

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 27 APRIL 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 68:8

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Song of praise: Hymn 15-1:1+2+4

Confession of faith: **Nicene**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic* and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Hymn 15:2+3.

Law

Hymn: 15:2+3

Prayer:

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

Amen

Psalm: 138:1

Scripture: Acts 2

Text: Acts 2:37-42

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

See where the Gospel of Jesus Christ takes us:

- With it we are on the way to the Lord's eternal kingdom.
- The Gospel is the pronouncement of certain facts that occurred in the past and which have an influence on our future.

In this sermon we look more closely at the manner in which we must be a church. Note the following aspects:

1. **Where does the church as we know it today come from?**
2. **What did the first church look like when it was ordained by the Lord?**
3. **What do the elders and the deacons do?**
4. **Are we still sincere?**

1. **Where does the church as we know it today come from?**

Before anything was created the Lord had already decided who all the people would be that would live on earth. He determined the name of each person and what the destiny of each person would be.

Let us consider the facts again:

- Before creation God already determined to prepare a church for Him for a life after this one.
- In the time before creation He already decided by name who would be all the people to be born on earth and which of them He wanted to have. (Ephesians 1:4-6)
"For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight in love." (Ephesians 1:4)

Out of all whom He destined to live He chose a certain number as His property.

- Then already He determined that His Son Jesus Christ would some time in history adopt a human body and live among mankind on earth.
- He would be completely without sin as a man and at the end He would in death surrender Himself to the wrath of God.
- God would then visit on His Son the punishment for all the sins of those people He chose before creation so that they might be acquitted of all they had done wrong.
- He will then take them up into His eternal kingdom to live with Him forever.

The fact is that all this has already occurred and that it has an effect on us.

- After His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven.
- But in His stead He sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us into faith and the Hereafter.

The Lord Jesus also decided that these believers should congregate as churches.

- He wanted them to live together and that they should exercise themselves together in godliness.

The first church came together on the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out.

- We are many years removed from that day but that does not mean that presently we may be a church according to our own desire.
- Our church must still be as the first church was the day it was ordained by the Lord.
- Our faith must be same as that of those people and the experience we have in our hearts must be the same as theirs.

That is why we consider these people again today and see what the Holy Spirit made them through the blood of Jesus Christ – so that we may examine ourselves and return to the same path should we have strayed from it.

- Just like them we must outgrow all our ignorance and repent to serve the Lord with all our heart. (Acts 17:30): *“In the past God overlooked such ignorance but now He commands all people everywhere to repent”*.

Remember, the only purpose of the church is to glorify God.

- Everything else that the church does or which happens in the church stands in the sign of service to the Lord and the glorifying of His Name.
- For the church is the people chosen by God and of whom He has said that they are His property.

There is a wonderful description in the Bible of who we are and what we are as members of the church of the Lord.

- The Lord says that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood.
- He sanctified us and made us His property so that we may declare His praises. (1 Peter 2:9)

Bearing these words of the Lord in mind we must ask ourselves some questions:

- Why am I and are you in this congregation?
- Why do people come to repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ?
- Is it necessary for such converted people to become members of the church of the Lord?

It is necessary for us to reflect on these issues for when we find the answers thereto we shall know where we stand before the Lord.

- Put differently – we shall then know whether we belong in the church or not. People who do not truly believe in the Lord cannot be members of the church.

We must always bear in mind that:

- The Lord has come a long way with each of us.
- Out of all the people who would live through the centuries God chose only a number who, according to His decision, will in the life after this one be in His kingdom.
- He decided to sanctify these people in the blood of Jesus Christ and we are part of these people.

One could now ask – what about it?

- On the one hand it reveals exactly where we stand in the Lord's Counsel.
- On the other hand it tells us what He now expects of us – He sanctified us so that we may live holy and blameless before Him. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Which means that we may not loaf around in the church.

- As believers we must deliver.
- You cannot be only a name in the church register and inactive in your congregation.
- We must be living members (see Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 54).
- If your faith is not of such a nature that you are a living member of the Lord, then you are in the wrong place if you are a member of the church.

2. What did the first church look like when it was ordained by the Lord?

We must carefully note the facts recorded in the passage we have read from Acts 2 for in it we see what the first church of the New Testament looked like. We should always strive to be members as these people were and to believe as they did.

It is important to remember that:

- Only people who truly believed in the Lord became members of the first congregation.
- Their life was completely surrendered to Jesus Christ.

That is why the following was true of each of them:

- They all were baptized.
- They were unified in their faith.
- They did not each one follow his own idea of the true teaching.
- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.
- They lived together in fellowship – there was no discord or snobbishness.
- They persevered in the common meals – which included the celebration of Holy Communion.
- The children of the newly converted were baptized as well.
- They devoted themselves to praying together.

