

Acts 2:42-47 - DiCicco

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[0:00] Now what? You ever had that feeling? You ever achieved something and had that feeling kind of nagging you in the back of your head? If you cross the finish line of a race you've trained for for months, maybe get your degree.

I remember as a kid, when I was younger, sometimes I get this feeling on Christmas or my birthday, after unwrapping that present that I'd waited so long for that I knew was coming, played for it for a bit, and then just left with that nagging feeling.

Well, now what? Kids, maybe you've felt that before. Maybe some of you who became Christians as adults know this feeling.

Kind of like the people who responded to Peter's message in our first reading this morning. They hear what he has to say and they ask him, what are we going to do? Now what?

Maybe for some of you, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, but this feeling is kind of universal. At least plenty of people I know know this feeling, religious or not.

[1:11] In my own life, two examples stand out to me. The best two trips of my life, or maybe I should say two of the best, happened within a couple weeks of each other. The first trip was me and my best friend from high school.

We went rock climbing around New Zealand, which was pretty great. And it ended with this five-pitch climb on this pretty sheer mountain face. A little bit exposed.

Really nerve-wracking. In some ways, this was completely different from all the other climbing we'd done. Because instead of just going up one pitch and coming back down, when my friend Jackson got to the top of the pitch, he would belay me to where he was.

And then we would do that again. And again and again and again and again. It's very similar, but completely different. Same movements, but the stakes were much higher. The second trip was my honeymoon.

Jasmine and I got married in New Zealand. That's why Jackson, my high school friend, was there. And after the wedding, Jasmine and I drove around the country for a couple of weeks. It was a great trip because it was at this point the high point of our relationship.

[2:20] I mean, there's good food, an amazing place to spend a couple of weeks. If you haven't been to New Zealand, maybe try. But what made it so great is that both of these experiences were sort of, pun maybe intended, mountaintop moments.

Mountaintop experiences in their own ways. Yet, sometimes it's at the top of the mountain that we get this feeling. It's when we reach that achievement that we ask the question sometimes, now what?

For me, literally at the top of the mountain with my friend Jackson, it was more of a technical question. How are we getting down from here? What are we doing? For Jasmine and I, the question popped in my head when we got back to America and we closed the door in our first apartment. Mountaintop experience over, normal life beginning, now what? This is the question I think that Luke, the guy who wrote this book we're reading today called Acts, this is the question he's answering in the passage Daniel just read a minute ago.

What happens when God starts a revolution? What happens when God comes down to be with his people? Luke paints a picture of the organic outcome of the life of Jesus, the life he promised taking root and flowering in the earliest group of his followers.

[3:43] We're going to take a closer look at this picture. First, at the community itself, what kind of life these early Christians lived, and then at the results of this kind of living.

I hope this morning, whether you call yourself a Christian or not, that the picture Luke paints of this radically ordinary community is compelling. That the attitudes, the actions of these people might

challenge us in the same way we think about our relationships.

Relationships towards one another and our relationships, relationship towards God. But before we take a closer look, would you pray with me just one more time? God, would you fill me with your spirit that I might speak your words this morning, that we might hear your voice.

Would you fill those who listen with your spirit, that we might be faithful to live the life that recognizes and rejoices in your son, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Well, if you were here last week, you heard Daniel bring to life the story that comes just before the passage we read. In that story, God kept his promise to be with his people.

[5:02] After raising Jesus from the dead, and before Jesus left his followers by ascending into heaven on a cloud, two things that have been a theme of our service this far, Jesus told his followers, his disciples, to wait for the Holy Spirit who would fulfill this promise God made to be with his people.

Even more than this, that the spirit was the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all the people of the earth. And if I can step back even another week to paraphrase Dave, maybe to double click on something he said, this moment when Jesus ascends into heaven, this is weird.

Even if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, even for those of us who do, it's not ordinary for someone to be raised from the dead. It's not ordinary for someone to take a cloud elevator into the sky and to promise to return.

I think we can say as Christians that these are extraordinary kind of moments. But this is what happened. It's the radically different part of the story God is writing.

Well, just last week, Daniel unfolded for us what happens after this, which is also a little weird. It was the story of this moment where the Holy Spirit, this promised presence of God, came down to be with God's people.

