

Jesus-Centered Family on Mission with Him
JCFoM Week 1
Acts 2:42-47
1/8/23

Why A Vision Series?

Happy Birthday Citizens Church! If you weren't aware today marks 2 years for us having public worship gatherings as a church family.

So we've officially entered the toddler stage as a church. If you want to know what that means I'd encourage you to go spend 5 minutes in CitiKids. We're figuring out how to control all of our limbs, how to use the bathroom, and how to not throw tantrums. But it also means we're starting to show some personality, have an imagination, and come into our own just a little bit.

In other words - it's still chaotic and hectic and a bit all over the place but we're hopefully more mature now than we were last year, amen? Every year we're still kicking it as a church feels like a grace gift from God. **He has been so kind to us.**

Now, my job this morning is to launch us into a new sermon series we're going to be in over the next 7 weeks. It's what's known in the church world as a "vision series".

But my goal is not to give you a new vision or to lay out some new direction for our church and where we want to head over the years to come - which is what a vision series might sometimes be for. Rather, over the next 2 months we want to spend time unpacking what has been at the center, the heartbeat of our church from the very beginning.

Since a handful of us sat around Lindsay and I's living room in Columbia, SC in the spring of 2019 until now we've had the same goal - the same overarching vision for who we feel like God has called us to be as a church. And so we want to spend the first part of this year unpacking that.

And we want to do that for two main reasons:

1. "Why's" Matter

- Why do we show up at 7am to turn a workout room into a sanctuary so we can worship Jesus together?
- Why do we push so strongly to get folks to be in a Community Group?
- Why do we put so much effort into training and resourcing you for spiritual practices?
- Why did we even try to start a church in a pandemic in the first place?

These are all questions we must understand as a collective body, because - **When you lose your why, you lose your way.**

- When you forget *why* you and your spouse have a regular date night, you either stop doing it or it becomes a begrudging task.
- When you forget *why* you made that New Years resolution a week ago, you give it up or start compromising on your goal.

And so this is a chance for us to reset on our "why". Our "aim". Our driving identity we're going for as a church. Because over half of the folks in this room are new to our church in the last year. We've moved locations. We've shifted some ministries, stopped some ministries, started some ministries.

And I don't want us to lose our "why" in the midst of all of that.

2. Definitions matter.

How many of you have been in a conversation with someone where you start arguing because you thought you were talking about the same thing but turns out you were on two totally different pages?

Lindsay and I got into one of these recently - we were going back and forth on a scheduling conflict and how something wasn't going to work, and we both kept saying "that day". We can't do it "that day" or I can't help you "that day". But about 5 minutes in we realized, she was talking about Tuesday, and I was talking about Thursday.

We were on two completely different pages even though we were using the same words and phrase.

And I think a vision statement can have a similar problem if we're not careful. I can say that "church is a family" and I can mean one thing and you can hear something totally different.

And so a lot of what we're going to be doing in this series is just clarifying terms. When we say "_____ " we mean "_____ " type deal.

Vision Statement

So my job today is just to get us started by covering the vision as a whole. 30,000 feet in 30ish minutes.

Here we go. Here's our vision as a church:

Citizens Church exists to be a Jesus-Centered Family on Mission with Him.

We think this statement does a pretty good job summarizing, at a glance, what the church should be as patterned and commanded in the Scriptures. And this picture we see clearly in **Acts 2:42-47**.

So grab a bible and head there with me. Let's look together at the very first church in the Bible, and see what it might mean for us as we consider being a Jesus-Centered Family on Mission with Him.

BACKSTORY:

To give you the backstory, Jesus has died, 3 days later rose again. In Acts 1, He tells His disciples - wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes, then you will go and be my witnesses, proclaiming the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then He ascends, He goes up to the right hand of God.

Beginning of Acts 2 Holy Spirit comes down, the disciples are filled, Peter gets up and preaches the gospel, 3,000 people in Jerusalem respond and put their faith in Jesus, are baptized, and the first church is formed.

And Acts 2:42-47 is how that church orders the rhythms of its life as a community, as the family of God.

Now, almost certainly they did not have a vision statement. No website, no catchy phrase.

But it's not hard to see this very first church pattern its life together around these three key aspects - **Following Jesus. Being a Family. Living on Mission with God.**

Let's consider each one together from the passage, we'll move kind of quickly...

Following Jesus

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

At their core, the first Christians were Jesus people. He was the center. It was all about Him.

They weren't united around a certain set of preferences, or political ideologies, or view on school choice, or similar hobbies, interests, and demographics, or anything else that might make up a community – **they were centered around the person and work of Jesus.**

The whole thing hinged on Him. Jesus is everything.

They were united on this shared convictional reality that the man who had just walked among them for 32 years, died on a cross, rose again, and appeared to them in the flesh for more than 40 days, that He is in fact the Messiah promised long ago.

