

We Must Maintain A Warm Fellowship
Series: Acts of a Healthy Growing Church
Acts 2:42-44
January 15, 2017

Welcome again to worship. I'm so glad we are together again.

We've begun a series called "Acts of a Healthy Growing Church." We are looking back at the Early Church through the book of Acts and see how they were healthy and growing.

Last week, we learned that in order to be a healthy growing church, we must minister in the Holy Spirit's power. We must depend upon the Holy Spirit for everything we do, especially in the places where we think we know how to do it.

We've given you a page to record some notes, so turn to page 5 in your bulletin.

Today, we are going to address the second act of a healthy growing church. And here it is: We must maintain a warm fellowship.

We use the word "fellowship" a lot in the church. We talk about the fellowship of believers. We name the big room downstairs our fellowship hall because what we do there is much more than social. Some churches have a fellowship hour, which is usually less than an hour, but still has drinks and doughnuts, because fellowship goes on there, and it's more than just coffee.

Some of the most humorous and enlightening moments in our lives center around the fellowship hour.

Take for instance the interaction between a pastor and young boy. It seems this particular congregation loved good fellowship and always served coffee after the sermon. One Sunday the pastor asked a little boy if he knew why they served the coffee.

"I think," said the boy, "it's to get the people awake before they drive home."

That might be true. Myra wants us to put together a coffee bar like 1st Church of God's here in our church for four reasons: first, Myra lives on coffee; second, she thinks bad coffee is a sin against God and man; third, she believes it will increase our hospitality to our members and guests alike; and fourth, she has to sit through two of my sermons every week, and that can be brutal.

Well, I don't know if the Early Church had a coffee bar or not, but they did have fellowship. Let's look at Acts 2:42-44:

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common.

This is a perfect example of fellowship. They loved each other.

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. Occurring 20 times in the Bible, its primary meaning is fellowship, sharing in common, communion.

1 John 1:7 reads:

*But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship [koinonia] with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*¹

¹ 1 John 1:7 (NLT)

If faith in Christ is the fundamental note of the Christian society, the next is fellowship among the members.

There are three reasons we need fellowship to be a healthy growing church.

First, we need fellowship to be a family.

The church is to be a family, especially in times like these when families are scattered and fractured.

Both of mine and Myra's parents are dead. We each have a brother, but they live in different states. Besides, we don't get together very often. I mean, Myra's brother is a dork, and my brother is a Steeler's fan.

So the church really is our family, and it's your family as well. It is the place where we can laugh together, cry together, remanence together, mourn together, share together, eat together (we like to do that, don't we?), talk together, pray together.

I remember the Bill Gather song:

I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God,
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family,
The Family of God.

Paul says in Philippians 2:

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.²

Paul stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose. When we work together, caring for the problems of others as if they were our problems, we demonstrate Christ's example of putting others first, and we experience unity.³

Ten times in the first 5 chapters of Acts, it says, "they were unified". He uses phrases like, "they were of one accord... one heart... one purpose... one spirit... all united in thought." God can overlook a lack of facilities, a lack of programs, and a lack of leadership. But one thing He will not overlook is disharmony in the church. Harmony, unity, must be maintained at all costs because the church is a fellowship, a family. We need to build fellowship into each other. To be a healthy growing church, we need fellowship to be a family.

The second reason we need fellowship to be a healthy growing church is this: we need fellowship to be the Body of Christ.

What a great analogy Paul uses. We are the Body of Christ. The reason it is so good is that we can relate to it because we all have bodies and we understand the relationship and the workings of the body. We know that our body works together as a unit to accomplish its tasks. Everything works together in order to live.

For example, suppose a mosquito lands on your arm. The hair on your arm or the skin on your arm might detect it. Nerves transmit that signal from your arm to your spinal cord and into your brain. Your brain interprets the situation so quickly that you don't even have to think about it. The brain initiates a response and sends a signal to

² Philippians 2:1-2, NLT

³ Life Application Study Bible, Philippians 2:1-2

the other side of the brain, which relays that back to the spinal cord through a different set of nerves, to the opposite side of your body, to the muscles in your arm, elbow, and hand, to move to the exact spot of the contact to smash that sucker flat. And you do this without even thinking about it.

Every step you take when you walk involves the sensory receptors in your feet and legs, the muscles and nerves, the brain to interpret it all, the inner ear for balance, the heart and the lungs, and probably a few more systems that I haven't thought of.

That's why the image that we are the Body of Christ works so well for us. In order for the church to be healthy and growing, it needs all of its parts working together.

And we all are parts of that Body of Christ, and we all have specialties and roles and work to do to help this body be healthy and growing. We are not all the same; we don't all do the same thing; and none of us can do it all.

Paul writes:

*Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*⁴

We also know that when a body part is not working properly, the rest of the body suffers and can't do what it wants or need to do.

DAD'S HEART ATTACK. MISSING HIS FIRST GRANDCHILD'S GRADUATION.

Cancer is another example, where the body begins to produce cells that do not help the body, but hurt the body.

When the church is not in unity in the spirit, in purpose, in love, it does not grow, it is not healthy. When there is grumbling, bickering, back-stabbing, there is no unity, and the body starts to die. But when there is unity within the Body of Christ, it can work together as it was intended by God.

When God has a bunch of baby Christians, He looks for the warmest incubator He can find. The church that has warmth and fellowship and harmony, God blesses that church with new believers because He wants them to be in an environment, in a Body, where they can grow.

Finally, to be a healthy growing church, we need fellowship to do God's work.

