

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread

A while ago Janet wanted to go to a particular shop, I had better not say where

- And as it was a Saturday morning, I decided to take her
- Parking near the shop is difficult so I parked just up the road
- On the opposite side of the road there was a church (accurately ‘a church building’)
- And half-listening to the radio my mind wandered
- ‘I wonder what goes on in there?’ I thought to myself
- and I concluded that probably not much happened in there
- and certainly not much that I would want to go to
- and if that’s me, a Christian and a minister, what does the world at large think?

Michael and I went to have our hair cut – strange that I have to pay more than him

- Michael had the nice young lady hairdresser and I had the next available man
- But because I am a minister I was properly introduced – with the commendation
- ‘I posted a letter at his church at 9 o’clock on a Wednesday night ...
- All the lights were on and I could hear people singing
- It was, of course, the night of our last midweek celebration
- My hairdresser engaged me in conversation about the church and then I asked
- Do you have a church that you attend?
- He told me where he lives in a little village in the Tamar Valley
- I made a few suggestions of churches he might attend
- And then he told me that his father was a retired Assemblies of God pastor

Recently, I was at a funeral service

- after I got talking with the girlfriend of one the grandchildren
- a very nice young woman of about 30 years, who turned out to be a doctor
- and was living in South London, not so far from where I used to live
- I asked my now well rehearsed question, ‘do you have a church that you attend?’
- People don’t normally seem to find this question too threatening
- But it has some precision because people sometimes talk about belonging to church
- But, as we all know, that is not the same as having a church that you attend
- When she replied that she did not have a church that she attended
- I was quickly racking my brain to come up with a place that I could recommend
- Suddenly I found myself saying, ‘You could go to Emmanuel at Wimbledon’
- ‘The minister there is a friend of mine – it’s not a bit like you would expect
- and there are a lot of people at that church, just like you.’
- And then she told me her grandfather had been a Church of Scotland minister

It seems to me from many conversations not so different from this

- That there is still a considerable amount of goodwill towards the church out there
- At a push some people might even say they have a church to which they belong
- But this has not become a church that they attend and living as a Christian
- Something has gone wrong
- They are either looking at church buildings and concluding – not much happens there
- Or, in church or conversation with Christians are not engaging with the message

In Acts, Luke gives a very brief account of Paul's return visit to Macedonia and Achaia

- As he encourages the people on his way to Greece
- And gathers what seem to be representatives from nearly all the Gentile churches
- To take a substantial gift of money to the Christians at Jerusalem
- The narrative style has reverted to 'we' which suggests Luke accompanies Paul
- Possibly as a representative of the church at Philippi ('we' stopped in Acts 16:16)
- Where Paul has spent some extra days to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread
- Before heading off to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost

The first port of call on Paul's journey from Philippi to Jerusalem was Troas

- Troas was probably not a church started by Paul
- Significantly Luke records:

On the first day of the week they came together to break bread.

(Acts 20:7)

Through this short paragraph we gain an introduction into the worship life of the church

- Especially if we do not spend too much time gaining free publicity
- By arranging for members of the congregation to fall out of the window
- Instead, from these few verses we learn about

- I THE LORD'S DAY
- II THE LORD'S PEOPLE
- III THE LORD'S SUPPER
- IV THE LORD'S MESSAGE
- V THE LORD'S POWER

- I THE LORD'S DAY

On the first day of the week they came together to break bread.

(Acts 20:7)

It was not at Sunday School but through the BBC TV children's programme *Crackerjack*

- And their weekly boy against girl quiz
- That I learned that Sunday was the first day of the week
- I try hard to avoid pagan calendars and pagan diaries which give that place to Monday

The fact that the Christians at Troas came together on the first day of the week

- Is very significant – first because this is the earliest unambiguous evidence we have
- Christians are moving away from Sabbath observance to worship on the Lord's Day
- Now we must reserve a longer discussion on the relationship between
- The Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord's Day for another occasion
- Though clearly we have to take the 10 Commandments seriously
- Including 'Remember the Sabbath Day' (which I interpret as one in seven)
- 'to keep it holy', briefly my interpretation is that one in seven days should be different
- and that for the believer that one day in seven is the day of resurrection, the first day
- the day that God began his creation, that day that God began his new creation
- the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out, the very special Lord's Day

