

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

Feb. 23rd, 2025

PM Worship Service

Sermon Title: Gathered Together

Sermon Text: Acts 20:7-16

Acts 20:7 ¶ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Acts 20:8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered.

Acts 20:9 And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

Acts 20:10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him."

Acts 20:11 And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.

Acts 20:12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

Acts 20:13 ¶ But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go by land.

Acts 20:14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene.

Acts 20:15 And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus.

Acts 20:16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Main Point: The church must never be distracted from regular, basic, ordinary things that God has given to build up his church.

Outline:

1. The Lord's Day
2. The Lord's Supper
3. The Lord's Comfort

Introduction

When I used to preach around the state of Mississippi there was a beautiful old church that was just stunning. It was so old it didn't have a bathroom in it. The bathroom was in a separate building. And the pews actually had doors at the end of each row, so you had to open the door to enter your pew. These dated back to the days when families used to purchase their pews that they would sit in.

And the pulpit was exposed. It was right out almost in the middle of the congregation. It didn't give you much to hide behind, and there was this big velvet pillow you would sit your Bible on to preach. And I always loved preaching there just because it was so interesting and just different.

But one thing I always knew was that the second my sermon began there was a particular lady off to the side. In my head I called her "Sleepy Sue," though I don't know her real name. And each time I preached she would lay her head against the sunny glass of the window and fall asleep. And as soon as I would pray she would wake up as if nothing had ever happened. And I learned to be amused by it, rather than be offended by it.

And tonight's passage introduces us to Sleepy Sue's predecessor. He was a man named Eutychus. And poor Eutychus is the father of *all* those who fall asleep in church. Perhaps you feel some connection with Eutychus. Maybe even right now, I don't know.

Except in the case of Eutychus, he literally fell asleep in church. He fell hard, actually.

Now the reason I draw attention to Eutychus here in the introduction is that I don't really want to focus on him in the sermon, and so this is really his moment in the sun. This introduction is really his moment to shine. I think when most of us read this passage, Eutychus is almost all we can think of. He falls out of this building, falls three stories to the ground.

One of the books we read in seminary was called *Saving Eutychus: How to preach God's word and keep people awake*. And in this book Gary Millar and Phil Campbell give some advice to preachers so that we never have another death of poor Eutychus on our hands as ministers.

But what I'm most interested in here tonight is the practice of the church as we see it here in Acts 20. One of the things that many today believe is that "organized religion" as we know it today was invented by church organizations to control people and exert power in society. But we see here that already the regular defining practices of the church even as we know it today are already in place. And so tonight rather than dwell upon poor Eutychus' tragic death and joyful resurrection I'd rather we look at just how the church is *doing* church during Paul's time.

And the three defining realities of the church that we see in this chapter are: The Lord's Day, The Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Comfort. I'd like to focus on all three, and offer some reflection on how we should value these things, ourselves.

1. The Lord's Day

First, this passage introduces us to what seems to be the first *recorded* formal observance of The Lord's Day.

Luke records for us the final days of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. He is preparing to leave, but first he visits nearby churches in various cities. They end up in Troas.

It's in Troas that the majority of the events in our reading take place – certainly the parts of the passage that we will dwell on.

So what happens in Troas? Well there is a gathering of the Christians in that place. But notice the timing of it here in this first point. Luke says it was “on the first day of the week, when we were gathered to break bread.”

The first day of the week. If you translated the Greek literally it actually says “the first day after the Sabbath.” Because remember, for Jews Saturday was the Sabbath. But these Christians don't meet on that day, they meet on the day after that now.

Why? Well the resurrection of Jesus has a profound impact on how God's people worship. The Sabbath ends up moving from the last day of the week to the first day of the week, in part because Luke 24 tells us that Jesus rose on the *first* day of the week.

I'm actually going to just read from our own church's confession about the Sabbath because I think it's so excellent and clear on this:

“As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He has particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week: and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.” (WCF 21.7)

The Confession says a couple of things worth noting. One is, you have to meet together on some particular day, right? They say it's a law of nature, which is another way of saying, it just makes sense. And we know that God has said in his word that we should set aside one day in seven, but which day in seven has not always been set in stone.

