

Growing Up In Jesus - “We Want You to Be With Us In This”

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Mar. 28, 2021 - Palm Sunday
(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson’s series: *Making Maturing Disciples of Jesus*)

Acts 2:37-42

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayer.

You have heard the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Well, it takes a village to raise a disciple of Jesus. It takes a community to raise maturing followers of Jesus. But not just any kind of community – it takes a special community! It takes a community shaped by the Holy Spirit. It takes a community brought into being by the events of Pentecost to raise maturing followers of the Jesus. In Acts 2, we see a description of the first church brought together and equipped by the Holy Spirit.

If we were watching that first church in action, we would see men and women – of many different cultures hanging

out together. They appear to be enjoying fellowship with one another and even more, they are experiencing fellowship (*koinonia*) in the Trinity, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Temple, and in their homes, day by day, they were experience fellowship (*koinonia*) with each other IN the Trinity!

We can, therefore, restate Luke's description of their community in the Spirit this way: **"They were continually devoting themselves to participation in the Divine fellowship (*Koinonia*)"!!!** Yes, they were having fellowship (*koinonia*) with each other as they enjoyed their chips and dip, their veggies and cheese. But what Luke is celebrating is that their fellowship (*koinonia*) with one another was fellowship (*koinonia*) within the Triune God of grace. Yes, in the Temple, and in their homes, spending time with each other, supporting one another, encouraging one another, but also ... and fundamentally ... supporting and encouraging each other by sharing together in the Divine Fellowship.

You see, the Living God is one, but not solitary. The Living God is one, but not alone. From all eternity, the Living God has been a Fellowship, a *Koinonia* is the Greek word. From all eternity, the Living God has been fellowshiping as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Augustine argued that the Holy Spirit is the embodiment of the fellowship of the Father and the Son. And the Holy Spirit comes to bring us into that Divine Fellowship, that Divine *Koinonia*!

As His church our fellowship with one another is not just with one another; it is with, it is in, it is within the Trinitarian God; into whose Fellowship we have been brought by the cross of the Jesus and the power of the Spirit. **“They devoted themselves to the fellowship (*Koinonia*),”** to joining together in the incredible loving-grace that flows between the three Persons of the one God! As Jesus’ Church it is being in that Fellowship that makes us one.

We find our unity not in agreement on every theological doctrine, not in any social agenda, not in any style of worship, or forms of governance, or vision statements. We find our unity in our mutual enjoyment of the Trinitarian fellowship (*Koinonia*). We find our unity in being brought by the Holy Spirit into the Friendship at the center of the universe; the Friendship that has forever existed and thrived between God the Father and God the Son. Churches today vary in many ways, but they are united and alive by entering into the Divine Fellowship. We are invited into it.

How have you experienced it? I know it can sound a little mystical, but I’m sure you have experienced some of that Divine Fellowship on your own and with each other. It may have been an act of kindness that showed you were valued in this fellowship. It may have been a word of grace, a smile of forgiveness, a nod of welcome, a prayer of solidarity, a hug of fellowship, a joyful celebration in your success, a coffee and conversation, a donut of friendship, a show of patience, or a healing word.

How do we do this enjoyment of THE Divine Fellowship? How do we stay alive in this wonder, this fellowship, this community IN God? Let me first say, I think we do this well. I think you do this well. Our church family, our fellowship, is such a gift to me and to others. I can't wait to see you all on Sundays and look forward to visits during the week. I feel anyone in our city would be blessed by hanging out with us on Sundays and during the week.

There are also some things listed that we can do to enter into this Divine Fellowship more fully.

Luke says, **“and they were continually devoted ... to the teaching of the apostles.”** Why the Apostles' teaching, why not some other teaching or subject? I once heard a friend say his church in Vancouver, Canada was focusing on loyalty to the Queen of England. The minister actually gave a sermon on that topic as though being a good subject to the Queen was somehow the purpose of being a good church.

Why do we gather to learn from the Bible and not some other teaching? Because of what it means to be an apostle. Apostle means “sent one.” An apostle is someone sent and authorized to speak on a person's behalf. In the first century, Caesar had his apostles. People sent by Caesar authorized to speak Caesar's word. Citizens expressed their devotion to Caesar by being devoted to the message of Caesar's apostles. The risen Jesus has apostles, people sent by Jesus,

authorized by Jesus to speak Jesus' message. **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"** not because the apostles were any better communicators than everyone else – they were not. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching because the apostles had been authorized by the risen Lord to speak His words to the church and to the city. To sit at the feet of the apostles was to sit at the feet of Jesus – their word is His word. We express our devotion to Jesus by being devoted to – sticking to, attaching ourselves to, persisting in – His word as it comes to us through His apostles.