Paul writes in Philippians 1:5:

*for you have been my partners [koinonia] in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.*⁵

Notice what Paul called them. Partners, koinonia. They are fellowshiped, connected, to Paul's missionary and evangelistic work.

We need fellowship to do God's work. Just like last week when I said we need the Holy Spirit to do God's work, we also need fellowship to do God's work.

In the Bible is what are called "the one anothers." 38 different "one anothers" that we were commanded to do.

1. Jesus said in John 13:34, "Love one another."
2. Romans 12:10: Be devoted to one another
3. Verse 16: Be of the same mind toward one another.
4. Roman 14:1: Accept one another.
5. Verse 19: Build up one another.
6. Galatians 5:13: Serve one another.

⁴ Romans 12:4-5, NLT

⁵ Philippians 1:5, NLT

7. Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's sin burdens.
8. Ephesians 4:32: Be kind to one another so as to preserve unity.
9. 1 Thessalonians 4:18: Comfort one another . Ever wonder why Jesus took Peter, James, and John deep into the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion, and why He was so disappointed when He found them sleeping? He needed the comfort of His friends.

That's 9 real quick "one anothers" and you must be in fellowship to obey those commands. And when we do them, we are doing God's work.

In the fall of the year, Linda, a young woman, was traveling alone up the rutted and rugged highway from Alberta to the Yukon in Canada. Linda didn't know you don't travel to Whitehorse alone in a rundown Honda Civic, so she set off where only four-wheel drives normally venture.

The first evening, she found a room in the mountains near a summit and asked for a 5 A.M. wakeup call so she could get an early start. She couldn't understand why the clerk looked surprised at that request, but as she awoke to early-morning fog shrouding the mountain tops, she understood.

Not wanting to look foolish, she got up and went to breakfast. Two truckers invited Linda to join them, and since the place was so small, she felt obliged.

"Where are you headed?" one of the truckers asked.

"Whitehorse," Linda replied.

"In that little Civic? No way! This pass is dangerous in weather like this."

"Well, I'm determined to try," was Linda's gutsy, if not very informed, response.

The trucker replied, "Then I guess we're just going to have to hug you."

Linda drew back. "There's no way I'm going to let you touch me!"

"Not like THAT!" the truckers chuckled. "We'll put one truck in front of you and one in the rear. That way, we'll get you through the mountains."

All that foggy morning, Linda followed the two red dots in front of her and had the reassurance of a big escort behind as they made their way safely through the mountains.

Caught in the fog in our dangerous passage through life, we need to be "hugged." With fellow Christians who know the way and can lead safely ahead of us, and with others behind, gently encouraging us along, we, too, can pass safely.⁶

I want you to hear what the result of the Early Church's fellowship:

*And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*⁷

The result of people being close to each other and celebrating warmth and harmony was that other people wanted to get involved.

Charles Moore writes, "Alan and I met 20 years ago. We were both students at Cal Poly. I was a freshman and he was a junior. As a physics major, Alan was both intelligent and articulate. How Alan got on with his studies, however, is still a mystery to me. Alan was virtually blind. He could not see well enough to get from one place to another without help. But when it came to reading, it was a different story. I can still see Alan, his face two inches from the text, arduously pecking away at each of his assignments. Alan not only got straight A's but returned to Cal Poly as a physics professor.

⁶ Don Graham, downloaded from sermoncentral.com

⁷ Acts 2:47 (NLT)

Although Jewish in background, Alan was extremely skeptical of anything religious, especially Christian. He was well read and well versed, and he argued his doubt like a scientist. Alan believed that Christianity was unable to pass the theological requirements of science. He therefore pled agnostic. There simply wasn't enough evidence in his mind to warrant belief in God.

As a fledgling freshman, I along with several others, tried to show him there was ample evidence in Christianity's truth. There were not only facts of fulfilled prophecy and the reliability of the New Testament documents, but also the testimony of creation. Wasn't that sufficient? Not for Alan.

Alan was unusually happy to discuss religious subjects, which always gave us Christians some hope.

But even more intriguing was how he liked to hang out with us. Alan didn't have many friends. He was rather unattractive, much too serious and totally dependent on others for any kind of transportation.

But we tried to reach out to him the best we could. Alan knew he could come anytime with us to the beach or on our recurrent midnight runs to Taco Bell. We tried to include Alan in everything we did.

One evening, something happened. A bunch of friends got together to enjoy the sunset and a roaring bonfire. By the time the evening was over, Alan had made a commitment to follow Jesus and no one else.

The next day, he came to tell me what happened. I asked him what made him decide. "While everyone was sitting around the fire, I realized that whenever I am around you Christians, I am happy. Even when we disagree with each other, I find myself liking to be with Christians."

"But Alan," I said, "I thought you were never going to become a believer unless there is first enough evidence."

"Yes Chuck," he replied, "I still require it. But that's precisely why I now believe. It's how you all love each other that strikes me the most. I never considered that evidence before. A good scientist considers all the facts. I simply haven't found the love you Christians have for each other anywhere else. That's enough evidence for me that Jesus is Lord.

If the local church is going to develop the kind of beauty that God says is possible, that which will attract others to Christ, we must commit to becoming together the kind of church Christ calls us to be: a church that is a biblical fellowship. Biblical fellowship has the power to revolutionize lives. Masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, and tenderness flows. People really do become like brothers and sisters, and they shoulder each other's burdens.

We will be a healthy growing church, a place where agnostics can find evidence of Christianity, where baby Christians can be nurtured and can grow, where we can make it through the fogs of life, when we maintain a warm fellowship.