

# The ABC's of being the Church

Message for Sunday, March 3, 2019  
by Bruce Fraser

## Children's Message:

Acts 2:44, New Living Translation:

All the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had.

I brought some delicious oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies with me today, to share with you. But—oh dear!—there are four of you, and five cookies. That's not going to work. Hmm... here's what I'll do. You three can each have one cookie, and you can have two cookies. That worked out perfectly! We shared the cookies, and each of you received something.

Do you agree that worked out well? *Someone will likely point out the sharing wasn't fair.* Yes, I see what you mean; that wasn't fair, was it? What can we do about it? *Someone may suggest breaking the fifth cookie into pieces.* Ah, that will fix it. Thank-you!

What just happened here tells us something about ourselves. We all like to get our share of things. We don't want someone else to get more than we do. Any of us would be happy to have the extra cookie; but we don't want someone else to get it. There's a word to describe that: *selfishness*.

The Bible tells us that in the church, people shared whatever they had. Those who had lots gave to those who had little. They didn't grumble and make a face; they were glad to be able to help others. They were very close to Jesus, and they saw how Jesus shared everything. He even gave away his life, and died on the cross, so that we have his forgiveness.

We can be like Jesus, like the people in that church. We can share with others. We're actually going to practise doing that this coming Saturday, when we have a pot-luck supper. We'll share our food, and there will be enough for everyone.

**Message** "The ABC's of being the Church"

We have the annual meeting of our congregation today. It's a time to review what we've done over the past year, and to make plans for this year. Of course, making plans means that we have a goal in

mind. It's not just what we would like to see happen. We need to pray and ask God for guidance.

As we seek God's will for us, I suggest a paradox: to find out where we should go in the future, we need to look to the past.

Let's hear that passage which describes the lifestyle of the church in the beginning:

Acts 2:43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Wow! They were a vibrant community, built on the foundation of God's love, which they in turn shared with one another. It's no wonder that the people of the city looked on with awe.

When I was younger, I could run at a pretty good pace. But that was just for a sprint. Athletes who run in the marathon at the Olympics keep up that pace for two solid hours! I am in awe of them. It's the kind of awe that says, "Wow! I could never do that."

That's not the kind of awe people had for the church. Rather it was the kind of awe that says, "I want to do that! That's exactly what I've been missing in my life, and I need that. How do I become part of this?"

Let's go back to where the Church began. We see that God's love and power was the source of it all. The night of the Last Supper, Jesus prayed for his apostles. Part of his prayer was this:

John 17:20-21, Living Bible:

"I am not praying for these alone, but also for the future believers who will come to me because of the testimony of these. My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind, just as you and I are, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."

Imagine! The same love that Jesus and his Father had for each other, that's the same love that is in us!

Note carefully: I did not say "should be in us", but "is in us." It's not something we can work at and achieve. It is given to us. We just have to open up, and commit ourselves to God, and let that love start to flow! Then, watch out!

Now, how does this affect Christians in a group together? Here are some thoughts. To make it easy to remember, I'll list the points as the ABC's. All four points were demonstrated in Jesus' own life.

### A) Acceptance (unconditional love)

How Jesus treated Zaccheus is an example of acceptance. Zaccheus was a tax collector, one of those despised Jews who chose money over God and over their friends. Jesus saw Zaccheus up in a tree, because that was the only way he could get close to see Jesus. Jesus called out to him:

Luke 19:5

"Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

It was after this that Zaccheus repented and turned his life around. Zaccheus had experience acceptance: someone had loved him just the way he was. And it changed his life.

When you love others just as they are—yes, even if they've hurt you!—that is acceptance. That is the way Jesus treats us. That is the way we treat one another in the church. And that is the way we reach out to others.

### B) Building up one another

During the three years Jesus had with the 12 apostles, he taught them how to live right with God and with one another. They even had periods of on-the-job training, where they went out preaching and healing themselves. Jesus prepared them for the time when he would be gone, so they would be mature enough to take over. He was building them up.

The opposite of building up is tearing down. Imagine the result if Jesus had spent those years criticizing them, pointing out their faults!

When the time came, they were ready. The church was established on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus Christ, and they built it up from there.

That is our ministry as well: to build up one another. How? Here are two ideas.

### Equipping people to do the work of the church:

Many people in the church feel unable to lead a group in prayer. They feel guilty and discouraged over that. No! I as the minister and the other teachers and leaders in the church have failed them, by not building them up, by not giving them what they need.

**Encourage one another:** So many people face defeat through the week. Someone has applied for forty different jobs, and has been turned down at every one. Someone else feels the frustration of their body aging, no longer being able to do the things they enjoy. They need to know that someone understands, that someone cares, that someone is there to help them through the really rough spots. Church is the place where we can do that, where we build up one another.

### C) Commitment

Jesus talked a lot about commitment, but more than that, he modelled it.

John 15:13, New Revised Standard Version:

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Jesus could easily have avoided death on the cross. But he died there willingly, because he was committed to loving his friends (and enemies) to the utmost.

Imagine what would happen if all Christians were totally committed to one another! What effect would it have on the church? What effect would it have on families and marriages? What effect would it have on you, if you had that kind of commitment for others, and you knew that others felt the same way for you?

Please notice that I'm talking about commitment to people. And of course, the first and greatest commitment is to Jesus Christ himself, as Lord and head of the Church.

## S) Servant

When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he wasn't just going through a ritual. It was a parable in action.

John 13:12-15, New Revised Standard Version:  
After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

Let's remember who Jesus is: the divine Son of God. He could do anything he wanted. The universe is his to command. Legions of angels stand ready to answer his call. Yet what does he choose: to be a servant! His goal in life was to serve the people around him, and he finally gave his life for all. Now he calls us serve.

What would happen in a church which lived that out? What would happen if, at the beginning of each day, you asked yourself, "How can I serve someone today? Who needs my help?" Wow!

Let me tell you about a church which, in one event, did all four of these things: accept, build up, commit, and serve. Author Tony Campolo tells about what happened.

A pastor of a Presbyterian church told me about his early days of ministry when he served a small country church.

There was a young woman who came to his church and presented her child for baptism, a child that had been born out of wedlock. In a small rural community, a woman like that can find herself shunned. The day of the baptism the woman stood alone before the congregation, holding her child in her arms. The pastor hadn't recognized the awkwardness of the situation. He came to that part in the baptismal service when the questions are asked, "Who stands with this child to assure the commitments and promises made here will be carried out? Who will be there for this child in times of need, and assure that this child is brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"

It was then that he realized there was no godmother or godfather on hand to answer the question. But without hesitation, as though on cue, the entire congregation stood and with one voice said, "We will!"

### Next Steps:

By letting loose God's love in our lives, and using few ABC'S, incredible things can happen to people. Our highest calling in life is to become like Jesus Christ. Just think what your life would be if that happened to you.

- Pray: Ask Jesus to fill you with his spirit, to help you grow more like him every day.
- Accept one another and love people just as they are;
- Build up one another, equipping others to be disciples, encouraging them along the way;
- Commit to one another, so that they are a top priority in your life.
- Serve: make a difference in the lives of other people.