

# **We Are the Church**

## **Part Five: Marks of a Dynamic Church**

*Acts 2:1-21*

*Marks of a Dynamic Church:*

1. Has an atmosphere in which God is free to move

- Obedience to His Word

- Faith in His promise

- Dedication to prayer

*Marks of a Dynamic Church:*

2. Grabs the attention of others

*Marks of a Dynamic Church:*

3. Is open to everyone

- race

- gender

- age

*Marks of a Dynamic Church:*

4. Proclaims the Good News

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### **Part Five: Marks of a Dynamic Church**

#### ***Acts 2:1-21***

Is it okay to brag? Because I brag about West Valley Church all the time! I don't miss any opportunity to tell others about you. In fact, I don't wait for an opportunity; I *create* opportunities to brag about you. I tell people how great West Valley Church is, whether they want to hear it or not!

Today we are continuing in our series called, "We Are the Church," looking at what it means to be the church – things that are true regardless of whether or not we can meet together for an hour a week in worship. Because I like to brag about you, what I'd like to share with you today should be both an affirmation and a challenge; an affirmation of the great church that West Valley Church *is*, but also a challenge for us to *become* even more so.

We're going to go back to the origins of the church for this so let's see the Bible's account of the church as God established it, in Acts Two. It's a lengthy passage, so you might want to turn there in your Bible or Bible app and follow along, or just see it on the screen as I read it. Before I do, let's do something – let's stand to honor God's Word. Whether you are here in the Worship Center or you've joined us on line, let's show that we honor God's Word by standing while it is being read.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen

carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:1-21, niv)

May God bless the reading of his Word to our hearts! Thanks, you can be seated.

There is a term that geneticists and microbiologists use, called “genetic markers.” One of my best friends is Dr. Geoffrey Fuller, and he is one of those scientists. He says that a genetic marker “usually refers to a short sequence of DNA that is fast and easy to test for, and indicates a broader, more important characteristic of a cell.” In other words, markers are indicators that something bigger in the organism is true. Make sense? So this passage that we just read has some “markers” of a true church that are a fast and easy test – indicators that tell us that the church is a dynamic, Spirit-filled Church. I want to point out four of these markers to us today, in order to encourage and affirm and challenge us as West Valley Church.

The first mark or marker of a dynamic church is that it...

### **1. Has an atmosphere in which God is free to move.** (Acts 2:1-4)

If you've been a Christian for very long then this wasn't the first time you've heard or read that passage. What *usually* grabs your attention is the phenomena in verses 2-4: the mighty rushing wind, the flames of fire, and then the disciples speaking in foreign languages that they'd never learned. But a key verse to those events is actually in verse 1 – which is what they were doing *before* all that happened: they were cultivating an atmosphere in which God was free to move. There were three things that they did that allowed God to freely move in and through their lives, and the first was...

#### **- Obedience to His Word.**

The reason they were doing what they were doing in the first place was because it was what Jesus *told* them to do. In chapter one, Jesus said, “Don't leave Jerusalem, but wait for

the gift my father has promised, which you have heard me speak about..." (Acts 1:4) They were obediently doing what Jesus told them to do.

What has Jesus told us to do, West Valley Church? He's told us to introduce people to Jesus Christ, equip people with a faith that works, and live as people of purpose. We do that by demonstrating love and being a generous blessing to each other and to the people in our community. You do that in the way you serve Wide Hollow and Mountainview Elementary Schools. You just did that last month by donating packets of school supplies for over 500 students – and you did that during a pandemic! You've also shown this by donating over \$200,000 in five years to help build the church and community center in Victoria Village, Guyana. You do that through First Friday Coffee, Breakfast with Santa, Upward Soccer, and Trunk or Treat – which, by the way, we have very, very exciting news about how we are going to Trunk or Treat this year! You can start donating candy now, but you'll hear more about the details next week! And, there are greater things ahead for West Valley Church as we are paying off that mortgage through Here For Good. God is free to move when we obey what he told us to do!

Another way that they allowed God to freely move is that they demonstrated...

**- Faith in His promise.**

They were waiting together because they believed that Jesus would do what he said he would do; they knew in their hearts that he was going to fulfill the promise he'd made just a few days earlier when he said in chapter one, "...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5) This is what I shared with you two weeks ago; when we take Jesus at his word and we allow the promised Holy Spirit to fill our lives, there is no limit to the ways he can demonstrate his power and love through us to supernaturally transform people's lives with the Good News!

On the other hand, we see examples in Scripture where Jesus could *not* do miracles because of the unbelief of the people in certain towns (Matthew 13:58; Mark 6:5), so we want to *always* take Jesus at his word.

The third way that they gave God the freedom to move was through their...