He is the Christ. He is the one who through that life, death, and resurrection - forgives us of our sins, cleanses us from our unrighteousness, unites us to Himself, and brings us into a forever relationship with God.

This whole thing - centers on Him.

And practically, that lived out Jesus-centeredness took the shape of 4 things in this passage...

1. Apostles' Teaching

They were committed to learning the truths about God and His Kingdom. Committed to coming together to learn **about** God and **from** God. To growing in their theological knowledge. To being convicted of sin. To hearing God's Word proclaimed through the apostles. To sit under good preaching and teaching.

This is a huge part of the life of the early church. Teaching correct truths about God.

- This is why Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 - **Preach the Word.**
- Col 1, Paul's prayer for the church at Colossae is that, among other things, they would **"increase in the knowledge of God..."**

The early church wanted to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God. To them, God was an endless mystery they could never fully grasp, and so they sought to know Him more, study Him more, understand Him more.

And a key way they did that was through the teaching and preaching of the leaders who would preach to them God's Word.

2. Communion

"The breaking of bread" in v42 isn't referring to meals. In the context of the passage – sandwiched between teaching and prayers – this phrase "breaking of bread" has to do with communion. The table. It was a primary focal point of early

Christian worship gatherings. Every time the early Christians would gather, they would celebrate the bread and the cup - remembering that the entire Christian life is based on the body and blood of Jesus.

Andrew McGowan (church historian) - “[Communion] was not merely one sacramental part of a community of worship life but the central act around or within which others – reading and preaching, prayers and prophecy – were arranged.”

3. Prayers

Talked *with* God just as much as they talked *about* God. Prayer is a marker throughout the book of Acts. Corporately and individually people approached the throne of grace, they brought their requests to God. And through prayer God fueled their mission, directed their steps, protected them, freed them at some point from prison, multiplied their gospel impact.

4. Signs and Wonders

In other words - the Holy Spirit truly lived among God’s people. From the upper room at Pentecost out into the life of the Church, the Spirit lived in God’s people individually and moved among His people corporately. And that’s seen through signs and wonders.

Being a Family

So the first church begins centering their lives around Jesus. BUT...it doesn’t stop there.

Because their lives revolved around Jesus, it also started revolving around one another.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts...

Because they love Jesus, they start loving each other. The 3,000 others they’ve now found themselves following Jesus with.

That’s the way it works in the Christian life – as you learn to follow the first command - love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength – that works its way out into your life in the second command - love your neighbor as yourself.

Another way you can say it is this – there is no category in Acts for a “just me and God” sort of faith. It’s always a communal body. From the beginning. 3,000 people get saved and they start living the Christian life **together**.

How does this look for them?

1. Care for those in need

We talked about this at length during advent. No one hoarded for their own safety or gain. They willingly took what they had, sold things if needed, distributed as any had need.

How beautiful of a community – *no one was in need because no one saw what they had as solely belonging to themselves*.

2. Gathered Worship

“Attending the temple together.” They made corporate worship, the gathering of God’s people to worship God, a priority. They didn’t neglect meeting together, as Hebrews encourages us not to do, but together attended the temple to worship God.

They made the worship gathering with God’s people a central part of the rhythms of their community.

3. Eating together

They ate together. They broke bread in one another’s homes. We see this model of gathering and scattering we’ve tried to talk about here as a church – they gathered together for worship, corporately, in the temple, then they scattered over meals and tables in homes.

The church is a family.

In other words – their lives became revolved around Christ and in so doing their lives became revolved around each other.

On Mission with God.

But they don’t even stop there! Their love for Christ moves outward into love for others in the church, which then spills out and over into their city.

This is how the passage ends - **47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

There was one more crucial aspect - living out Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8. It wasn’t just - first 3,000 now we’re good, let’s focus on discipleship and move on. The Gospel continued to spread more and more and more as more people met Jesus, and were folded into this beautiful community.

Jesus keeps saving people. He keeps bringing people to Himself. As these Christians commit their lives to pursuit of Christ, to caring for and loving one another – it puts the gospel on display in such a way that people are drawn to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Something is so different about this community, that God uses their witness as a community, to continually draw many to Himself.

This is why we have “with Him”, not just “on mission” – because of what the text says – they don’t add to their number...Jesus adds to their number. As they are faithful to love and have favor with their city, love one another, revolve their lives around Jesus – that spills out into the saving work God wants to do in and through them in the city.

Citizens Church

Alright, that’s a lot. But do you see it?

Following Jesus - teaching, communion, prayer, signs and wonders of the Spirit

Being a Family - sharing their possessions, eating together, gathered worship

Living on Mission with God - favor with non-Christians, the Lord adding to their number

What a beautiful picture of what the church is to be.

