

JUNE 4, 2023

# home church

## for reflection & discussion:

1. What are the divisive issues you are currently experiencing in your life, family, or faith community? Why are they important issues to you and or others?
2. Consider: Are there ways in which your own faith may be more defined by walls and boundaries than by the centrality of Jesus? Explain.
3. Can you imagine a way that centring on Jesus could bring unity without conformity? What might that look like?
4. How can you practice being more centred on the person of Jesus?



## FIVE SHIFTS OF TRUE REVIVAL + REFORMATION

A reformation is a period of recalibration and course-correction. Any community around for as long as the church will experience inevitable drift over time. Yet the Spirit has worked again and again throughout history to draw the church back toward its center. Key moments come when particular ideas and practices are rethought and core truths are rediscovered.

Rapid cultural and technological change, clergy scandals, church divisions, and political turmoil have resulted in a period where “deconstruction” is the buzzword. Many Christians find themselves rethinking their faith, and many outside the church dismiss Christianity as having nothing true or relevant left to say to the world.

## THIS SUNDAY: SHIFT 5, THE CENTRE HOLDS!

**TEXTS:** Acts 11, 15 (Acts 15:7-11), Romans 10:1-4, 9, 12

Small groups, families, and friends are experiencing a division and disunity in their faith like never before. Like their pastors, they’re wondering “What holds the center? Is there something that can sustain our shared life together? Is there something big enough to unite us even when so much seems set to tear us apart?”

## REVIEW

**Last Sunday:** Simon Chan speaks to this regarding the Pentecostal event, “Speaking in Tongues...is the most appropriate symbol of an event whose primary purpose was to create a church distinguished chiefly by its all-embracing inclusiveness.” Tongues is a language which points to a universal experience by swapping out the normal function of language and performs by providing a type of social holiness.

## Five Shifts: More of a Restoration to Early Church

### Shift 1: A different way of reading scripture

- God always looks like Jesus, and all scripture is properly read through him.
- Psalm 1: way of the law, stand, sit, walk

### Shift 2: A bigger gospel

- To be saved includes belonging to a community under Jesus called to live the life of the future now.

### Shift 3: A new relationship with power

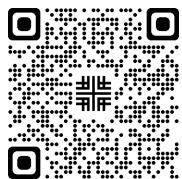
- Evil is overcome through the power of suffering love.
- Matthew 5:3-12

### Shift 4: A clarified purpose and a fresh empowerment

- The Holy Spirit empowers us to partner with God’s work of reconciling all things.

### Shift 5: A new approach to disagreement

- The church is defined by our shared center, not by the lines we draw.



## connect

- need prayer?
- meet with pastor Shel or Josh
- ask questions
- sign-up for our weekly e-newsletter
- get information
- join a Home Church
- make comments



## I. THE PROBLEM OF DIVISION

<sup>34</sup> "I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another." -Jesus, John 13:34-35

- There have been debates about gentile inclusion (Acts 11 and 15)21
- The Separation of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15)
- The Great Schism of western and eastern traditions in 1054
- The Protestant Reformation and a myriad of examples of denominational and church splits we've witnessed in our own lifetimes
- Shel: RCA, CRC, URC, NRC, now a new RCA break off

*"What holds the centre? Is there something that can sustain our shared life together? Is there something big enough to unite us even when so much seems set to tear us apart?"*

### Reminder: Wall builders or well diggers?

**Walls:** The problem is, walls are about containment and limits. Once someone has left the "enclosure" of a wall, that wall is powerless.

## II. GOSPEL

One of the most prolonged debates had to do with Gentile converts.

**Acts 10:9** About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. <sup>11</sup> He saw heaven opened and an object, something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. <sup>13</sup> Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!" <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, "Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!" <sup>15</sup> The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!" <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven. ....<sup>28</sup> He said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean."

- It is hard to overstate how important Torah was (and is) for the Jewish people.
- Peter changes position based on revelation of the Holy Spirit to him and the Holy Spirit drawing the non-Jewish, believer into the church!
- You would think that would be the end of the debate, but in Acts 15, church leaders once again gather to address the issue of Gentile inclusion.
  - Some are arguing that "unless you were circumcised according to the custom we've received from Moses, you can't be saved" (15:1). **Read that again. Some were arguing that Torah adherence was a salvation-level issue.**

Peter stood up... "God, who knows people's deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, but purified their deepest thoughts and desires through faith. Why then are you now challenging God by placing a burden on the shoulders of these disciples that neither we nor our ancestors could bear? On the contrary, we believe that we and they are saved in the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:7-11 CEB).

You see what Peter just did there? He cuts through the debates, not minimizing the importance of the Law by any means but instead drawing Jew and Gentile together around one shared centre, the person and work of Jesus.

James: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:19-20). The church comes to a compromise and decides to write a letter. In the letter James explains how and why they came to this conclusion, saying in verse 29, "The Holy Spirit has led us to the decision that no burden should be placed on you other than these essentials."

- The Greek word for "seemed good" or "led us" in this instance is *dokeo* which can be variously translated as "led," "seemed good," "presumed," or (my favorite) "imagine."
- The church centres on Jesus and then, by the power and guidance of the Spirit, is led into a way of discerning how to live. Through the Spirit they "imagine" what the church can look like as it centres on Jesus, welcomes Gentiles, and honors all their history.

### Now What Shall We Do?

- Spirit-Driven Curiosity... "What if?"
- Unity in diversity
  - Churches are not meant to be uniform and homogenous; they are intended to be a family, united in Christ
- Show Up and Make Space
  - The Jewish training would have been to avoid these people...
  - Jesus enters into their midst in his earthly life and now by the Holy Spirit!