Which is why a community devoted to the apostles' teaching is the community in which followers of Jesus mature. Without the apostles' teaching, we don't mature in Jesus. But soak in the apostles' teaching and we blossom and flourish. One of the ways to enter into Jesus' Fellowship with the Father and Spirit is to soak in His word. Soak in His apostles' letters and gospels. People grow up into Jesus in communities where there is an unapologetic devotion to the teaching of Jesus' apostles!

And, says Luke, **"they were continually devoting themselves .. to the breaking of the bread."**

At one level, Luke is referring to the fact that people were taking their meals together. **"And day by day, devoting to breaking bread from house to house"** (Acts 2:46). There is no way to exaggerate the centrality of meals for life in the first century Middle East – nor for the twenty-first century

Middle East. Sharing a meal together is almost a sacramental act. In the Middle East, when you eat together you are expressing unconditional acceptance. So too in Africa and Asia. I'd say a meal together in our country is one of the best bridge-building ways of our culture.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that the religious leaders were horrified that Jesus was eating with **“tax-collectors and sinners”** (Luke 15:1). Jesus was welcoming tax-collectors and sinners as members of His own family! To eat together was to express unconditional love ... at least for the time of the meal, and for the time the food that is shared is still in one another's bodies. So the new community eats together, day by day, in the Temple and in their homes, expressing their unconditional love, the unconditional love experienced in the Divine Fellowship. One of the simplest ways we can be community in this city is to eat more meals together. Let's enjoy the Divine Fellowship God has given us.

Jesus made Himself known in the breaking of bread. Yes, when we participate in His Supper, we do something – we remember Him: **“Do this in remembrance of Me.”** We remember Him, but when we participate in His Supper, He does something too! He makes Himself known! How it works, I don't know. Somehow the Holy Spirit – whose passion is that we know Jesus – makes Jesus known. This is why the new community was **“continually devoting themselves ... to the breaking of the bread.”** It is during the

Jesus meal that Jesus by His Spirit brings us back to the centre of all things, and draws us more deeply into the Divine fellowship (*Koinonia*).

And, says Luke, **“they were continually devoting themselves ... to the prayers.”**

Not just “to prayer,” but “to the prayers.” **“The prayers”** refers to the prayers the people of God were given long ago and have prayed for centuries, to the prayers prayed in the temple – to the Psalms, prayers that were sung. Yes, the new community was praying spontaneous prayers, expressing their concrete needs of the moment, expressing their fears and longings as we see throughout the book of Acts. But they were also devoting themselves to the prayers the Holy Spirit inspired in the Psalms. Speaking and singing the Psalms.

“Continually devoting themselves to the prayers...” day by day in the temple and house to house. And they prayed them with greater vigor and anticipation. Giving birth to new prayers, like Ephesians 3:14-19, **that the Spirit strength us with power in the inner person, that Christ dwell in our hearts, enabling us to comprehend the incomprehensible love of Christ, that we be filled up to all the fullness of God! The prayers, the Spirit-breathed prayers.**

It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a special church to raise disciples. A church devoted to the Fellowship ... the Trinitarian fellowship (*Koinonia*); Devoted to the

teaching of the apostles ... to the word of those authorized to speak Jesus' living word; Devoted to the breaking of the bread ... to the Meal where the Living Lord makes Himself known; Devoted to the prayers ... to the prayers that enable us to move into ever deeper fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Are we surprised then by what else Luke says about the new community? There was awe: **“everyone kept feeling a sense of awe”** (Acts 2:43). Of course! The Spirit was there ... moving among them. The Spirit who in the beginning breathed over the waters of chaos and brought the world into being. The Spirit who overshadowed the womb of the virgin Mary and brought the God-Man into being. The Spirit who moved in power in the tomb and raised Jesus from the dead. That is Who is here, moving among us, right now. Of course everyone kept feeling a sense of awe!

And they experienced joy, **“Taking their meals together with gladness.”** Of course. Someone has said that joy is the emotion you feel when you have “come home.” Yes, this is what we were made for! The kind of Church we were made for!

So, what are we to do today, on this Palm Sunday? We say to the coming to us God, we say to the very Breath and Life of the Trinity: *“You are welcome here.”* “You are free to move within our community.” “Be all You want to be

for us, in us, and through us, for the glory of Jesus Christ, who loves to pour You out on His disciples.”

So the apostle John can write in his first letter 1 John 1:3, I like how J.B. Phillips translates this: **“We want you to be with us in this – in this fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ His Son... the more that fellowship extends, the greater the joy it brings to us... already in it.”**

Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, God of all power and might; when You sent forth Your Spirit, we were created; when we falter, You lift us up. We give You thanks for both life and breath. We praise You for Your indwelling presence. Come now, Holy Spirit, Breath of God, blow upon us today; fill us with joy as we experience Your loving presence. Move within us and confirm in our hearts the resurrection hope of Easter morning. Renew us, we pray, in the name of Jesus, our Risen Lord. Amen.