**- Dedication to prayer.**

What do you think it is they were doing in that upper room? Playing board games? Nope. Verse 14 says "They all joined together constantly in prayer." These prayers were not just, "Oh Lord, please heal my sickness" prayers. Don't get me wrong – those are good prayers to pray. But those are first-level prayers; when believers are young in their faith and immature, *those* are the kinds of prayers they always pray. But as believers mature, they spend their prayer time surrendering to God, seeking the Holy Spirit, and praying for God's work to be accomplished in this world. That's next level prayers. *That* is the dedication to prayer that these disciples had, that gave God freedom to move among them, and that's what we want.

We can experience a powerful move of God as we practice obedience, faith, and prayer.

The second mark or marker of a dynamic church is that it...

## **2. Grabs the attention of others.** (Acts 2:7-8, 12)

There are some things we do at West Valley Church that cannot help but get the attention of others. All throughout the book of Acts we see that the Church was too powerful to be ignored, like in that passage we read. After the sound of wind and the sight of the flames of fire, the crowd that had gathered at the house where this was taking place were amazed to hear the disciples speaking in different languages. They realized that this was something beyond the ordinary, and many of them were intrigued.

A dynamic church like ours attracts attention. People can't help but notice. *You* have a reputation for loving and serving your community, through our community partnerships with Union Gospel Mission and Love INC, through your service to the elementary schools, through the homework club that we will be starting up again soon, and through your generous giving toward benevolence for families in need, especially in this time. You are attracting attention as our community sees people of Latin descent and culture, worshipping alongside Anglo people, singing and hearing the Word of God proclaimed in both of their own heart languages. This is happening in *our* church, in the midst of race protests and riots in other places!

And, as you share with people the miraculous things that God is doing in your life, they can't resist the need to take a closer look! By our transformed individual lives and by our authentic supernatural biblical community, people are introduced to Jesus in us. And whenever a person meets Jesus Christ, they'll find the same thing to be true that we have – that he is God, and that he is love, and that he has the power to change lives.

It is important to realize, though, that some people are *not* going to take an objective look; even in the presence of the miraculous, some are going to be cynical and reject the message. Verse thirteen that we read said that some people “were making fun of (the disciples), saying, “They have had too much wine.” Sometimes people will mock us, too.

I remember one new, young mom who was incredibly stressed over taking care of her children, and our church served her and her family – cleaning house, bringing meals, providing free childcare, things like that. Then she was invited to their small group, so she came, and she loved it; she found a whole group of people who were loving and accepting. She invited her husband to join her, and the first time he did, he went home saying, “There's no way those people can be that happy. They must be on drugs!” But his wife convinced him to keep coming anyway. He did, and he soon found he was wrong; people really *were* genuinely that kind and happy – because of Jesus. He saw Jesus in them! They both accepted Christ and their family is in church to this day!

As the community of West Valley watches us, their reaction will be the same; they will want to join us or reject us. But they won't be able to ignore us. As they see that we are genuine, they will see Jesus.

The third marker of a dynamic church is that it is...

## **3. Is open to everyone.** (verse 17)

When Peter stood up and spoke to the crowd, he made it clear that God intended to do great and powerful things for *everyone* – not just the Jews – that *all people* would be included in His Church. That means that, according to what we read, there's no room for discrimination of...

- **race.**

When Peter stood up to speak, he reminded everyone that God spoke in the Old Testament through the prophet Joel, saying "In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all kinds of people..."

Up until the time of Christ, Jews were considered God's people; Gentiles were considered to be separated from God. Religious Jewish men used to pray, "Lord I thank you that I was born neither a woman or a Gentile." Even though Gentiles could convert to Judaism, they could never enjoy the full package of benefits as one who was Jewish by birth – and, really, strict Jews had no use for Gentiles at all. Some even went as far as saying that help should not be given to a Gentile woman in childbirth, because it would only bring another Gentile into the world.

Even though God had promised many times in the Old Testament to eradicate this kind of racism, the Jews ignored it. Then Jesus demonstrated that God was against racism by crossing those cultural boundaries, and on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit shattered that sin. Did you notice the miracle when the disciples began sharing the Good News? God spoke *their* language; God didn't expect them to learn *his* language – he accommodated them by speaking their own mother tongue. We at West Valley Church are doing the same thing; we are following God's example when we translate, speak and sing Spanish; because we are led by God's Spirit to share the Good News in *both* of the dominant languages in West Valley – Spanish and English. You've elected Latinos to your Leadership Team. By the example set in God's Word, we are becoming a multicultural church. That's the message of Pentecost: God's Spirit is available to anyone from any nation.

There's also no room for discrimination of...