[6:26] And in an abnormal way, God had been among his people before in the temple, but now the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the individual believers themselves. This is radical.

It's different. Even so different that the people around this group of believers notice when this happens. People start crowding around, and one of Jesus' followers gets up.

We heard about it in this first reading this morning, and he explains to the crowd who had gathered that this spirit is the fulfillment of God's promises. This is what we've been waiting for.

The resurrection of Jesus proves his identity of God, and Peter brings this to the crowd. And the fact that these people have executed this Jesus as a criminal, this one who was actually the Christ, causes them to ask this question, now what?

What do we do? Peter's message is captured in this sentence that comes at the end. Save yourselves from this crooked generation. This message of the resurrection is that God has made the world this way, and we have sort of gone that way.

[7:35] That if we have split off from the God who is life, then eventually that leads to death. And so Peter's call to save themselves from the crooked way in which we all live is just to come back, to turn and to come back to God, to come back in line with the way he has ordered and made the world.

To see the world as God made it, to live life as God intended it. The promise of the resurrection is that for anyone who trusts in what Jesus has done, we can sort of ride the coattails of his victory over death.

That by holding on to Jesus, we can have the everlasting life he promises, because he has defeated death. And again, as we read this morning, the crowd responds, those who received Peter's word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

For the followers of Jesus, who were only about 130 before this day, this was a mountaintop moment. A moment where everything radically changes.

And so the question, now what? What happens when God makes good on his promises? What happens when his people receive the down payment on eternal life that's waiting for them?

[9:04] Well, it's not what you'd expect. At least it's not what I would expect, or what I imagine I would expect, if I was reading this story for the first time. This mountaintop moment comes.

What's going to happen next? It's right here in the first verse of our text today. These 3,000 who received the message, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

In a word, what happens next is rather ordinary. Luke, this author, paints a picture of the normal life of this new community. They devote themselves to the apostles' teaching.

Wouldn't it be great to sit at Peter's feet, to walk the dusty roads outside Jerusalem with John and just throw all of your questions at them?

What was Jesus like? I've heard about him. I've heard you teach me about him, but did he smile much? Did he ever stop smiling?

[10:06] What was he like? What does he want me to know? How does he want us to live? What does this new life look like? I wonder what questions, church, you would have for the apostles.

Thankfully, God has provided, through his apostles, a record of Jesus' life for us. More than this, even in the letters of the New Testament, we can see them work out the implications of his life and death and resurrection as the truth of Jesus hits real people in real places in their real life scenarios. We see in the New Testament how the resurrection radically changes everything. And yet, in a very profound way, the new life of this community is radically ordinary.

They devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, but also to fellowship, being with one another, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Those who believed Peter's message have intertwined themselves with the others who have believed it.

Their lives have become connected. The breaking of bread is just a way to say that they had dinner together. It could also speak of the commitment of this group to remembering the Lord's death, the death of Jesus, by coming to the Lord's table, which we'll do after the sermon.

[11:28] Just a side note, if you identify with this group of early believers, if you are devoted to the things that the apostles have taught in this book, the things that God has given his people, if you are devoted to fellowship with another Christian church, here or elsewhere, we welcome you to this table with us this morning.

But these people in this earliest church were devoted also to the prayers. It's a weird way to phrase this. I don't know if things seem weird to you.

Apparently, a lot of things seem weird to me, but I find this a weird way to phrase this, the prayers. Does it mean that they're just a prayerful group of people? Maybe. I mean, in chapter one, Luke describes the followers of Jesus before the Holy Spirit comes as meeting together and devoting themselves to prayer.

Singular. So why the plural here? The prayers. I think it's because, as we will see in a minute, this community continued to worship God in the Jewish temple.

And they prayed from this book, the book of Psalms that we have in our Bible, the prayers of God's people that praised God for his work to redeem all things.

[12:43] They praised God for his promises. Maybe we can put it another way. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church blooms in radically ordinary ways.

They devote themselves to learning from the eyewitnesses, to being together, to eating together, and they keep doing the same thing. The same prayers they've prayed their whole lives, yet completely different because the resurrection changes everything.

So their normal lives become radically ordinary. But it wasn't all ordinary. I mean, I don't know if you heard, as Daniel read it, verse 43 says that awe came upon every soul.