We’re trying our best even as a stumbling toddler church to live into this.

- **TEACHING** – ok let's do that. I don't want to preach some psychological or sociological crap or self help ideas – let's get up and give people God's Word.
- **PRAYER** – Let's be committed to prayer. Do an entire series for LENT on prayer and devote ourselves to three times a day prayer as a community. Have a prayer team every Sunday ready and willing to pray with you and for you.
- **COMMUNION** – Let's make this a regular part of our worship. Take communion almost every Sunday as a way of forcing us to stare at the sacrifice of Jesus and remember the good news of the gospel and what Christ has done for us together.
- **EATING TOGETHER** – All of our community groups have some monthly rhythm that includes eating together. We always have food at our events. We love to spend time over shared meals, investing in each other's lives, laughing together, and enjoying God's kindness to us.
- **FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE** – We had a meeting this week with staff members here at the Dowd YMCA, dreaming of ways we can partner together - we want favor with them. We want to love them and bless them and for them to think highly of us.
- **THE LORD ADDING TO OUR NUMBER** – Later today – celebrate two baptisms – people going public with their faith. We want more and more of that.

We're far far far from perfect. We stumble and fall and make mistakes. I stumble and fall and make mistakes in my ability to live this out all of the time.

If you're looking for the perfect church, if you expect this to be the perfect church, you are in for a LET DOWN. But we're trying. We're relying on the Holy Spirit. We're leaning into this together.

Venn Diagram

But let me just be honest with you for a second...here's what I think can really get in the way of us living into this vision together. It's that most people, myself included – really really like **parts** of it. And really really struggle with some of the other parts.

Here's what I mean – whenever someone is becoming a member, they sit down with one of our pastors for what we call a member interview. And I'll usually ask some question like - What brought you to Citizens and what kept you at Citizens?

And overwhelmingly I hear one of two answers.

- Either, they love the teaching. Which I'm always flattered by, thank you. And how we preach God's Word and emphasize life with God and spiritual formation, etc. etc.
- OR, they love the community. They've never felt more welcomed, loved, like they can confess their sin and be themselves.
- There's like 1 or 2 people who mention serving and our role in the city, but overwhelmingly one of those two.

Now that's ok, everyone has what they prefer to emphasize and enjoy and gravitate towards. But it becomes a problem when functionally we begin to live into the life of our church as if we only have part of the vision we have.

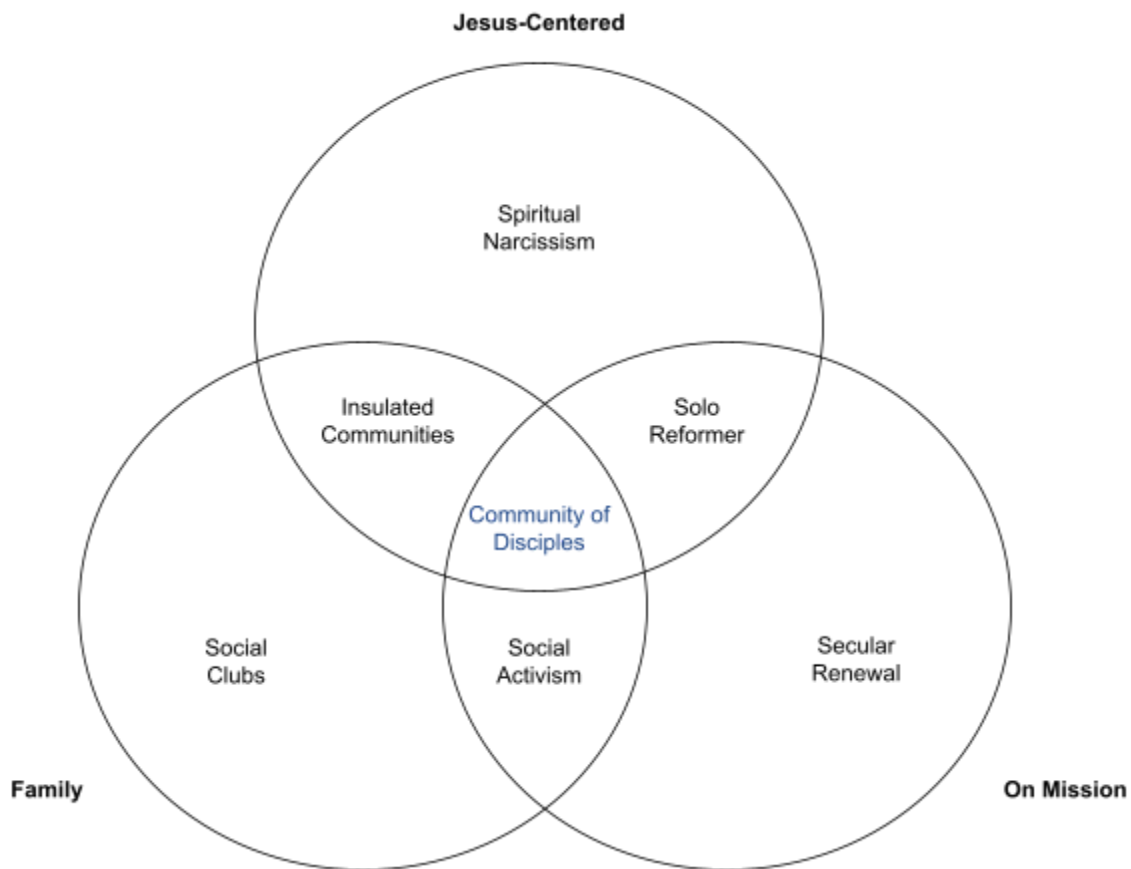
We are a Jesus-centered family. [full stop].