Christians have disagreed for centuries about what not to do on the Lord's Day

- it amazes me that in a society that has never had so much recreational time
- people seem to need to be so busy on the Lord's Day
- but that aside, I don't want us to major on what we don't do
- but on the Christian use of the Lord's Day – not negatively but positively

The third week of June is a decisive week for me – not only is it my birthday

- but, in recent years, it has also been the week the football fixtures are published
- I enter all those fixtures in my diary, plan my holidays around them
- Try desperately hard to avoid any other conflict of interest
- Hate it when Synod or church meetings outside of my control conflict with it
- Why do I get in such a state about it – because I am a fan and I want to be there

I was just the same when I was playing – I tried to let nothing stop me

- Janet and I were married on a Friday, allegedly because I was playing on Saturday
- Because we were away on honeymoon I did not play
- But I apologised to the rest of the lads for letting them down

Now take the Christian use of Sunday, the Lord's Day – the services are our 'fixture list'

- We know months in advance when they are – including all the specials
- Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Ascension Day
- Most churches would be revolutionised if our own people simply came
- People seem embarrassed in church to ask, 'where were you?'
- Yet the fans I sit with at Plymouth Argyle would not be embarrassed to ask at all
- Not that they ever have to

A very great witness in contemporary society is our Christian use of the Lord's Day

- The New Testament word that we often translate church
- Can also mean 'assembly', 'gathering together', 'congregation'
- On the Lord's Day we see the gathering of the Lord's People
- At Troas, on the Lord's Day, there was a gathering of the people of God

II THE LORD'S PEOPLE

No one arrived outside the meeting room at Troas and concluded nothing is going on

- The apostle Paul was there and this was an evening of great significance
- They were probably there in the evening because it was the time people were free
- And it was to be an evening of great significance of the church at Troas

When I was in ministerial training I often went out to tea before the Sunday evening service

- With a friend who shared with two members of the local charismatic Anglican church
- I liked their church and would often go there if I was free on a Sunday evening
- They often had guest speakers and perhaps a visiting singer or band
- Sadly, they were often a bit critical of me and of the church where I was placed
- And would ask questions such as, 'whose doing the worship?' and then say
- 'We've got such and such a preacher and such and such a band at our church'
- To which I felt compelled to say, 'We've only got God at our church!'

It's not a criticism of the conference, the celebration, the holiday week, the big event

- But we do need to remember that authentic worship
- Is not dependent on all the paraphernalia of the contemporary worship experience
- But people meeting in the presence of God

So many times I have had church members say to me

- That they were disappointed not to have been at something in the church
- Adding, 'If I had known that it was going to be like that I would have come'
- What a force for God we could be if only we all came
- With open minds and open hearts and open Bibles and a great sense of expectancy
- And not be disappointed to think 'We've only got God at our church.'

We should not be too hard on poor Eutychus, who fell asleep

- Luke is not critical of the length of Paul's preaching and conversation with people
- That is a great bonus for, as he explains, Paul intended to leave the next day
- But Luke also observes that there were a great many lamps in the upstairs room
- At first this seems like an inconsequential detail
- But Eutychus was possibly overwhelmed by fumes of the oil or lack of oxygen

III THE LORD'S SUPPER

Luke begins his description of this Lord's Day meeting at Troas

- By saying that they came together to break bread
- The very essence of breaking bread is coming together to remember Jesus
- For Jesus had given the command, 'Do this to remember me'
- Getting the balance between the solemn remembrance and joyful thanks is a challenge

As a child, I had a very bad introduction to the service of Holy Communion

- after the service had ended there would be an interval
- during which red *Books of Offices* would be distributed among the congregation
- a hymn that no one seemed to know would be sung
- during which there would be another collection, taken by poor stewards
- I thought it meant that they weren't very good
- But apparently it meant that the collection would go to the poor
- I had seen what people put in and I was not surprised that they were still poor

After this dismal hymn

- the Minister in black gown which he always wore but no one ever told me why
- would be at the communion table, rather than in the pulpit
- not facing the congregation but side-ways on, unkindly called the ping-pong position
- the service would then proceed in sixteenth century English
- 'vouchsafe unto us', 'by the one oblation of himself once offered' and so on
- then row by row about twelve adults would go forward and kneel at the rail
- to receive a small cube from a white sliced loaf, and a thimble of wine
- as they were going forward the organist played the dreariest music imaginable
- being a child I was cut adrift, about a dozen rows back, as adults squeezed by
- knocking their books off the ledge as they went