They were amazed, stunned. They were struck by what had become ordinary in their community because through the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection, these apostles, God was doing many wonders and signs.

Again, abnormal things. We could call them weird. That's apparently my word today. Weird things. In the same way God had attested to the identity of Jesus through his mighty works and signs and wonders, he validates the witness of the apostles to the resurrection.

[13:57] Validates their teaching through the same kind of thing. Radically ordinary that now the message of these men is marked by the same mighty works. So what happens when God makes good on his promise?

What does it look like when God puts a down payment on eternal life by giving his people his own spirit? Well, those who accept it become marked. Marked with this new way of living.

The resurrection changes everything. They go throughout sort of a normal day, but in a different way. What Peter had just preached and what Daniel drew our eyes to in the passage before this one when he preached last week is that if and because Jesus was raised from the dead, he is not just another person.

He's not just some carpenter from up north. No, he is Lord and Christ. He is, as Peter will put it in next week's passage, the author of life. And everyone who hears this message and accepts the implications of it for their own life is radically changed.

The whole community becomes tuned to the same resurrection frequency. Do you notice how tightly Luke weaves them together?

[15:14] This is something that comes out from start to finish in this passage. Not only is Luke describing this whole mass of 3,000 people as if it was a single organism, but over and over, Luke stresses the harmony, the unity, the togetherness that marks this new community.

Their new resurrection life defines them. And if this is the same group that is introduced before Peter's message in the passage before this one, they're a massively diverse group.

Most of them are Jews back in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, but they're from everywhere. All over the ancient world. And not all of them were Jewish by birth. This was a diverse group that became radically redefined by the gospel, the good news, the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and all its implications.

How so? Luke shows us. Isn't that nice? Right here in verse 44, it says, all who believed were together and had all things in common. This word common comes from the same word as the word fellowship up in verse 42.

So what does it look like to be devoted to your community? You know, verse 45, they were selling their possessions and belongings. That's their land and their things and distributing them, the proceeds, to everyone as any had need.

[16:44] That's devotion. That's community. That's radically ordinary. Because on the one hand, this is really surprising.

I mean, what community actually lives like this? Normally the ones that we're told to stay far away from. Right? But wouldn't it actually be great to live in a community where people cared for each other in this way?

Where people were so in tune to the needs of one another that they could meet those needs and if necessary, do it so selflessly that they would sell their own possessions to make sure that those in need had what they needed?

If you're not a Christian, does it surprise you to hear that this is what marked the earliest community of believers? The selfless attention and action to alleviate the need in their community?

I might be reading the political pulse wrong, but this kind of community seems to be what a lot of people my age, maybe a little younger, are desperate for or at least are really interested in.

[17:54] I want you to understand how could a community like this work? Luke would answer, come to Jesus, find out.

Like often, Christians get uneasy with this passage, but doesn't it make sense that a community formed around the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, God himself, who took it upon himself to meet our deepest need when we could not, wouldn't it make sense for his followers to do the same?

The resurrection changes everything. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church blooms in radically ordinary ways. This is ordinary because it's something we all want.

I know there are some people out there who think this sounds terrible or maybe just terribly idealistic, but here, God's people are marked out by their unity of mind, which shows itself in this selfless attention and action for the good of others, which is actually the same mind Christ had. Christ who looked not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Aren't we, as Christians, commanded to consider others more significant than ourselves?

[19:15] Following Jesus in this way is a high calling, yet a natural outcome of the resurrection, a radically new, ordinary way to live.

And so, if God's people are marked by a certain devotion, a unity of mind, what does this actually produce? what kind of effect does this have? Let's forget for a second that the effect of this day is going to be the next 24, 26 chapters in this book and focus just in on our text.

The next two verses focus in on this result. What is the result of a radically ordinary new way of life that marks the followers of Jesus? Day by day, verse 46, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.

They received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The radically ordinary life that the Spirit produces yields faithful growth according to God's purposes. is. This community marked by radically ordinary ways of life is faithfully growing. [20 : 40] The radically ordinary life of the community didn't just mark them out as those who believed what the apostles taught about Jesus. Their day by day faithfully ordinary lives shaped them more and more into the kind of people they were becoming.

