave. Wherever

two or more gather in the name of Christ<sup>vii</sup>, in the friendship and unity that comes from sharing this place and sharing this purpose, we break the bread and share the fellowship laid out for us by the example of the earliest church.

After the party, there's a new normal. I could go on all day about this congregation's particular devotion to teaching, learning, and education that continues to offer new insights and options for us all. The commitment and love shown by faithful Sunday school teachers who form our youngest members, guide our youth, and expand the minds of our adults, the commitment we show to sharing the Good News with each new generation as we present our 4<sup>th</sup> graders with Bibles and send our graduates into the world with reminders of the roots of their faith that will always support them, not to mention the lengthy list of topics, events, speakers, and classes that challenge us and comfort us – all of which can be found and are celebrated on posters in the halls, lists in our brochures, and will soon be accessible on our website.

After the party, there's a new normal and a renewed connection within this family of faith. Look around you. Look down at your bulletin, at the hymnal in your lap or by your feet, at the faces that are upturned with you now and will bow with you in a few moments for prayer. Look at the blue cards waiting for you to address and the 'Thank Yous' listed in the bulletin and on the birthday boards in the narthex from those whose lives are touched by your prayers. We meet on Wednesday, Fridays, and

Sundays. We gather in the church, at the Manor, and at the Lake. Through service, compassionate care, welcoming smiles, warm meals, and the grace of God, we devote ourselves to worship, to the sacraments, and to the prayers.

In the days, weeks, and years that have led to this point, we have been formed and transformed. In the celebrations of this past week, we have been changed. In the devotion we have to one another and to our Lord, we are renewed. And as we go forward with new energy, new commitment, and a new 150 years to shape ~~~ things will stagnate. There will be challenges. There will be conflict. There will be confusion. The witness in Acts bears this out as the story of that earliest church continues. Just read on into chapters 5 and 6<sup>viii</sup>.

In fact, Beverly Roberts Gaventa writes that we should be careful in our reading of Acts 2:42-47, for

*"Later incidents that seem to contradict these portraits suggest that Luke's characterization may be a idealized picture."*<sup>ix</sup>

To that, today, I say, "So be it, and so what?" Why shouldn't we, aware of our realities, strive for the ideal and continue to celebrate all that is good and vibrant and exciting, even after the party. Let's let the ideal be our normal ~ however it may appear ~ with new members, new programs, and a new associate pastor on our horizon.

To those who made each aspect of last week's party a success, to those who have planned and replanned and then cleaned-up, to those who joined in on any

and all parts of the fun, and to those who joined us in spirit but couldn't be here in person ~~~ Thank You. Now the party's over, but the next steps of our life together are just beginning. May we continue with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love<sup>x</sup>, devoted to each other, devoted to our mission, and devoted above all to the example and call of our Lord.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the One still creating, redeeming, and moving in our midst – Amen.

**This sermon delivered by  
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- i. The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins Publishers) 1993, Leviticus 23:15-22.
- ii. Ibid., Acts 2:42.
- iii. Keeping Holy Time, "Studying the Revised Common Lectionary Year A", Douglas E. Wingeier, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press) 2001, p. 171.
- iv. Ibid.
- v. NRSV, Acts 2:42-47. *adapted*.
- vi. Keeping Holy Time, p. 171.
- vii. NRSV, Matthew 18:20.
- viii. NRSV, *footnote* p. 2062.
- ix. Ibid.
- x. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part II – Book of Order, v. 2007-2009 (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly) 2005, W-4.4003-h.