

TO REMODEL

By

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Text: Acts 1: 6-14	Date: 5/4/08	#0822
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If you use a digital camera, you know how easy it is to crop a picture. You can define portions of the photos you've taken. You can edit out large amounts of background and focus on just one detail. Then you can make a print of just that detail. When you show this new photograph to your friends, they'll never know what has been left out, what the context was for the image you're showing them. So, for example you can show a photograph that is entirely of your smiling children, but nobody will ever see the vast snow covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains in front of which you photographed them.

This analogy to cropping is frequently what we do when we read scripture. We read portions that especially make sense to us like those smiling children for which we have great affection. But we've cropped the background when we don't read for the bigger picture. We're often enamored of small pieces of scripture yet fail to recognize how the pieces link together to form the dramatic story of salvation.

This morning's NT lesson is a case in point. I want to direct your attention to that small group of people mentioned in vv. 12-14 of Acts chapter 1. We have eleven disciples headed by Peter and John; we have the unnamed brothers of Jesus; we have

certain women also unnamed; and we have Mary the mother of Jesus. They are together in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem, and they are spending their time in prayer. We can almost hear the voice of the photographer saying to them: stand a little closer so I can get the group shot.

Here is where we might devote ourselves to considering the prayer time of this small group. What were they praying about and how did they actually conduct the prayer? We might also wonder just how much time they did spend together. Did this involve several days or weeks; did someone cook for the group; did they ever go back to their homes at all? One reason for a focus such as this is because we might want to model our own church group after this high profile assembly of individuals. We might want to remodel our own life of prayer after the way of prayer by these biblical heroes.

The danger of cropping a picture is that we lose the background. For all the advantages of investigating details, we run the risk of disrupting a critical balance. So even though our desire may be to remodel our prayer life, if we can't see the background, we may lose important perspective. If we were to enlarge the photograph of these disciples and women huddled in prayer in the upper room, we would take in the background of their just experiencing Jesus' departure in what we call today the ascension. In fact that larger picture should also include the events described in chapter 2 of Acts, whereby the Holy Spirit descends upon this group ten days later on the day of Pentecost. For that matter we might as well enlarge the picture to include

the entire book of Acts, because from this group gathered for prayer, the church expanded out from Jerusalem into the whole known world. As a result of their prayer, that group remodeled itself and dispersed to tell the gospel to thousands.

When we use the word remodel we are usually talking about converting our garage into an extra bedroom or installing pine paneling and better lighting in our family room. Last August my son said he was going to expand his house; maybe he said remodel, I can't remember. But he showed me the sketch he presented to the municipality to get his building permit. I couldn't believe it. If he had presented that sketch here in Emmaus, they would have laughed him right out of the borough office. However, I've seen photos of my son's completed house: amazing! Obviously, remodeling has a lot more to do with what takes place inside our thinking, imagination and heart.

Especially when we're speaking not about houses and church buildings, but about our prayer life and the ministry life of a congregation. Remodeling has a lot to do with the relationship we're fostering with God. We remodel when we need something new. In terms of the church *new* is more importantly about our heart and relationship to God, than it is about the sketches of appearance. So is the remodeling of our faith in Christ a matter of background that we must reconsider or is it a matter of further focusing, further cropping until we get to the very center? When you eat and drink the Lord's Supper this morning, let the bread and cup lead you to see the bigger picture of faith in Christ as well as faith's deep down center in Christ.