- with only the *Book of Offices* for entertainment
- in the form of the Order of Service for the Funeral of a Child, fitting reading
- for at that moment, transition from life to death would have been scarcely noticeable
- now that is a caricature, but it is not that far from how it really was
- and my guess is that it was replicated in Methodist Churches all over the country

Then there's the story of the Anglican vicar reading the liturgy for the eucharist

- And it's not a good day. Not many people have come
- And those who have are like him, spiritually out of sorts, suddenly he gets to the bit
- 'And so with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven'!
- what now, me, today, really? Angels and archangels and all the company of heaven?
- In a moment the service is transformed and absorbed into the worship of heaven
- How can worship really be dull when it is all about the 'glory of God'
- for it is a solemn remembrance and joyful thanksgiving for the death of the Lord
- his body given for us, his blood shed for us

IV THE LORD'S MESSAGE

Paul spoke to the believers until midnight and then again until dawn

- it is unlikely that this was one long sermon, even in two parts
- more likely is that he preached and talked informally with the people
- as friends often do after, or before, a long absence

Paul obviously revelled in his conversation with the people

- had that not been the case he certainly would not have had two goes at it
- though I am the last one to devalue the importance of biblical preaching
- we must not underestimate the role of friendship and conversation in the gospel
- Paul was openhearted and made friends

In actual fact, we have no information about Paul's sermon at Troas

- but in this passage we do have his address to the Ephesian elders (20:18-38)
- which reads like a miniature letter

We live in an age where Christians seemed to resent any inconvenience for the gospel

- perhaps, it was ever thus
- Leaders can so easily be dragged down to the commitment level of the people
- But leaders are called to bring the commitment level of the people up
- Paul reminds them of his example and of his sufferings

Paul has not preached to them in order to tickle their ears

- he has not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to them
- It might not have been the message they wanted but it was what they needed
- particularly he has declared a message of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus

Paul reminds them that in their role as elders they must be shepherds of the church of God

- freely associating God with Jesus (20:28) who bought the church with his own blood
- a great pastoral responsibility is opposing those who distort the truth
- believers must be on guard against 'savage wolves'

False teaching has been an enemy of the church from the beginning

- those of us who believe that evangelical Biblical teachings are true
- must not be so insular in our beliefs and defensive in our doctrines
- that we neglect social concern and intellectual engagement with the world around us

The greatest subtlety of counterfeit Christian teaching is it looks so much like the real thing

- simply the only way to distinguish the counterfeit is to be thorough versed in the truth
- we must be constantly alert to spot any departure from the truth
- but the only way to do so is to know and teach the truth so we recognise falsehood

At Troas we see an introduction into the worship life of the church

I THE LORD'S DAY

II THE LORD'S PEOPLE

III THE LORD'S SUPPER

IV THE LORD'S MESSAGE

V THE LORD'S POWER

While Paul was proclaiming the Lord's message, Eutychus dozed off and fell out the window

- Luke's mention of the many lamps offers some explanation
- As to how a young man might do that even when Paul was speaking
- But in any event, the fall from the third storey killed Eutychus

In an action reminiscent of Elijah and Elisha (cf. 1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34-35)

- Paul "threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him."
- This is the last of eight such raisings of the dead in the Bible
- Now you want to know what the other seven are, don't you?
- Elijah and the widow's son, Elisha and the Shunammite's son
- A Moabite who had been thrown into Elisha's grave (2 Kings 13:21)
- Jairus' daughter Lk 8:40, young man at Nain Lk 7:11, Lazarus Jn 11:43
- And in Acts Tabitha (9:36) and Eutychus (20:9)
- Interestingly enough – just eight raisings in the whole Bible
- Which makes me conclude that though God could raise the dead today
- I should not expect it to be a regular occurrence
- Someone might ask, 'Why did you not include the Lord Jesus in that list?'
- The simple answer being, as far as we know each of these eight died again
- But Jesus, by his mighty resurrection, rose again to die no more

It has been a wonderful Lord's Day evening at Troas and the people were greatly comforted

- They had worshipped on the Lord's Day
- They had been with the Lord's People
- They had shared in the Lord's Supper
- They had heard the Lord's Message
- They had seen the Lord's Power

Of which we have an even greater sign – the passing of someone from death to life

- Reborn to eternity by the grace of God – that's the gospel sign we need the most