

THE EARLY CHURCH'S CORE VALUES

Acts 5:12-26

INTRO

Let's re-situate ourselves in the book of Acts. In 1:8, Jesus commissioned these early believers to be his witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and working out to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Chapters 1-3 show their witness in Jerusalem and chapters 4-5 detail the opposition to that witness in the form of persecution, persecution that by chapter 8 will propel them out to Judea and Samaria.

Today's passage follows on the heels of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, and it comes in two parts: 1) a summary statement of the activities of the early church, and 2) a narrative of the second wave of persecution.

This is the third summary statement so far (2:42-47 and 4:32-37). All three have common themes such as Spirit-filled unity, radical generosity, and the explosive growth of the church; this summary highlights a fourth theme, their healing ministry. And in the persecution that follows we see the church's teaching ministry.

[READ Acts 5:12-26]

We just read of two of the early church's core values – they were a healing community and a teaching community. Our church shares these core values.

What are core values anyway? They are the ways God has uniquely wired a church, ways that give that church a unique culture, baked-in qualities that are evident to anyone who walks in the door. For example, another core value of Altadena is that we are “a welcoming community.” Whether you are visiting or have been here for 30 years, you should sense a warmth and welcome that goes beyond pleasantries and comes from an experience of the welcome of God through Christ.

In our text we see these two qualities of a healing community and a teaching community and how they are inseparable.

I. **The Healing Community (vv 12-16)**

What do we mean that they were a healing community?

Look in v. 12:

“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.”

The Bible often uses the word “signs and wonders” to refer to what we call miracles.¹ The word “sign” shows that miracles always pointed beyond themselves – it was not primarily about the supernatural act being performed but the God who performed it.²

To be clear, “signs and wonders” were supernatural acts – acts against nature, acts that humans themselves could never do. What kind of acts are we talking about?

Vv 15-16 spell it out – incredibly sick people and people afflicted by demons were healed. In short, people who were unwhole were made more whole. People whose lives reflected the devastating effects of the fall into sin began to reflect more of the new creation to come.

For us today, the church is not necessarily a place where people are instantly healed of physical maladies or where demons are regularly cast out, although both happen in Christian communities around the world. When I say “healing,” I mean not only supernatural acts of physical healing but healing of the effects of the fall in any way – whether physical, emotional, relational, spiritual, or healing of the mind – the increase of shalom where there was once chaos.

Being “a healing community” is one of our church’s core values. The language under that heading says: “Since the gospel brings healing to broken sinners, we are a community where such healing from God is experienced. God uses his people to be instruments in this healing.”

What do we see from these verses about this healing community?

A) The Healing community pictures God’s mercy and compassion
Keep in mind, the narrative right before this was God’s judgment on Ananias and Sapphira. Here we see God’s mercy on the heels of judgment.³

“Now *many* signs and wonders were done *regularly* among the people...” – a clear reminder of God’s character, that though he deals

¹ *Reformation Study Bible*, Theological Note, p. 532.

² *RSB*, p. 532.

³ Matthew Henry, *Whole Bible Commentary*

seriously with sin, he is at the same time “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7).

Healing highlights God’s compassion toward broken and hurting people in very tangible ways.

B) A Healing Community is made up of those who have been healed

C) A Healing Community gains respect from the unbelieving world

(v. 13) “None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.”

We see this double reaction from unbelievers observing this healing community: fear and respect.

Unbelievers likely had heard of how seriously God takes half-hearted devotion in the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

People saw the high standard of integrity of this Christian community, making them not dare join unless they were ready to give up everything to follow Jesus.

But at the same time, they held the believers in “high esteem.”

[In times of clear outward brokenness and devastation, the church has an opportunity to gain or lose the respect of the watching world. I heard an interview of a teacher in NC whose community was laid waste by the hurricane. Through tears, she shared how her church had fed 1,000 people that day and was seeking ways to show the tangible love of Christ to her community.

It's no coincidence that two of the major hospitals in Birmingham over the last decades are Brookwood Baptist and St. Vincent’s Catholic.

Christians have the most motivation of anyone to show compassion and seek the wholistic healing of others because of the healing we’ve received in Christ.

The healing community of the church gains the notice of the world.

D) A Healing Community is a key ingredient to church growth

(v 14) “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”

“*More than ever*” – really? Even in the face of persecution? Yes, a healing community is a growing community, because, as we’ll see, healing points people to the Healer.

Notice too – “multitudes of both men and women” – why spell this out? Against the cultural norms of his day, Luke mentions women frequently in his writings, often as the ones playing significant roles. As a Gentile outsider himself, he made clear that the gospel makes cultural outsiders into awe-filled insiders.

No matter who you are or where you’re from or what you’ve done, Jesus invites you into his healing community of the Church.