From this we may gather that in our present day we have lost some of these attributes.

- In our congregation, for example, we do not really pray for each other or pray together as they did.

Compare also Acts 9:31 – there it is written that the faithful were guided by the Holy Spirit so that their way of life was completely devoted to the Lord.

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” (Acts 9:31)

- *“... living in the fear of the Lord.”*
- Note these words.

Are we still so aware of the Lord's judgment that we truly are afraid of sinning because we do not want to be confronted by the Lord?

- The words mean that the members of the first church must have prayed often and that this together with a sincere life before the Lord gave them happiness.
- When people live a life of prayer and joy, something great happens to them. We read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 4:31)

The point made by the Lord is that the members were joyful because they lived closely to the Lord.

- We must exert ourselves to be like them.
- We must also be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- We must rid ourselves of all rebelliousness so that the Lord may fill our life with cordiality and contentment.

Which means that each day we must come to repentance and turn away from the evil we still have in us.

- We may not and cannot persevere in the evil ways of life.
- We must therefore seek guidance from the first church and find out why they lived well.
- It is written in Acts 2:47 that in their daily life they praised God and enjoyed the favour of all the people.

3. What do the elders and the deacons make of this?

Immediately after the church came about, the Lord began using people to manage the church for Him.

- People were chosen to fulfil particular offices where they were given tasks to keep the church of the Lord healthy. (Acts 6:3; 4; 6 & 7)
- These people were not chosen for the sake of filling positions – their calling was aimed at the spreading of the Word of the Lord and to embed it into the members of the church.

This explains why it is so important that the elders and deacons in the church should regularly visit all the church members within their wards and:

- Discuss their spiritual needs.
- Read to them from the Word of God.
- Pray with them.

No elder or deacon may do a pastoral visit without a reading from the Scriptures.

Church members who live with the Lord will always know that an elder or deacon on a pastoral visit does come there by choice for a neighbourly visit.

- They are sent by God to strengthen and comfort them.
- They must continually remind the faithful of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage them in their faith. (Hebrews 10:25)

That is the purpose for which the God of the Bible sends His office bearers to His church members. All pastoral visits have only one purpose: the office bearer must preach the Word of the Lord.

Every church member must know that he/she is forever a saved child of the living God.

- We were purchased at great cost: the only God of heaven and earth became man and with His blood paid for all our sin.
- The result is that we were put onto the road leading to the throne of God.
- God's light shines onto this road and therefore we must live in such a way that our feet stay within the light of God's recreating grace and love.

The ministry and the visits of the Minister, the elder and the deacon must proclaim these things.

- We are new creatures whom the Holy Spirit recreates more and more to resemble the image of His Son.
- Which means that with the help of the Holy Spirit we recognise ourselves in our sin and in a life of repentance we subject ourselves to God.

4. Are we sincere?

When the first church came about it was as the result of God's love for those people.

- They fully realised that this love must be shared by them with people in need. (Acts 4:32-34)
- They saw to it that nobody in the church was in need.
- We must care for one another and not go our own way in isolation. (Galatians 6:2)
- We must pray often and prayerfully live together.

Then God will fill us with God the Holy Spirit. (Acts 4:3)

When we worship the Lord we must live and pray and sing with all our heart so that everyone may see what people look like who know the fulfilment of God the Holy Spirit.

- In our confession we say that as true believers we pray that the Lord may so govern us by His Word and Spirit that we submit ourselves to Him more and more each day that we may live.
- We also pray that the Lord shall destroy the devil and all his evil works.
- We also provide the reason which is that we want to do only that which is holy to the Lord and is written in His Word. (Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 123 and Belgic Confession Art 29)

We accept that we are sincere in what we confess.

- That is why each one of us must as sincerely as possible strive to do what the Lord expects of us.
- The Lord tells us that some of the first churches took the sermons so seriously that they followed each sermon up with an examination of the Scriptures at home.

Acts 17:11: *"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."*

- The Lord would not have written this in the Bible unless He intended us to do likewise.

Always remember, brothers and sisters, we do not belong to ourselves, we were redeemed from sin and now belong to our God and King Jesus Christ and are filled with God the Holy Spirit.

- We must truly know and adore this tri-une God.

- He expects us to remain on the road He put us on that day when the Holy Spirit was poured out onto the church.
- We must live in and by the preaching of His Word.
- We must love and show it.
- We must pray.

We must radiate the joy and fulfilment of the Holy Spirit. Our body and mind, our time and energy must be a mirror that must reflect to the bored and cynical world the shining majesty of Jesus Christ.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm 89:6

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

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Scripture NIV