Before the resurrection that day was the last day of the week, but now that the resurrection has happened, that day is the first day of the week, and will be until the end of the world.

The first time we actually see it called the “Lord’s Day” is in Revelation; John tells us that he was “in the spirit” on what he calls “the Lord’s Day.” In 1 Cor. 16 Paul instructs the churches on how to take up collection, and he says it should be done specifically “on the first day of every week.”

The resurrection is such a defining event, such an earth shaking triumph that it even changes how and when people are meant to worship God. It changes what we talk about when we meet. It changes our focus. But notice... the substance of the Sabbath still hasn’t changed. It’s still a day for worshiping God. It’s still a day for devoting our time and attention to him. It’s a day to set our eyes on the Messiah. It’s a day to set aside our regular worldly concerns and meet together with his people. That’s always what the Sabbath has been about, even before Christ came.

And that’s what we see happening here in Troas.

There is a purposefulness in their gathering, as well. It’s intentional, not just sort of an accident – well Paul happens to be here. Well no, they gathered to break bread, not necessarily first and foremost to hear Paul speak.

See, they don’t just happen to be breaking bread. The passage says they gathered to break bread. In other words, there is a purpose and a reason why they were together, and it was to break bread. If it wasn’t for the breaking of bread, they wouldn’t have had a reason to meet. Do you see that? Their gathering is purposeful and centered around this meal that Luke tells us about.

We’ll focus on what’s meant by this phrase “breaking bread” in the next point, but for the moment, please note that they are gathered for a purpose, and the purpose is to do something that Jesus commanded them to do: to break bread.

From the earliest days of the church this was their practice. There is a very early Christian document called *The Didache* (which just means “the teaching”) that is thought to date back very early in the Christian church, and it talks about Lord’s Day worship. Listen to what the Didache says:

“And according to the divinely instituted day of the Lord, having been gathered together, break a loaf. And eucharistize (literally “give thanks”),

having beforehand confessed your failings, so that your sacrifice may be pure.”

Scholars think the Didache was from as early as 60 AD, which is very close to these events in Acts. So the idea of Lord’s Day worship, this idea of Christians intentionally gathering on the first day of the week to worship Jesus and break bread isn’t a late development that people came up with way later.

It was something that Christians began to observe very early on after the resurrection, and certainly very early on in the church.

So when we meet on Sunday mornings and evenings together, keep in mind that this has long been the practice of Christians dating to within years of the resurrection.

And my application is simple: let’s keep doing it. And let’s not follow the world’s pattern. Because the world’s pattern is toward more and more busyness. More and more work. More and more focus on supposed “productivity.” And it’s usually a very industrial model of productivity. The world will keep pushing on you to give this day up, because for them this is just like all the others. But let’s keep observing the Sabbath

- a) because it’s a command,
- b) because it’s the biblical example, and
- c) because it is a blessing that God has given to us.

Let’s not give it up or see it as an inconvenience.

2. The Lord’s Supper

The second element of the gathering here in Acts 20 is the Lord’s Supper. But it’s also the Lord’s Word. It’s the preaching by an elder of the church and the sacramental meal that they are gathered together to observe. They go hand in hand.

The day of the week is relevant, but the meal and sacrament together are the real show. This is really why they’ve come. The passage says that “Paul talked with them...and he prolonged his speech until midnight.”

In much of the world, worship services can actually be quite long. Multiple hours long, actually. In the West we put a very high value on timeliness and succinctness. But for much of the world our practices are actually quite strange. And we see here that Paul spoke for hours and hours. He is speaking as much as he can because he knows he is about to leave.

This is a people that have gathered on the Lord's Day, and the real centerpiece of their gathering is this lengthy talk that Paul has given. We would call it a sermon. It's the teaching of the Apostles that brings this group together, and I don't want you to miss that.

And notice this in the narrative: **the breaking of bread doesn't happen until Paul's sermon is complete.** Until the word of God has been delivered, there is no breaking of bread.

Calvin points this out, that there is a serious reason for this. If the sacrament was observed without the preached Word it would become like a superstitious meal. People would think there was something mystical and magical about taking the substance of a piece of bread and breaking it and sharing it, or taking the wine and pouring it and drinking it.