This community is on that journey as they daily worship in the temple daily share community life together they receive their food with glad and generous hearts.

Hearts getting more glad and more generous with each day. Their belief which is at first like a seed of this new life planted in their hearts by God grows through day by day faithful action.

This is how God works. Can you think of anything else where incremental growth is gained by daily routine? Anything?

Kids, have you noticed any changes outside lately? I mean, we're in spring. I'm assuming that most of you kids are outside more often in April than you were in January.

[21 : 47] Could be wrong. My kids are. Even in the cold days. It's peaceful. for a minute. We can see outside the kind of result that longer days of sun and plenty of water in this last month has on the environment.

Flowers, blossoms, and buds on trees. We see the same pattern here. Daily input brings organic output. Following Jesus is not a Sunday religion, at least not in Acts chapter 2.

But by daily hearing God's word in the temple and from the apostles, daily sharing life with one another, they grow in gladness and gratitude towards God and they praise him as they receive his gifts.

More than just an internal result, though, within the community, this radically ordinary way of life makes contact with those who don't believe. Did you notice that tucked into the beginning of verse 47?

these Christians were having favor with all the people. When people from outside this group looked in, they liked what they saw. There was a favorable attitude towards this ragtag group of peculiar people.

[23 : 07] This for me is maybe the most personally challenging part of this passage. Not because I don't get it. Sometimes passages are theologically challenging. This one just, the rubber really hits the road.

It makes sense that the people around this community look at it favorably. I mean, if Peter was right when he said earlier that this generation, all generations, are crooked.

That we've deviated from the path of life God has intended. And that if, through the resurrection, through faith in what Jesus has done, we can be brought back into line with the way life ought to be lived.

If that's true, then those who are shifted back in line with the one who made it all should be a pretty attractive bunch. Their radically ordinary way of life of these faithfully growing followers of Jesus should be intuitively and implicitly attractive to everyone.

Of course, the message of this resurrection challenges the status quo as much as its implications are compelling to the general population. But later, even with a system actually opposed to God's people, Peter, the same apostle, in the reading we heard earlier, he'll urge Christians to live honorably so that those who haven't heard, haven't accepted this message, even those who are decidedly opposed to this message of resurrection and reconciliation with God might not be able to slander Christians.

[24 : 41] that actually those outside the community would be able to see what Christians do as good and it would be compelling. It would keep them from slandering God and God's people.

This is consistent throughout the New Testament. The resurrection changes everything and the result in our lives should be a marked behavior, one that we continue in day by day that changes us, grows us in gratitude, gladness, and generosity.

A behavior that should compel the people around us, should mark us as believers in Jesus Christ. Have you ever seen a group of friends and the way that they treat each other, joke with each other, help each other out, it just makes you want to be a part of that group?

In the 90s we plastered these groups on the TV and Seinfeld and Friends and all these sitcoms. Today it's probably more podcasts. You kind of feel like you know the people in the podcast and you're having a conversation with them.

We sort of understand what a compelling community looks like. This is the kind of thing that marked this early group of Christians, a community so compelling that others saw it and want it in, which is the final result that our passage shows.

[26:05] I mean, just look at the end of this passage. That's what ends up happening, right? These believers were daily living radically ordinary lives, having favor with all the people and, end of verse 47, the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

If you were in the Sunday school where Dave was talking about history before, one of the things he said in the past couple of weeks is it's not like this thing happens and then this thing happens and then this thing happens in history, but there is some causal relationships between things.

We can over-interpret or under-interpret those relationships but Luke hasn't just put all of these bullet points together and not expected us to see any relationship. It's the community that compels those outside them to join, to see Christ.

They see him on display in their lives and God adds to their number. God adds to their number daily, those who are being saved from this crooked generation.

When we talk about faithfully growing, not only those who had faith growing in their faith but God himself actually being faithful to keep his promises. That this spirit who was intended to bless the whole world does exactly that.

[27:21] That one by one as people join this community, as they hear the message of the resurrection and come to faith in Christ, they receive this Holy Spirit and so God makes good on his promises, faithfully growing his people.

God adds to their number daily, those who are being saved. God, through his people and their compelling community, draws in those who need saving. Sadly, Acts doesn't end in chapter 2 and as we go throughout Acts, we'll see many oppose this message.

