

**Sunday, May 7, 2017 – Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
**“How It Looks”**

Acts 2: 42-47

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Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sometimes, you just know when things look right. Six years ago this week my nephew Jacob came into my life. My sister and brother-in-law were brand new parents. Sometimes you see someone with a kid for the first time and you think, “Well, this will be an interesting experiment,” especially when it’s your only sibling, the kid sister but no, I just knew, I knew Karla and Jonathan were going to be awesome – it just looked right. Sometimes you can’t put everything to words, you just know it feels right, it looks right.

How do you know when you’ve walked into a good church? Sometimes, you just know. I’m sure some of you here today walked into Mountain View and from the first day you just knew, and you never questioned it and you’ve been here ever since. If pressed for a reason you could probably list reasons why but all you can say is, “I just knew.”

Luke, the doctor turned investigative reporter who collected information about the earliest days of the church, describes such a scene in Acts 2. In fact it’s the kind of scene churches today want to emulate. A decade or so ago and still somewhat today the trendy Christian thing was to try do church like the first century church, especially these guys in Acts 2. Just Google “Acts 2 Church” and see what comes up, there’s a ministry in almost every town with this as a key piece of their mission and vision. A church that’s genuine, authentic, sticks to Jesus and lives out a life of love. Awesome. If you were looking for a church this place was met with favor from the community – people looking from outside saw what was happening and found it an extraordinarily different and attractive way to live. People were in close relationship with each other, gathered around the teaching of the apostles – remember, there’s no written New Testament yet, just a couple months after the crucifixion and resurrection, just

oral stories about Jesus from His disciples. They followed Jesus' command to "take, eat." They prayed. They shared with others, loved and served each other. It's this utopian kind of description, and many of them could tell you that in that fellowship, they just knew this was right.

What do you do when it isn't so simple? Remember how mentioned nostalgia – 13 years ago this month I preached my first real sermon, at my home church in Michigan. I'm feeling nostalgic about it because I preached on this very text, and this is the first time since then I've preached on it. A year into seminary I was face to face with the reality that you'd think would have set in at some point before my preaching class at the end of my first year – I'm going to have to preach a sermon every week. See, seminary is a lot like any other graduate school, you read a lot of books, do a lot of research, write a lot of papers. It was a lot the same... until it wasn't. Now here I am, a couple of days shy of 23 years old, presuming to have something meaningful to say to 800 people spread between three services? Who do I think I am? And what are they going to think when they see me stammer, and what do I do with my hands, and why should people my parents and grandparents' age listen to anything I have to say about real life, about God about their spiritual condition?! And I'm going to have to do this at least once a week? What have I gotten myself into? After years of cruising along just know I wanted to be a pastor, this preaching thing just didn't feel right.

And a lot of things as a Christian are like that. Maybe you took your time figuring out if this is where you were supposed to be. Maybe you're wrestling through big questions about God, faith, the Bible. Maybe you're afraid of people seeing how you're so different here than what your family sees at home or your coworkers see at work and you feel like a hypocrite. Maybe you're taking on something new – a board, a committee, or you've never done community serve day, or never attended a youth group event and you think you don't know enough people or know enough information and it feels unnatural and awkward and it just doesn't feel right. Maybe it used to just feel right but now it doesn't. How do you know this church thing, this God thing, this Christianity thing is working when it just doesn't

feel right, when your experience isn't like the lady down the row from you who saw how it looks and just knew?

It's simpler than it looks. It starts with remembering that church isn't about you, it's about Jesus – but Jesus, who church is about, is for you and He puts together a community. So is the Apostle's Teaching, God's Word happening in worship? Is it encouraged to study, whether in groups like we have running on five days a week, plus in your family and personal life? Is breaking of bread happening – yes communion and by extension, baptism, but also people who enjoy each other and do life together? Two weeks in a row by the way, I've been able to attend Dinners for 6 to 8 gatherings – great way to get to know people here. Is what God does for us in an hour of worship helping us live as Christians the other 167 hours of the week?

Sometimes you feel it and you just know but other times, that's not how it is. Whether you "just know" or you don't know, let Jesus who lived, died, lives again and is coming again answer the question. If it's about Jesus and not you, but that Jesus is clearly portrayed for you, then that my friends is how it looks. That's the church.

Christianity is way more than just a religion. It's a lifestyle, an altogether different way to live. It's not just something we do on Sunday it's something that becomes the core of who we are. And frankly, it isn't always going to be this overwhelming mountaintop experience of just knowing and having it just feel right. In fact, sometimes it feels downright wrong. It means putting yourself last, making sacrifices, being in satan's crosshairs and having all the garden variety anxieties, fears, personal growth, relationship drama, neurosis, injuries and diseases everyone else has – but we do it in a church that is about Jesus, who is for us and who pieces together a community to do life together. Sometimes it's beautiful, sometimes it's unpleasant. We can be honest about life, about our hardships and still point toward Jesus as our hope while doing the hard work of loving one another – and when Jesus is the focus, that is an extraordinarily different and attractive way to live that finds favor with the community.

Today we do that in a very tangible way – baptisms are happening, Jesus’ body and blood is feeding us and we’re going out into the world as a group to serve. But really it happens every day, in ways more ordinary and less dramatic.

When it just didn’t “feel right” for me, the church came to encourage me. It came in the form of kind and loving words to a very green and nervous kid who thanked me for sharing God’s Word and giving them something to think about. I’m sure they went more out of their way to share it because I was so green and nervous and it was my first time but you know what? God used that. God puts us here for each other especially for the times when life in this world just doesn’t look and feel right.

It happens for you, too. A card sent to someone who is sick, a phone call to a friend who is grieving, driving up a dish you prepared for a funeral, meeting with friends in your home. Even the umpteenth load of laundry for your family, done in love. Done in praise of God with glad and sincere hearts, multiplying by the hundreds of this community and the thousands throughout this city – what if it were all harnessed and intentional and spreading? People studying their Bibles together, praying together, worshipping together, loving their community in ways small and personal and large and organized. What an extraordinarily different and attractive way to live.

There’s no such thing as a perfect church. We don’t see a perfect church but how it looks, is the church is made perfect in Jesus. Amen.