

Good Church | Doing Good Church in the Spirit
Michelle Vecchio-Lyzenga-
Minister for Christian Formation
May 2, 2021

After a year of sheltering-in-place, First Pres is getting ready to return to church and into a world that is far different from the one we left behind. As we embark on another chapter of our life together, we turn to the book of Acts for wisdom and guidance as we ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be the church today? What does Good Church look like?" Following the Gospels, Acts tells the story of the community that emerged from Jesus' death and resurrection, a growing group of disciples committed to sharing the gospel with a world in need. But most of all, Acts tells the story of the disruptive movement of the Holy Spirit in and through humanity. Join the pastors (present and past!) of First Pres, as we follow the Spirit's leading into the church that is becoming.

Gather

Together, listen to Luke 13:29-30 and imagine feasting in the kingdom of God. What do you see, smell, hear, feel?

Then people will come from east and west,
from north and south,
and will eat in the kingdom of God.
Indeed, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last.

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Acts 8:26-40 (NRSV)

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

1. In Acts 1:8, Jesus declares that his disciples will be his Spirit-led “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” What do witnesses do? How do you see Jesus’ declaration being fulfilled in Acts 8:26-40? Who are the primary actors in this passage?
2. Nothing about Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch’s encounter is expected. How does the surprising movements of the Spirit here expand horizons—for Philip, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the early church, us?
3. Where are you sensing the Spirit’s unrestrained movement in your life, in our community? Where might the Spirit be inviting you and us to put cautious rationality on the shelf and follow an outlandish God and Gospel into the world?

DWELL | LECTIO DIVINA (OPTIONAL PRACTICE)

Romans 8:14-17(NRSV)

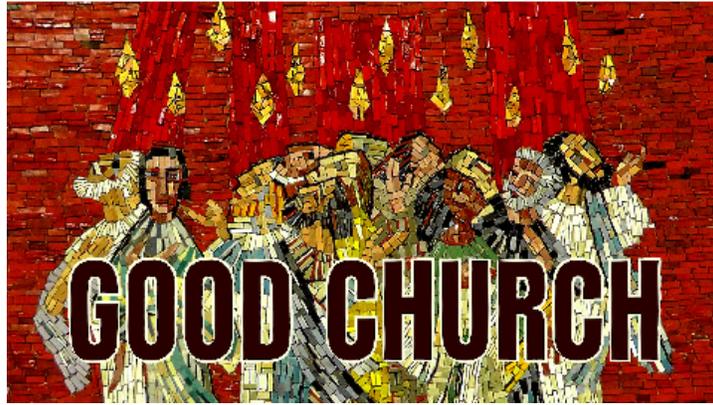
¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

RESPOND

Spend time this week reflecting on these questions, then share together as a group:

What would I do if I knew I couldn’t fail?

What would First Pres Berkeley do if we knew we couldn’t fail?



Good Church | Doing Good Church in the Spirit
Rev. Mark Stryker
April 25, 2021

After a year of sheltering-in-place, First Pres is getting ready to return to church and into a world that is far different from the one we left behind. As we embark on another chapter of our life together, we turn to the book of Acts for wisdom and guidance as we ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be the church today? What does Good Church look like?" Following the Gospels, Acts tells the story of the community that emerged from Jesus' death and resurrection, a growing group of disciples committed to sharing the gospel with a world in need. But most of all, Acts tells the story of the disruptive movement of the Holy Spirit in and through humanity. Join the pastors (present and past!) of First Pres, as we follow the Spirit's leading into the church that is becoming.

Gather

Together Pray:

"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the church." Revelation 2:7

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Acts 15: 1–29 (NRSV)

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses."

⁶ The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. ⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. ⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹² The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. ¹⁵ This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

¹⁶ ‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen;
from its ruins I will rebuild it,
and I will set it up,
¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—
even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.
Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things ¹⁸ known from long ago.’

¹⁹ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. ²¹ For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.”

²² Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, ²⁵ we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Dwell

1. After reading Acts 15:1–29 ask and discuss together your response to this question: what from this passage speaks of hope for doing “Good Church” in our time?
2. Where is the Spirit inviting you to trust in hard conversations?
3. How can we be people, whose conversations, deliberations, and decisions are receptive to the Spirit’s disruptive and unexpected movements among us?

Dwell I Lectio Divinia (Optional Practice)

At first this passage may not appear to have connections with Acts 15:1–29, but by dwelling with it you may hear of some:

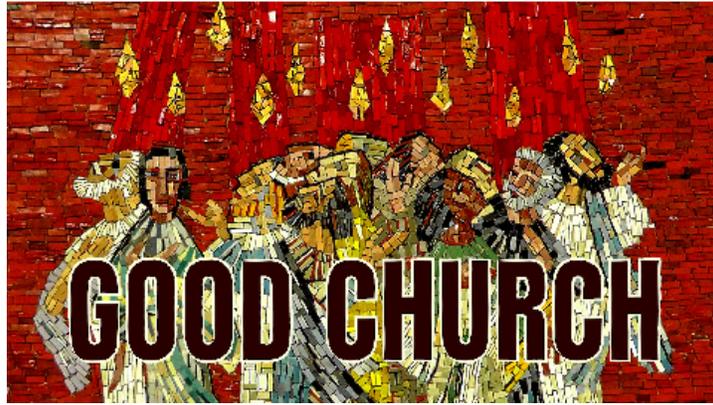
John 8:1–11

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’

Respond in Prayer

As a way of response, finish the following sentence, “Good Church is...” Share that with your community group next week when you meet so you can compare notes and learn from each other.



Good Church | At Table
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell
April 18, 2021

After a year of sheltering-in-place, First Pres is getting ready to return to church and into a world that is far different from the one we left behind. As we embark on another chapter of our life together, we turn to the book of Acts for wisdom and guidance as we ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be the church today? What does Good Church look like?" Following the Gospels, Acts tells the story of the community that emerged from Jesus' death and resurrection, a growing group of disciples committed to sharing the gospel with a world in need. But most of all, Acts tells the story of the disruptive movement of the Holy Spirit in and through humanity. Join the pastors (present and past!) of First Pres, as we follow the Spirit's leading into the church that is becoming.

Gather

Together Pray:

Read through Psalm 23:5-6 and meditate on what the table of God is like.

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

Listen, Converse, Imagine

Acts 2:29–47 (NRSV)

²⁹ “Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.”’

³⁶ Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ 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.

Dwell

1. If Acts is the account of the early church, does this passage match up with your idea or image of church today? How is it similar? How is it different?
2. What are the marks of a GOOD CHURCH?
3. How would your life be different without church in it?

Dwell | Lectio Divinia (Optional Practice)

Acts 2:25–28 (NRSV)

- ²⁵ For David says concerning him,
'I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover my flesh will live in hope.
²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.
²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

Respond in Prayer

Sit at table with someone this week with a glad and generous heart. Be open to receiving and open to giving.