**A Picture of Church**

 ***12****Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.****13****And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.****14****All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14, ESV)*

 The picture of The Church is a picture of prayer – as a church, we are called, above all else, to be devoted to prayer. Greetings dearly beloved as we talk today about the image of the church. What is the church? What does it value? What is the purpose of the people of Christ gathering together? My prayer is that at the end of this message, we will “land” on and be convinced of the truth that the church, above everything else, needs to be about the business of prayer. Let’s talk, then, about this picture…

 The Church is the Apostle-led, Jesus following, prayerful gathering of people. What we are reading about today is one of the earliest gatherings of The Church in its history. Notice that all the Apostles were present; the Holy Spirit had yet to fall upon them; and yet, they had to fill their time with meaningful work while they waited for God’s Spirit to commission them. What they did in that period of time became a foundation and an example for the rest of church history. Focusing on the details of the Scripture reading, we need to think about the following important things: first, the eleven Apostles and certain women who followed Christ were there, along with Jesus’ immediate family. Second, the offering up of prayers and petitions was mentioned. So, we can say that the beginning of The Church was one that was led by Jesus’ disciples and followers, and their primary work as prayer.

 Think about it: the state of a building is contingent on the state of its foundation. If a building has an improper blueprint or a weak foundation, it is impossible for it to withstand strong winds, rains or otherwise severe weather.

 The foundation of the church is the group of Jesus’ Apostles, and they are an example to us through their all-important work of prayer. Today, we gather for that reason, and we do so not only to read and hear God’s Word preached. Rather, there is worship, prayer, praise and supplication happening as we meet. Yes, our teachings are taken from the Scriptures, and both man and woman are praying; and worship and prayer are foundational to the life of The Church. If we continued reading the book of Acts, we would see that the Apostles had two primary focuses: prayer and God’s Word.

Today, we need to continue stressing the importance and indispensability of prayer. Our practical task is to be convinced that it is not only the sermon that is important, but prayer also, along with praise and requests (or supplications). If we are only coming for the sermon, we are in the wrong. We are called to follow the Apostles’ example and teaching. They gave us a very clear model of what church is supposed to look like through their focus.

 Therefore, let us not simply gather as a church for its own sake, but to pray and to beseech God – because the foundation of the church, the picture of the church is one of prayer.

 As a church, we are called, above all else, to devote ourselves to prayer. The Lord bless you all. Amen.