

Christian fellowship

A commitment to one another Acts 2:44-47

42 They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers. 43 Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. 44 All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. 45 They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. 46 Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, 47 praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

This morning we looked at how we are all part of a body, the Church. It's where God places each of us. We are called to unity and as people given diverse gifts and skills, we use these to build the common good. I want to look at this from another direction this evening by exploring how operating as a body works. God has brought us into fellowship to one another. What should that life together be like. The passage we read in Acts spells this out in a few simple sentences.

The Greek word for fellowship is one you may have heard of before: *koinonia*: *common, having in common, sharing*. It's a "common" word in the NT. So when Paul in 1 Cor 10 says "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ" he uses the word *koinonia*. It's a sharing in the body - we all participate, share, in it. This is the idea in Acts 2:42. *The fellowship*, fellowship was sharing. They shared their lives together. This is amplified in *44-45 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*

There's more in this passage that helps us with the unpacking of "fellowship" in verse 42. Because verse 44 speaks of having possessions "in common", and the word "common" (*koina*) is the same root as "fellowship" (*koinonia*) in verse 42. In verse 42 some translations are uncertain whether it should be "the fellowship" (NIV and TEV) or just "fellowship" (AV). Actually the meaning is not much different if you translate it in either way. They devoted themselves to sharing with one another.

Fellowship pervades this passage because these people did everything together. They worked in unity, they functioned in unity. They DEVOTED themselves to it. Why?

Several years ago studies were conducted among former American prisoners of war to determine what methods used by the enemy had been most effective in breaking their spirit. The findings revealed that they did not break down from physical deprivation and torture as quickly as they did from solitary confinement or from disrupted friendships caused by frequent changing of personnel. Attempts to get the prisoners divided in their attitudes toward one another proved to be the most successful method of discouraging them. It was further learned that the soldiers were not sustained primarily by faith in their country or by the rightness of the cause for which they fought. They drew their greatest strength from the close attachments they had formed to the small military units to which they belonged.

This is an example from the world but it shows us the way in which both as created beings and as newly-created beings that we not only need one another - it is essential for life in Christ. Why is much made of this - because we can't do without one another in Christ.

What's more, throughout the NT we are told to love one another as we have been loved. And what was the love of Christ - *agape*. And what was the consequence of *agape* - Jesus suffered and died for us.

Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Says Paul in Rom 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves" Or better still Jesus in "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I

have loved you, so you must love one another"

We are a family: a close family and we are called to share in one another's lives. Christianity is not a sole occupation. It is a shared experience and that sharing together builds us up. It's a sharing based on love. That is the nature of what God has brought us into. As we found in the first chapter of Ephesians, we are now members of God's family. We are brothers and sisters. And God expects the same standard of love in His family that He has shown us.

So what can we learn about the nature of fellowship in Acts 2?

1. Commitment - They were committed to it - they did it all the time

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts

Fellowship was so important to them that they met all the time. They were healthy Christians. They were desiring together to commune, have fellowship - to worship God. But to do that they needed fellowship with one another. The question I want to ask you is - do you see the Church, do you see fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ as THE place to develop and mature your commitment to Christ.

The trouble is that so many Christians simply don't. Yet over the past few months we've seen that God calls us to grow closer to Him and an essential part is to learn from one another amongst the people He places us with. We grow as part of a fellowship. The idea of fellowship so filled their lives that they were meeting together. The basic aim of fellowship is to be in an environment where sincere love can be expressed. In the interaction of true fellowship believers have the opportunity to share God's grace - to be the means by which God can impart faith, encouragement, comfort, healing and instruction to one another

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" Colossians 3:16

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Christianity is not for lone rangers. We commit to Christ, we commit to one another. We are in God's family. We are God's children.

2. Solidarity - They shared their lives together

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts

By sharing lives I mean literally. That is the meaning of *koinonia*. Sharing. They belonged together so they shared their resources. Some people have used this for models of socialism or even communism. Some Christians believe that this is a model for communal living. There seems to have been a great deal of it here. But solidarity was very important for the infant church in a world that was very hostile to it. As the gospel spread there was a less of a need for solidarity of this sort. And if you drop your eye to verse 46 we see that they hadn't sold everything. They still had their homes so it wasn't communal living in that sense anyway.

Solidarity - a very socialist kind of word but important. How can those who are privileged see those with whom they have fellowship suffer. The question of whether we should help or not doesn't come into it. We have immediate solidarity. This selling and giving I would suggest was love-giving. The story of the John's commentary. They saw their possessions and property as a resource that could be used to help someone else. I could easily pull a sermon on giving out of this. But fellowship means helping one another where we perceive need.

But this lies at the heart of fellowship and we must sort out our minds before God and not make excuses for ourselves. God has blessed us with much - now we can use what we have to be a blessing to others in the household of faith. And that is the challenge of fellowship in a society where self-gain, personal wealth and selfishness is the order of the day. As we learn of our brothers and sisters in Christ in need what's our reaction.

3. Unity - They continued to meet together

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

They met daily in the in the temple courts so it was a worship. As we have seen it was to worship. Witnessing was probably significant here because it was a public place full of unbelievers. The desire was to be together. Why - because unity is a vital part of our walk and witness. How great is our desire to meet together to worship? How great is our desire to worship together? These people grew because they worshipped in unity and daily and we saw how the Lord added daily those that were being saved.

4. Hospitality - They met in one another's homes

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts

Finally, their fellowship was not a professional one. Fellowship, sharing together is borne out of love. It's friendship. And these friends could not help meeting one another. Love one another. Oh that God would teach us more of this. We will grow as the people of God as we love God and love one another. As are lives are bound up with one another we will mature into the people of God.

Lets so love one another than people in Felixstowe are envious of the stability and commitment of our relationships. And are drawn to us, and drawn to Christ, like moths to a flame - and find Christ!