

Reflection on Sunday 26 April 2026

by Adrian Walter, Lay Leader of Worship

Reading: Acts 2. 42-47

“Hopelessly Devoted to You...”

So sang Olivia Newton-John to John Travolta in the 1978 musical *Grease* - a line that many of us will remember, whether we care to admit it or not! But more of that in a minute...

The New Testament passage we heard earlier offers us a glimpse into what we now call the early Church. It is a beautiful and compelling picture. We know from later chapters in Acts that this first Christian community was not perfect and did not live without tension or difficulty. And yet, what we are given here is something precious: a picture of a church learning to live out its faith together, guided by the Spirit and centred on Christ.

As many of you know, I grew up in a church plant that began very simply, meeting in my parents' home, before gradually growing into the large church it is today. When that small group of founding members - coming from a range of church backgrounds - began to shape their life together, they turned intentionally to passages like this one in Acts. Despite the fact that it was written nearly two thousand years ago, these words still spoke clearly and faithfully into their present moment.

That raises an important and perhaps uncomfortable question for us. If future generations were to look back at the Church of the twenty-first century, what might they say? What kind of picture would they find of our shared life, our priorities, and our devotion? How would they set up their church?

Some years ago, an American pastor, Professor Jeremy Berg, tried to explore that question by rewriting the reading we've just heard (Acts 2. 41–47) in contemporary terms, verse by verse. His aim was not to condemn, but to hold up a mirror - to reflect what many people experience in church life today. I invite you to listen to this paraphrase with open hearts.

Acts 2. 42–47 - Rewritten for the 21st Century

42 The believers engaged with Scripture now and then, perhaps glancing at a "verse of the day" on their phones as they rushed into busy lives. They attended church regularly, offering their hour each week, but often kept a certain distance from deeper fellowship. Shared meals existed, but usually in hurried mid-week gatherings, squeezed in between school activities, lessons, and shopping. Prayer tended to surface mainly when life became difficult.

43 A quiet sense of weariness and apathy settled in, because there was little that stirred wonder or deep joy in the church's life.

44 Faith became something private, tucked away into a small corner of life, opened briefly on Sunday mornings and then carefully closed again.

45 During the week, people worked hard to care for their own families - meeting responsibilities, paying bills, and trying to stay afloat. Some struggled quietly, but their needs often went unnoticed, hidden behind pride, fear, or shame.

46 Day to day, believers rarely spent time together. Life revolved around work, children's commitments, and endless demands. Hospitality felt like too much effort. Homes felt too untidy, schedules too full. Meals were often eaten alone, accompanied by tired hearts.

47 A brief prayer ended the day, spoken more from habit than hope. Few colleagues or friends even knew these believers were Christians. Church attendance continued, but more from obligation than expectation, and new faces - and new faith - became increasingly rare.

I want to be clear: this is not a description of St Andrew's or St Mary's, nor is it aimed at any particular congregation anywhere. But it does reflect something many recognise within the wider Church today. It echoes Jesus' parable of the seed sown among thorns - seed that begins well, received with joy, but slowly crowded out by the pressures, distractions, and demands of life.

So, what might this passage in Acts still have to say to us? What can we learn from the early Church, not as an impossible ideal, but as a gentle invitation?

I have called this reflection ***Hopelessly Devoted*** because devotion lies at the heart of this passage. But the question is: devoted to who and what?

Acts points us to five simple, life-giving commitments:

- **The apostles' teaching**
- **Fellowship**
- **The breaking of bread**
- **Prayer and praise**
- **Care for one another**

So, let's just unpack these over the next few minutes.

First there was Devotion to the Apostles' Teaching

Imagine, for a moment, the challenge facing the apostles. Three thousand people come to faith almost overnight - each with their own background, questions, assumptions, and uncertainties. It would have been overwhelming. And yet, they committed themselves to teaching, helping new believers grow and understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

Much like today, many people around us know very little about Jesus beyond vague impressions. Teaching, then, is not just about information - it is about formation. It is about helping one another learn to see our lives in the light of Christ.

Jesus Himself modelled this so beautifully, patiently opening the Scriptures and showing how they pointed to Him. In a world full of noise and competing voices, the Church is called to be a place where God's Word is listened to with care, humility, and expectation.

Next there was Devotion to Fellowship

We cannot love Christ while remaining distant from His people. The New Testament reminds us that faith is never meant to be lived alone. Fellowship is not simply about gathering in the same room; it is about learning to share life honestly and gently with one another.

Of course, it is easy for our conversations to stay on the surface - weather, sport, everyday concerns. There is nothing wrong with that. But there are moments when we are invited to go deeper, to speak of faith, doubt, gratitude, and hope. When we do, something beautiful happens - we discover that we are not alone.

This was followed by Devotion to the Breaking of Bread

The early Christians shared meals together - not grand occasions, but ordinary, everyday food. Hospitality was simple, imperfect, and generous.

So often we wait for the right moment: when the house is tidy, the table is set just so, and life feels manageable. But hospitality is not about perfection; it is about presence. A

simple meal shared in kindness can open doors to friendship, understanding, and care.

The Eucharist holds a special place in this shared life. Again and again, it draws us back to the heart of our faith - to Christ's love, His sacrifice, and His promise of new life. It gently reminds us of who we are and how we are called to live.

Which led into Devotion to Prayer and Praise

Prayer weaves together the life of the Church, both when we gather and when we are apart. It is how we learn to place our joys, struggles, and questions into God's hands.

Prayer does not need to be complicated or eloquent. It simply needs to be honest. In our worship, in our homes, and in the quiet moments of our days, prayer shapes us—often more than we realise. Many years ago, Stella and I decided that saying thanks to God for the food we were about to eat in a restaurant was important. After dinner in a large hotel in a Muslim country a young girl approached us and asked if we were Christians. She said she was attending a work conference, where she was the only Christian, and seeing us pray as we sat down was huge encouragement to her. Sometimes, even small acts of faithfulness matter more than we know. A simple prayer said in public, a song sung with sincerity, a quiet trust in God - these things can encourage others in ways we may never fully see.

And finally, there was Devotion to One Another

The generosity of the early Church flowed from love, not obligation. People responded to real needs with open hearts and open hands.

Scripture is clear that we are called to care for one another wisely and compassionately - sharing what we have, supporting those who struggle, and recognising that everything we possess is, ultimately, a gift from God.

This kind of care does not demand heroics. It begins with noticing, listening, and being willing to respond.

So, to wrap up - no church is perfect, and none of us live out our faith flawlessly. But the whole book of Acts reminds us that God works powerfully through ordinary people who choose, day by day, to remain devoted – devoted to Christ, to one another, and to the life of the Church.

The invitation before us is not to guilt or comparison, but to renewal. To be *hopelessly devoted*... to Christ, the church and the world - not out of duty, but out of love - so that God may continue His work, in us and through us, for His glory and for the good of each other and the world.

Amen.