

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 2, 2018

Four Pillars of the Church
Acts 2:41-47

2:41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

2:43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

2:44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

2:45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

2:46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Dallas has a construction boom. Buildings are occupying the vacant lands. Each week or once a month, you can see how the building will be completed. Americans constructs the building from the wall, but the Japanese constructs the building from the pillar. The pillars were designed according to the specification and carried to the construction site. And the shape of the house is completed by combining the pillars in one day. Among these pillars, the most important item is the pillars of the four corners of the house. If they are not steady, the house will be tilted. In the same way, the Church, that is God's house, has four

important pillars.

Acts 2:42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The four important pillars are “the apostles’ teaching,” “the fellowship of the believers,” “the breaking bread” and “the prayers.” Let’s learn about these four pillars together today.

1. The Apostles Teaching

The first pillar is “the apostles’ teaching.” This is the most important principle in the church. No matter what else there is, the church cannot fulfill its mission without the truth of salvation in the church.

In Acts chapter 6, when the apostles received a complaint about helping widows, the apostles said in Acts 6:2, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” The apostles did not say so in order to avoid troubles, but rather to put priority to the ministry of the Word. They looked at the future of the church, to be guided by the Holy Ghost, and to choose the people who would later be called “deacons.” The apostles said in Acts 6:4, “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The word “devote” is used in Acts 2:42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”. Because the apostles were able to devote themselves to teaching, the church members were also able to devote themselves to learning the the teaching.

The Apostles’ teachings were passed down from the apostles to the pastors and teachers. In Ephesians 4:11, a pastor is called a “teacher” at the same time because the pastor’s primary role was to teach the apostles’ teaching. Even after the apostles had left the world, the Bible

that apostle wrote remained. No, the church has risked to keep the Bible in persecution. It was because the Bible was the apostle's teaching. Today, I believe that to stand in the apostles' teachings is to return to the teachings of the Bible and to start from the Bible in everything.

We are the church that believes in the Bible as the Word of God. Therefore, no one denies the creation, the miracle, the virgin birth or resurrection of Christ. However, when it comes to the church, we tend to follow the principle of this age thinking, "It is different from two thousand years ago" rather than following the Bible. Because the apostle's teachings were first given to a church, it is more important to learn from the Bible and to think accordance with the Bible. Before we think about what we want to do with the church, we need to learn how the Bible teaches about the church. We must not forget that we are required to know and follow what Christ wants from the church. Our discussion on the church should be asking our response to to the Lord's will after knowing his will. The reformation and revival happened when the church returned to the Bible and practiced it. It is proved by the history and testimony of a healthy growing church.

2. The Fellowship (Koinonia)

The second pillar of the church is "fellowship of believers." The Greek term used here "koinonia" contains the greater and deeper meanings that expressed by "fellowship" or "community." This "koinonia" is the "koinonia of Christ." The church was established by the people who were united with the Christ through baptism. As we receive the blessing, "the koinonia of the Holy Spirit be with you all,"

the “koinonia” is what the Holy Spirit creates and nurtures.

“Koinonia” of the church is not something known as “friendship” just among the people. If it is so, we get to know each other, appreciate each other, and praise each other. We could establish the good friendship here. However, “koinonia” of the church is not a place where everyone faces each other. Everyone faces to God, give thanks to God, and praise Jesus Christ. We shall share the feeling of “Lord is great!” “That’s right!” Such sympathy came from the true “koinonia” by faith.

For “koinonia” of the Church, we are supposed to share something spiritual and faith related. However, in the early church, they were sharing their belongings, too. In the verse of 44 and 45, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” In those days, the believers of Christ were excluded from the Jewish community; therefore, they needed to share their belongings and give necessities to the poor people. When the church spread out all over the world, the church was doing various welfare work for people who needed help. We can say that the church is the world best charity organization, and it is because this spiritual “koinonia” by faith.

Moreover, this “koinonia” is not definitely closed one. It is opened to everyone. In the verse 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.” New people have been added to the church for their salvation. “Koinonia” of the church is apart from the worldly things. It is holy, sublime, and passionate. The church did not do any

entertainment activities to attract people; therefore, the church received the respect from people, and the people wanted to join in. When the church maintains this kind of “koinonia,” the Lord will “add to our number day by day.” I believe so.

3. The Breaking Bread and the Prayers

The third pillar is the “breaking bread” and the fourth pillar is the “prayers”. The “breaking bread” and the “prayers” are concretely written in 46, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes...” In this section “day by day, attending the temple” depicting the people devoted to prayer. The church began in Jerusalem, and all the first members were Jewish people, so people gathered in the temple and prayed. In Acts 3, it is written that Peter and John climbed to the temple when they were praying at 3 pm. People regularly kept prayer time and prayed together.

In Chapter 4, after Peter and John were caught by Jewish leaders and released, “they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.” (Acts 4:23) I think that is probably where people gathered for prayer. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God. (Acts 4:24) In chapter 12, “Earnest prayer for was made to God by the church” when Peter was arrested and about to be killed. (Acts 12: 5) The church organized the prayer meetings here and there and prayed for saving Peter’s life. The believers got together as necessary as well as each individual prayed. The church was the gathering for prayer.

People prayed in the temple and “broke bread at home.” The

“home” is not about a general family, but a large house which was offered for the worship service before a church building was built. The “breaking bread” refers to “the Lord's Supper.” In today’s reading there is “baptism” in verse 41, and the “Lord’s Supper” in verses 42 and 46. The church is made up of people who have been baptized and are fed and grown by the Lord's Supper.

The Lord’s Supper contains all of the “teachings of the apostles,” the “fellowship” and the “prayers.” As the address of the Lord’s Supper begins with 1 Corinthians 11:23 says, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,” all teachings started from the Lord Jesus and were conveyed by the apostles. Also, 1 Corinthians 10:16 explained that we will experience the “koinonia” of the Lord's blood and flesh in the Lord's Supper. As 1 Corinthians 10:17 says. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread,” the "koinonia" of the body of Christ is created by the Lord’s Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:28 said, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” “Examine himself” means eat things such as to check materials, seasoning, texture and more. When you cook, you may pick a little bit, taste, and say that it is not boiled yet, or soy sauce taste is not enough, then add what you need. “Examine himself” is the same as that. By checking with the Bible, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we carefully examine our behavior and thoughts. And when we repent, we can receive the Lord's Supper and forgiveness. For the purpose, the deep prayer is necessary. Without prayer, the Lord's Supper cannot be established. Also, from the ancient times, in the Lord's Supper, there are numerous prayers such as praise,

thanksgiving, repentance, dedication, and intercession. It is said the Lord's Supper is “the best form of prayer,” but indeed it cannot be separated from the Lord's Supper and prayer.

We would like to remember every time celebrate the Lord 's Supper, the Four Pillars of the Church is indispensable, which the “breaking bread” is along with the “teaching of the apostles,” the “koinonia,” and the “prayers.” I wish that these four pillars will be ticked and strengthened then many people will be saved, nourished, equipped, and become a church capable for the work of the Lord.

(Prayer)

Father God, the present age, there are too many things that attract our attention and disturb our hearts. So, it is getting hard for us to concentrate and devote on one thing. Lord, please help us in order that we may be able to focus together on the same thing as the first century church devoted to the “apostles’ teaching,” the “koinonia,” the “breaking bread,” and the “prayer.” Please guide us that we can stay in that will never change even when the times change. We pray these in the name of Jesus Christ.