- **gender.**

Peter quoted the prophet Joel, saying, "Your *sons and daughters* will prophesy." I'm going to shoot straight with you on this: there are some denominations that feel that women are not allowed to be pastors or teachers or leaders in the church. They say that women can teach children or other women, but they are not allowed to teach men. They say women cannot be pastors or priests. But the Bible and Jesus' example are clear that there is no room for discrimination by gender. Peter didn't make this up or speak his own opinion; his words are a direct quote of the mouth of God, first recorded in Joel 2:28-32. So, women played an essential role in Jesus' group of disciples. The first time that Jesus publicly declared that he was the Christ was to a Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26) – a person of both different race *and* gender. After Jesus' resurrection, the first people he appeared to were women. In the New Testament, women played a critical role the establishment of several churches, and were identified as "fellow workers" by the Apostle Paul. Paul even gave instructions on how women should dress *while* they were praying and prophesying in church (Acts 16:13; 17:14; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 11:5). We don't have time right now

to explore this issue thoroughly, but it's enough to say that the Scriptures make it plain that women are to be actively involved in the ministry of the church, and they are not to be considered second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. So you've elected women to your Leadership Team and we have a female pastor on our staff – Pastor April who led us in prayer earlier. We have two women who have district licenses in preparation for ministry. I'm glad to be in the Church of the Nazarene, where we are called to fight against racial and gender injustice, and that we ordain women for ministry from all cultures, just like we do for men.

Third, there's no room for discrimination against...

**- age.**

Again Peter quoted Joel when he said, "Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams."

It is a shame that organizations that don't discriminate according to race or gender are still allowed to discriminate according to age. Too often in businesses, talented, experienced workers are quietly ushered out the back door to make way for younger (and less costly) laborers. There are even some church denominations that have mandatory retirement once a pastor reaches a certain age. This is tragic, because at no point in a person's life, do they lose their ability to make a significant and important contribution to the Kingdom of God. Our dear friend Pastor Arden who was on our staff was serving faithfully right up until the week he died – and he was in his nineties!

We *need* the wisdom and experience that comes only with age. We also need their patience, because we won't always do things the way they used to be done. But senior adults matter. *No one is put out to pasture because they are too old, and no one is put off till tomorrow because they are too young. The church is always multigenerational.* Researchers tell us that this is the first time in modern history that a church could have five generations worshipping together. How amazing and beautiful is that!? Every member of this church – no matter how young or how old – has a role to play, and we need each and every one of you.

The fourth marker of a dynamic church is that it...

**4. Proclaims the Good News.** (verse 21)

In verse 21 Peter proclaimed:

"Then anyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved." Later, Peter finished his message by saying, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins..." and he repeats the promise that Jesus made earlier: "And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

It is crucial, now more than ever before, that the church be faithful to preaching and demonstrating the Gospel message. I wonder if one reason that we've lost influence in society is that the church as a whole has gotten away from the primary message of the Gospel. Some churches only preach the bad news; they always and only preach against sin,

but that's not the same as preaching the Good News. Preaching the bad news is legalism. The Good News is liberating holiness!

I think, too, that too many Christians have replaced the Good News with their perspective of the US Constitution. They've stopped declaring the Gospel and started fighting the opposition to their political party – especially on social media. The message we *must* proclaim today is that Jesus Christ is Lord and has the power to change lives. Period. It is only this dynamic message that makes believers out of unbelievers. Otherwise, each week we are only preaching to the choir.

There's a story about three churches in a town – Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian, that decided to come together for a series of combined worship services. When the services were over, the three pastors were discussing the results with each other. The Methodist pastor said, "This worked great for us! We gained four families as new members." The Baptist preacher said, "We did even better than that; we gained six new families as members of our congregation!" The Presbyterian pastor said, "Well, we did even better than that! We got rid of our 10 biggest troublemakers!"

Churches that grow because of transfer growth are missing out on the foundational principle of our mission: we are called to take the Good News to every creature (Mark 16:15). The church has one job to do: to introduce people to Jesus so that unchurched people can become followers of Jesus. If we're not doing that, then we're not doing our job, no matter how holy we think we are or how long we've been in the church.

But *West Valley Church* is a dynamic church! This is a place where God is free to move because we are obedient to God's Word, we have faith in his promises and we are dedicated to Kingdom prayer. We grab the attention of others because of our unconditional love and service to our community. We are open and inviting to anyone and everyone and we don't discriminate against anyone because of their race, gender, or age. And we are always looking for better ways to consistently proclaim the Good News!

This is a great church, and we've got even greater things ahead. Because we are a dynamic church, and we want to be even more dynamic, we are paying off that mortgage so we can move even more money from mortgage to ministry. We have even greater things ahead – even in a pandemic.

Together, let's maintain our unity toward being a dynamic church, making sure we have these four markers in the DNA of our church, so that we will become even more and more dynamic.

*Pray*