It's not all Acts chapter 2 but this is the pattern for God's particular, peculiar people. even as the focus of Acts shifts to individuals, to their preaching of the resurrection across the whole ancient world, this pattern persists.

God's people devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles. Their lives are marked by the implications of the resurrection. God's people faithfully live radically ordinary lives.

So I guess the question that still echoes down through history to us this morning, the question that the resurrection itself places on us, the question that the preaching of God's word is hopefully pressing into us as his people is now what?

[28:37] Has the resurrection changed everything for you? Are we at all compelled by this community? If this morning you know that the answer is no, that the resurrection hasn't changed everything for you, wouldn't you like it to?

If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian this morning, are you at all compelled by this community? By their devotion, their selfless attention and action for those in need?

Do you sense in any way that things aren't the way they should be? That the world is out of line somehow? If that's you, can I invite you to come talk to me or one of the other pastors after the service?

Talk to whoever brought you. Let me just say here that in a lot of ways this community seems impossible. Like it might as well really be 2,000 years removed from our experience today.

But God is still calling people together in groups just as compelling as this one. With complete sincerity, I can say that we're sitting in the middle of one right now.

[29:52] I'm the new guy here, if you don't know. I've been here less than a year. So this is more a shot in the arm for you all than a pat on my own back for anything that the guy up front has to do with anything.

And I'm only up front once every five weeks, so that doesn't, you know. But the generosity, the hospitality, the genuine care of this community for one another is unfortunately in the Christian world extraordinary.

Fortunately for us, though, it's radically ordinary. I don't know if you college students have felt this. My family and I are truly grateful to be a part of this community. Because you guys live in a radically ordinary, extraordinary kind of way.

So as we, as Christians, hear this word today, this question, in some ways, it should encourage us as a church, it should encourage you.

The life, the community that you have cultivated is compelling. And we're so glad to be a part of it. But that question still lingers for us too.

[31:09] Has the resurrection changed everything? Friends, are you at all challenged by the picture of this peculiar people in Acts chapter 2? This week, I really have been.

Let's not lose sight of the way the gospel grows. Let's keep living faithfully, radically ordinary lives. Because the church grows together the same way everything else grows.

From plants to people, from flowers to friendships, God grows his church day by day through the radically ordinary life of the resurrection. So friends, keep going strong.

And for everyone who helps out here from music to catechism to communion to closing down the service and security and sweeping, for everyone who contributes to the life of this church by being here each week, by singing together and praying together, let's keep going.

This is how God grows the church. It's how he grows everything through faithfully doing the ordinary things. maybe take as a final example my two mountaintop experiences.

[32:16] These are the two people who knew me best in 2017. As years went on, my buddy Jackson moved to Indianapolis, Jasmine and I moved to New Zealand, and while Jackson and I had years and years of day-by-day, moment-to-moment friendship throughout high school, even into college, eventually the relationship changed.

He's still a friend. We can get back together and pick up where we left off even after years. But by contrast, the relationship with my wife, after almost nine years of day-by-day, life together has had a radically different effect.

It's the layers of ordinary moment that defined any relationship, not just a marriage. every relationship has mountaintop moments. It doesn't matter if it's a friend or a significant other or a mortal enemy.

Some of you have mountaintop moments on the basketball court with people. Those things don't define you. It's all of the momentary actions day-by-day that stack together to define a relationship.

Every friendship, every marriage faces the question that faces us. Now what? What does today have? For us as Holy Covenant Church, it's the same question we face every week, every month, as we come to the end of the ministry year, every year.

[33:44] Now what? What does this year hold for us? How do we live radically ordinary lives? Because it's not the mountaintop moments that define God's people either.

Not even in Acts. these people are defined by their devotion, their radically ordinary new way of living. We've seen that today in this picture of how this peculiar people lives their lives, how this compelling community reaches out to those around them.

So now what? Well, let's faithfully live radically ordinary lives. Would you pray with me? Almighty God, we thank you for your work, for what you've done through Jesus Christ for his resurrection, for the promise of your Holy Spirit.

We ask that as we hold to you, this would change everything. Pray this in Christ's name. Amen.