

The Goodwill Church

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Psalm 23

Acts 2:42-47

There sure was a lot going on in the first church. Thousands of men and women were converted by one sermon. And those thousands joined up with those who already believed in Jesus. The first church was like a megachurch. And they came together devoted to the apostles Sunday school class, devoted to studying; devoted to attending fellowship activities, sharing a meal together, and praying.

Not only all that, but every one of them was filled with awe. And there's more – they shared their stuff. What stuff – that is = that they kept, because they had a big garage sale – 3000 plus people sold their couches, and mattresses, their pots and pans, their rugs and tables, the garden tools and the patio furniture that used to sit by the pool. They emptied their junk drawers filled with scotch tape and nails, batteries and napkins from the fast food place down the road – and took all that stuff and sold it – like Flea across Florida – maybe. And then they collected all the money. Did they build a church? Did they buy curriculum? Did they spend it on new carpeting for their house church, or buy a zillion dollar organ to impress the neighbors? Nope. Instead they took the money and gave it to people who needed it. Yep there was a whole lot goin' on in that church.

And it may be that when we read it, we say, wow – that's who we're supposed to be. Followed by, But wow, that's not how we are. Because, I confess I won't be the first in line to sell all my belongings, and though I do believe there have been times when I've been awestruck, it's not my perpetual state of being. And I don't know about you, but mostly in this century we are not paying a whole lot of attention to anyone doing wonders and signs.

But before we throw up our hands feeling like we are failing in the church category, let's take a look at what else we are told about this first church: they had goodwill toward all people. Considering we are talking about a start up church in the first century – that in itself is maybe more awe-inspiring than all that other stuff that was going on. In a century of unclean outcasts and sinners, where women and children were considered property and maybe not as valuable as a few head of cattle..in a century when anyone who was the slightest bit different was shunned and excluded from full participation in worship and society – a group of people who had goodwill toward all people is quite an amazing and radical thing. And if that isn't enough...Once

we learn that this first church had goodwill toward all people...the next sentence reads: And day by day, the Lord added to their number.

In those two sentences there may very well be a message to our 21st century church. Because we are living in a time when showing and genuinely feeling goodwill toward all people seems to be at an all time low. We don't like different colors, different religions, different lifestyles, different political affiliation. We don't like anyone who thinks differently, looks differently, acts differently, talks differently. And if we don't like them – what do you think are the chances – that we will show goodwill toward any one of them.

The world we live in - needs to offer a community where all sorts of people from every sort of place and life experience can find a soft place to land. Where the different and forgotten, the odd and rejected are welcomed and shown genuine goodwill. That place could very well be the church.

A long-time Presbyterian once told me that the church should be the one place in all the world where no one is ever hurt. As simple as her words were, it hit me as being quite profound. I thought about her words then and I still do today. Bullying, gossip, teasing, humiliating, being too busy to listen, to help, console, encourage, being too filled with ourselves that we can't reach out to another...it all hurts – sometimes it comes from family or friends, sometimes from bosses, or organizations...but these things should ever come from the church or her members.

Churches all over the country worry about budgets and numbers; all worry about committee work and the lack of volunteers; all worry about maintenance and next month's bills. All good things to worry about I am sure. But do we ever think about goodwill? What if we put on our front burners the plan to show goodwill to others – to the guy in that pew who you're not real crazy about – to the neighbor who gives you a hard time – to that person, that group, that organization who did you wrong, what if we made an effort to show goodwill to the total stranger on the street. And what if we can't physically do any of these things...but what if we filled our prayers with nothing but goodwill. ----I know we in the church are rarely awestruck, know we aren't giving away our goods, or sharing everything in common. But I am convinced that if we entertain the idea of one day soon having a whole lot of stuff going on – then we need to make goodwill our first priority – because I believe and I know you do too. Church should be that one place where no one is ever hurt.