We are a family on mission. [full stop]

We are a Jesus-centered mission. [full stop].

Or something like that.

Which got me thinking – if our goal is all three – Jesus-centered Family on Mission with Him... what happens if you miss part of it? Well here's my best take...not the Bible, just what I think happens...



END WITH – COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES.

That's what we're going after as a church. **We exist to be a Jesus-centered Family on Mission with Him.**

I have no interest in giving my life away to any of these lesser visions of what the church might be. As both a pastor and as a follower of Jesus,

- While I want deep friendships that are like family that spur me on in my faith - I don't want just some insulated communities that exist for me and my Christian friends.
- While I want to give of myself in service to the poor and marginalized - I don't want just a life of social activism.
- While I want to live on the margins and frontlines of the kingdom of God - I have no interest in being a solo reformer.

But I long, and may we long to see more and more this vision of the early church makes its way out here and now in our church, in our city, in our time and place, among us as a people.

May we learn to revolve our lives around Christ, each other, and the kingdom of God moving in our city.

The text says...

42 And they devoted themselves...

In the Greek, it's one word - *proskartereó* - meaning "they steadfastly continued in these things."

It became the rhythms of their community. It became the focal point of their lives. Even when it was challenging. Even when they were tired. Even when the surrounding city no longer thought highly of them. Even when others in the community may not have been as devoted as they wanted them to be – they steadfastly continued in these things.

Day after day:

- Word and Prayer.
- Celebrating the body and blood of Jesus.
- Gathering for worship.
- Lingered and rejoicing in homes.
- Caring for those in need.

They devoted themselves.

They worked hard. It took effort. They had to sacrifice some things, they had to change some visions for their life, they had to give up some wants and desires and preferences – but it was worth it.

Isn't there a part of your soul that longs to see this type of community, this type of group lived out even in the here and now? Isn't there a part of you that says – man if I was a part of that, everything would be different.

You can be...but not without devotion. Not without sacrifice and effort. Not without steadfastly continuing in these things.

Gospel

But then the question becomes, and here's where we'll close. How? How do we do this? Shaped by culture, pull on our hearts, what is our hope?

Our hope to be this kind of community, the only means by which it happens...is Christ.

Don't miss what happens before Acts 2:42. We cannot separate Acts 2:42-47 from Acts 2:38-41.

We said that right before this description of the early church, these first 3,000 followers of Jesus, there's a sermon. Peter gets up and preaches the gospel. The text says this...

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "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. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

None of this vision of what a church can be. None of this "why" behind Citizens Church is possible without:

The gospel of Jesus Christ.

Repent and be baptized. The goal is not - here's a bunch of ways to live like a Christian. Notice, when they ask Peter - "what should we do?" He doesn't say - alright devote yourself to teaching, to prayer, sell your possessions and take care of those in need, go to the temple, and eat together in homes.

No! What does he say - **repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.**

The first step in the Christian life is to trust in Jesus! Not to get busy with a bunch of Christian activities, but to know God. To put your faith in Christ!

Let me say it this clearly - you can do everything the early church does in Acts 2:42-47 (prayer, Scripture, generosity, etc etc) and not be a Christian.

The first and most crucial and most necessary step of following Jesus is faith. Put your faith in Him. Lord, I can't save myself. I'm a sinner, I'm broken, I'm separated from a relationship with you. I need Jesus to forgive me, save me, wash me clean, and bring me to you.

If you've never trusted in Jesus, that's your first step. Today. Today is the day of salvation.

...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...

Who will live within you and help you to have the grit to devote yourself to this family and these practices.

So our only hope to live out this vision we believe God gave us for Citizens Church is the gospel being real and true and pervasive in our church family and the Holy Spirit working in power in and among us as we give our lives to a shared life together.

So as we close, if I could, I just want to spend some time praying over us as a community.

(Posture - stand, open arms)