- E) A Healing Community requires action in order to be healed
 (v 15) There were so many new believers that “they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them.”

What’s so special about Peter’s shadow? Nothing really. In Acts 19, we read that “handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched [Paul’s] skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and evil spirits came out of them” (19:12).

The point is not magical shadows or Kleenex. The point is the same as the woman who was bleeding for over a decade who reached out in a crowd and touched the fringe of Jesus’ garment and was healed (Mt 9:20-22).

The point is faith. It’s what that woman had in common with these people lining the streets. They knew that Jesus could heal. And they took action to put themselves in a situation to get near to the healing power of Jesus.

Three brief applications here:

- 1) This is not saying that if you have enough faith, God will instantly change a broken situation in your life. The quantity of your faith is not the issue. It’s who your faith is in.
- 2) This is not saying that healing will always come in the time or in the way that we think is best. Sometimes healing comes through what seems at the time to be our worst fears coming true.

- 3) This *is* saying that **we can sabotage our own healing**. Pride keeps us from being healed. Pride is the one sick person who refused to line the side of the street because he thought: “I don’t want to be a burden to Peter. There are so many others who need healing, I can wait. My condition isn’t that bad after all.” And he misses it entirely.

Healing requires a Spirit-empowered openness to being healed. It requires an admission that we are sick, that we can’t heal ourselves, and that there is only One who can.

- F) A Healing Community is magnetic
(v 16) “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed”

The word got out, and the next circle out was drawn in (first Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria,...). The believers will soon go to Judea, but for now, Judea is coming to them.

What about us? Do people walking around the park know this healing community? Are people being drawn in? Is this healing community magnetic to the six apartments within a mile of here?

The Church is a healing community.

It is also:

II. **A Teaching Community (vv 17-26)**

After this summary, we pick back up the narrative of Acts – here we see the second wave of persecution.

Notice that both waves were started by healing: the first from the healing of the lame man and this second from the activities of the healing community that we just described. (A Healing Community will always be opposed).

Let’s summarize the events that unfold in vv 17-26, keeping an ear out for the core value of teaching:

The religious leaders, here particularly the party of the Sadducees, were jealous of the apostles for their growing popularity and influence with the

common people.⁴ Of the two groups that made up the Jews' ruling council called the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees were often wealthier and held more powerful positions than the Pharisees.⁵

Their jealousy, mixed perhaps with zeal for the law,⁶ led them to arrest the apostles (this time all 12) and put them in prison.

Something unexpected happened there. (V. 20) “But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.’” – Jesus, the living water,⁷ the resurrection and the life,⁸ the way, the truth and the life,⁹ the one who has the words of eternal life.¹⁰

So early the next morning, they did just that, and when the officers checked their empty cell, the reaction of the chief priests is noteworthy: (v 24) “they were greatly perplexed..., wondering what this would come to” – i.e. their minds were blown, they were at a loss.¹¹

Their minds were blown even more to find that the apostles were “standing in the temple and teaching the people,” for which they promptly rearrested them, setting up next week’s sermon.

Did you hear the command of the angel? “Go and stand in the temple, [the very place most dangerous for you to be] and speak to the people all the words of this ‘Life’ [the very thing most dangerous for you to say].”

And they do. Why? Because the early church was a teaching community. Teaching was integral to the church’s mission. Being witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus required opening their mouths to teach, which, by the way, is one reason why we still have sermons and Sunday School and Bible study and the like today.

III. How They’re Connected

Flip back to Acts 1, look in verse 1: “In the first book, ‘O Theophilus, I have dealt with *all that Jesus began to do and teach...*”

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 113.

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Sadducees-Pharisees.html>

⁶ Clinton Arnold, *Bible Backgrounds: John and Acts*, p. 255.

⁷ Jn 4

⁸ Jn 11

⁹ Jn 14

¹⁰ Lk 6:68

¹¹ Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek NT*, p. 366.

The gospel of Luke was what Jesus *began* to do and teach, implying that Acts is what Jesus *continued* to do and teach, by his Spirit, through his people.

In Luke 7, when John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus if he's the one they're waiting for or should they keep waiting, Jesus said: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

The healing and the teaching is one: the gospel in word and deed – the healing of broken bodies picturing the healing of broken hearts.

The gospel is more than truth to be taught, and the gospel is more than deeds to be done. It's truth with legs, truth that transforms a life, truth that heals. It's what every human heart longs for.

Where do you need healing? (Relational, spiritual, an area of sin, trauma, resentment). Does this healing, teaching community sound attractive? Let me tell you something – you're in one right now. Have you allowed yourself to experience this healing community?

Don't stay inside. Come lay on your mat in the street. Come to the One who heals by his own wounds and find Life.