What sets aside the bread and wine isn't that someone waves their hand over the cup or says any magical words. What sets them apart is the preached word. Because when you take the bread and wine in faith, believing in Jesus, and believing in who he is, when you do take the bread and the wine, that which is symbolized in them becomes real *by faith*. The Spirit actually does minister to your heart in the Supper. He really does feed your soul with his bread, and he really does give you spiritual drink with the wine.

But if you've ever just eaten bread or drank wine without being in the gathered church with the word preached and ministered, all you did was have food.

In college, I had a religion class that made us walk some kind of prayer maze and at one point there was a station with juice and bread. My friends and I refused to participate in this supposed sacrament because there was no ministry of the word. They wanted us to participate either in some bare memorial (which isn't what the Supper is) or else some kind of superstition.

It's the preached Word, met with Spirit-given faith that makes the difference in the Supper. Now, Paul's sermon may have been... a little long. And it was certainly too long for poor Eutychus, but the principle is still the case that after he preached, verse 11 says "when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while." So they do have the sacrament once Paul's sermon is finished.

And that's our practice here as well. There *is* no sacrament without the preached word. There is also no sacrament if you don't obey Jesus by remembering and believing. The Lord's Supper isn't magical. It has no power on its own. It's simply God taking these common elements, and we take them in faith, and because we believe the word we've just heard, the Spirit says, "Here you go. It's the thing you need most... food for your souls. Christ himself."

3. The Lord's Comfort

Third, I want you to notice another dominant theme in this passage, and that's the theme of The Lord's Comfort.

Peppered throughout this passage is this repeated emphasis on encouragement.

Look at this: 20:1 "Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell."

20:2, "When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece."

20:11-12 "Paul had broken bread and eaten, and he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted."

Paul's ministry in these places is dominated by this purpose of bringing comfort. Bringing encouragement. Paul is an encouragement bringer.

Comfort has more of a sense of being built up. Being strengthened.

The Greek word *Paraklesas* means to come along side of. Jesus calls the *Spirit* a comforter. But that doesn't mean that the Spirit will only make you feel

good. Jesus says one of the things the Spirit does is he convicts us of sin. And that feels bad. So sometimes to be comforted or be encouraged doesn't necessarily mean to be made happy.

So it's actually possible for the Bible to tell you things that make you uncomfortable or make you maybe even feel bad about yourself, and yet biblically you're being comforted. Sometimes real biblical comfort or encouragement does make us feel bad.

In fact, that's what the ministry of the Word is. The faithful ministry of the Word tends to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Sometimes we need to be stung, and sometimes we need to be soothed.

But we always need to be strengthened. We always need to be built up. And that's what the work of comforting looks like, and we see it here tonight.

Often Christians are tempted to resort to tricks or gimmicks or quick microwaved solutions to how we can grow, but the truth is, reading and sitting under the word of God, just like these believers in Troas did, is the best way to be built up or comforted in a biblical way.

Conclusion

As we think about what the church is, what the church does, and what the church really should be, it is tempting to get sidetracked by making activities, programs, and "events" the measure of whether a church is active, of whether a church is healthy, of whether a church is accomplishing the mission God has given to it.

Here is an important question when it comes to whether you are part of a healthy church: are we doing what the church does? Are we meeting weekly on the Lord's Day with God's people? Are we sitting under the faithful preaching and ministry of the Word? Are we receiving the sacraments that Jesus has given to enrich our hearts? Are we being encouraged and built up for the work of living the Christian life?

I care deeply about the health of this church. And so I have a barometer that I deploy often. Before and after church, I ask myself, are people talking about

spiritual things, the things of God, things we learned from the Bible? Or do we quickly move to worldly things, entertainment, sports, politics, distractions? Things like that?

It's easy to think that a church is healthy if there is a lot going on, if people are running around like chickens with their heads cut off, if there are more activities than people can even be part of. Let me suggest that we as a church must be FAR more interested in growing deep than growing busy. **Busyness is not one of the fruit of the spirit.**

Christian, love the ordinary life of the church. Love the ordinary ebb and flow of meeting together with God's people, hearing the word, praying the word, singing the word, tasting the word, and being built up by the word.

This is what you need... it's what I need... and it's what the church has always needed.

Let's pray.