1. At the beginning of September we focussed on Jesus command to ‘Go and make Disciples!’
   And I shared the revelation that when he said this he wasn’t asking us to go as individuals
   Rather it was something he expects us to do together
   He had trained his disciples to be a community, and he was asking them to go and grow some more communities
   And the name we use for these communities is ‘church’
   Since that Sunday, we’ve been looking at the marks of a healthy church, using research done in the 90s by Robert Warren
   He found that the churches that were growing were not all that bothered about numbers
   Rather they were the churches who simply wanted to do church well
   And they all had a number of things in common – They were faith centred, open to doing what God wants, outward in their focus, open to all-comers, and operated as a communities
   Today we come to the sixth thing they all had in common – They did a few things well
   Before we go any further, I want you to stop and make a list
   List all the things you currently do for the church here at Liberton
   You’ll find there’s space on the back of your notice sheet...
   Robert Warren’s research found that it wasn’t that these growing churches did a lot of things OK, and a few things well
   But they just did a few things, and they did them well
   They were focussed rather than frantic, and they got the basic’s right

2. So, what are the basics that a healthy church needs to get right? We get a good idea from today’s reading – as you listen, ask yourself – what image comes to mind? - Acts 2.42-47

3. Hearing these words, what was the image that came to mind?
   The image that comes into my mind is that of a family
   They are sharing their homes / meals / possessions
   Caring for each other, looking after their needs
   & celebrating their common faith in prayer and worship
   Isn’t that what a family should be like?
   Aren’t we always running after our children?
   You’d think parenting stops after they’ve got a house of their own – no chance
   Washing, ironing, babysitting, not to mention the Bank of Mum and Dad
   But we know that, in time, there turn will come to look after us
   Just as we looked after our parents and grandparents before us
   The church described in Acts 2 was like that – 2.44;46b;42
   This is a group of people treating each other like family
   But a family can’t just stay at home all the time
   It needs to go out – work, school, socialise, serve
   The church in acts is doing that too – 2.46a;43b
   And, as a result – 2.43a;47b

4. Mike Breen, (a minister, sociologist, & historian), talks of how a big shift takes place in the course of the NT in the place where believers are nurtured
   The Jewish tradition had been the Rabbi and his followers. If you wanted to grow in faith, you attached yourself to a Rabbi and became his disciple – a highly individualistic thing to do
   People called Jesus Rabbi – although his teaching was very different and was backed up with the very real experience of his Kingdom as the disciples travelled together in community
   So, things are beginning to shift, but by the time we get to the book of Acts and in the rest of the NT you see that the place of nurture has shifted entirely - It’s moved from the synagogue / schoolroom, into the home / the household
   And this is one of the reasons why the early church grew so effectively. In the synagogue, people can be divided up – men and women, rich and poor, adults and children. In the household they are all sharing in it together
   I think I’ve spoken before about how the Greek word used for household is the word Oikos
**Oikos** is not what we would immediately think of as a home
It’s not a **nuclear** family – Mum and Dad and 2.4 kids
**Oikos** is a number of homes running together with a central courtyard
**Oikos** is **extended** family – parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, servants, nephews on an extended visit

Average size of **Oikos** – anything between 20-50+ people
Lindsay and I experienced **Oikos** when we were in Pakistan. Our house was in a hamlet made up of the families of five sisters – all of whom had become Christians. It included their husbands, children, grandparents, in-laws, relatives for a visit, and Lindsay and I who were their resident Social Anthropologists – thrown in for good measure

Our hamlet occupied a row of seven houses with a common courtyard out front. We shared the milk from our buffaloes, the care of our goats, our oxen for ploughing, our axes for chopping wood, the food from our fields and the pots we cooked it in. Children were constantly trailing backwards and forwards with something that had been borrowed, or something being returned. And if guests arrived unexpectedly, everybody mucked in.

We also shared our joys and our sorrows – our births, our weddings, our funerals
And we shared our faith – meeting regularly in our houses to pray and sing and learn – **Oikos**

It had its disadvantages – no privacy! Danger of gossip and petty jealousies. But, as Ruth said last week, being part of a community meant if people fell out they had to deal with it quick before it spread.

**Oikos**! Was this what Jesus had in mind when he gave his command to go and make disciples? It’s certainly what we see throughout the NT. Every time the word ‘church’ is mentioned, what the writer has in mind is not a building like ours, it’s a group of people meeting together in extended households

5). If we are to get the basics right, we need to be asking ourselves what is our experience of church more like?

Is it more like the schoolroom – a place where you choose to go as an individual, meeting others on the way, but returning to your own world afterwards?

Or is it more like the extended family – where you are a valued part of that community that Ruth was talking about last week? Where you feel valued and cared for and useful and loved?

Robert Warren’s research found that healthy churches were getting the basics right, and the basics were simple things like worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration.

They were places where worship was uplifting, pastoral care was effective, people were happy to give of their time, talents and money, and things were well run

These were the things that in the healthy churches were being done to a high quality

This was what was making these churches attractive to outsiders

There are different ways of being attractive

There are those who think they are attractive because of the way they **look**
– to them attractiveness is a superficial thing - good looking, or well turned out

There are those who think it’s what they can **do** that makes them attractive
– Spend their lives trying to be impressive or important

And finally there are those who are genuinely attractive
– who are attractive simply because of the sort of person they **are**
– someone who is good natured, loving, generous, and kind

You could say the same about churches

There are the ones that rely on the look of their building, or the quality of their worship

There are the ones that try to impress with their achievements – all the things they are doing

There are the ones that are just good people to be with, and good places to be

And here’s the thing - Richard Warren’s research found that the churches that focussed on doing a few things well were the happy places, - and that’s what was making them attractive

Where individual people seemed to have a sense of their purpose within the community because everyone was doing their bit

Where, in his own words, "A quiet sense of vocation (calling) pervades the whole church"

Ask yourself – which family would you rather be part of?

The family which never really spends much time together

Where every member is really successful – annual round robin letter listing all the things they’ve done?

Or the family where everybody gets on, and pulls their weight, and looks after each other?
6). Every church relies on its members to get things done
   And there will always be things that we like doing and others that no one likes doing but someone’s
got to do them
   And I tend to think, as members, we need to balance the two in what we offer
Remember that list I asked you to draw up at of the things you do for the church here at Liberton?
Spend a few moments going over that list, and asking yourself...
   1stly - If you think the list is too small...
       How are we doing in terms of our worship, pastoral care, giving, organising?
       Is there anything I could be helping with?
   2ndly – If you think that list is too big...
       What am I doing that I no longer enjoy?
       Am I doing something I should be getting someone else to do?
   3rdly – Ask yourself – What has God been saying to me today, and what am I going to do about it?

Questions

1. Make a list of the things you do for the church here at Liberton...

2. What image comes to John’s mind when he read Acts 2.42-47? Do you agree? What does this tell us about
   the first churches?

3.According to Mike Breen, what is the shift that takes place in the New Testament when it comes to the place
   where faith is being nurtured? Do you agree?

4. What is Oikos, and is something you have ever experienced? If so, where and when?

5. What does it mean to be attractive? When it came to what they were doing, what was it about the healthy
   churches that was making them attractive?

6. How did you get on with your list?