

January 18, 2015

“Welcome to the Forever Family – Devoted to Fellowship”

Acts 2:41-47

Welcome to the Forever Family

Devoted to:

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

God's Word

Fellowship

Ministry to those in need

Prayer

Worship

Taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to Everyone

Whenever we talk about this subject of fellowship the Greek work, ko-in-known-ya comes up. Koinonia is the unity that should exist in the church or among the ekklesia – the people of God, the body of Christ. The beginning of koinonia-fellowship is joining to/with Jesus. We become one with Him and with His faithful people – the ekklesia. We become one body of people with Christ as the Head. Koinonia means Fellowship, partnership, sharing, communion. Keep that in mind as I share this story.

In Romania, and in many Eastern European countries, there are so many orphans institutionalized that there isn't enough food or medical supplies or staff members to take care of them. The babies, often past toddler age, are still kept in diapers and placed in cribs because there's no other way to take care of them. They are lifted out to be fed and they infrequently have their diapers changed. There is no real physical contact with other humans, especially any of the cuddling and holding that babies need to develop normally. They end up in semi-catatonic states and often die from a lack of human contact. This condition is called “failure to thrive syndrome.”

We need to understand that “failure to thrive syndrome” can happen in our spiritual lives as well. That can be avoided and it can be cured. But, prevention doesn't happen by itself.

The key to avoiding this spiritual disease is through fellowship. But, fellowship is much more than what you may think it is. We can see what I mean in today's passage. It's the prescription against “failure to thrive syndrome”. You'll find it in [Acts 2:41-47](#)

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Basically, you can take this passage as the definition of the Greek word 'koinonia.'

In the church today, we often take for granted what the word "fellowship" means. We too often think of bagels and coffee after the service or potluck dinners. Biblically it is so much more than that.

First let's see how koinonia – fellowship begins. In verse 41 of Acts 2 we read that those who believed what Peter said were added to the church or to the fellowship. What did Peter say? And what did the people believe that caused them to become part of this ekklesia/koinonia- fellowship? We find the answer to that in Acts 2:38

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is how we enter into the fellowship or the communion of believers in Jesus Christ. We repent of our sins, turn our life over to God, baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to profess our allegiance to Him who has forgiven our sins through His death on the Cross. Then He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit (not a gift from the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit Himself is the gift). It is that gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us one in this fellowship of believers.

Remember, fellowship doesn't mean what we may usually think. In verse 42 of Acts chapter 2, we start to get an idea of what it really means:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

"The believers devoted themselves (constantly) to fellowship." Fellowship here is the Greek word "koinonia" and means to be a sharer, a companion, one who is a partaker, a participant in communion.

Who are these participants in communion and what are they in agreement about? They are people who are devoted to God's Word and its teaching, applying it to their lives. They were committed to Koinonia which led to the sharing of meals (including the Lord's Supper – which we refer to as communion) and to prayer and (v46) meeting together to

worship God. As they were united in fellowship they committed themselves to these things. What was the result?

Maybe we can answer the question of what is fellowship if we know what it might look like in our lives or what we might experience as a result. What should we experience when there's true fellowship? Verse 43 tells us that as a result of this Koinonia-fellowship which caused them to be completely devote to God and to one another:

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

What do you picture in your mind when you hear that verse?

Don't you wish we could have that kind of thing taking place today? There's no reason why we shouldn't still be experiencing this kind of fellowship. The truth is, we can and do still experience awe inspiring things in our church today, if we devote ourselves to true fellowship. Because true fellowship brings glory to God and the glory of God.

Let's ask the question again. What should we experience when we have true fellowship? We see more in verses 44-45 NIV:

All the believers (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were together and had everything in common. (i.e. was shared by all even) Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Maybe you noticed some familiar words in these passages to what I've already discussed. Do you see "together" "had in common" "gave or shared"? This is the same as the definition of the Greek word "ko-in-known-ya".

Does this mean we all must sell our possessions and come together and live in a commune? No. Then what does it mean? Here's what I believe this means for us today. The selling of possessions was a means to an end. We see that end when we look at the last phrase of the verse – they gave to anyone as he had need.

We have true fellowship when we demonstrate genuine caring or sympathy for each other and meet each others' needs. Sympathy is just an emotion that says, "I care for you." Fellowship means we must take action.

If we are to experience true fellowship, in the ekklesia (i.e.) wherever we meet as God's People and Christ followers – in this building or in homes- we will care for each other and take action in meeting each other's need. This is true fellowship.

True fellowship also means that we will be united in purpose, of one heart and mind. That's a tough one to understand. What does being of one heart and mind mean for us? Verse 46 helps us understand this a bit:

Acts 2:46 NIV

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.

First notice that they got together frequently, actually the early church got together “every day!” That may not be possible in our day and culture. But the point is they had fellowship often. We can’t have fellowship with everyone in the church but we can meet at Bible studies, or one on one; building relationships.

Uh oh, relationships. That can get messy can’t it? We would much rather keep our fellowship shallow. “Hi, good to see you.” “Yeah, good to see you too.” “Well, have a good week. See you next Sunday.” That’s a lot safer than meeting together and sharing our lives. I can only tell you this. When people tell of their faith journey, they always talk about individuals that God put in their paths. Everyone’s faith story has a relational component. We all need at least one other person of faith in our life who will be there when we need them, to pray for us, to meet physical, emotional, and spiritual needs; and who will love us enough to give us honest feedback, advice, and reproof when we need it. These are relationships through which we hear from God and when we see God in someone. Find someone or some people like that and be like that for others.

The early Christians met every day, united in purpose, they were one in heart and mind. Being of one heart and mind means that we maintain a singular focus to serve God and serve each other. In reality that means that we have no other motive to be here or be with each other than to please God.

And if we’re living God-centered lives and want to experience true fellowship, we need to meet together often in worship and more. The early church in Jerusalem met in the courts of the Temple to worship, to learn from the Word of God and to experience true fellowship. But they met in each other’s homes as well. We can’t serve one another if we don’t know anything about one another, and knowing about one another means spending more time with one another.

How do we exercise this love and caring today? We see in the passage for today that it isn’t just having meals together, their hearts were in a particular condition. What was that? The condition is described as “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

The fact that we’re supposed to be of a glad heart when we are together, most people understand. But, what’s the big deal about eating together? Fellowship is what goes on while we’re eating together. There’s something about humans that makes us bond together better when we share meals. I guess God just made us that way. But, what happens is this: we sit around together and share about our lives, we talk about our joys and our pains, our struggles and our triumphs. We can begin to bear one another’s burdens; celebrate with each other and cry with each other. We can only pray for each other if we share with each other.

It's true that someone can become a Christian without a church or even a small group of believers. However, the effective Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. A Christian who lives a life away from other Christians will never mature and not persevere in the faith without fellowship. In other words, the "Lone Ranger" Christian will develop "failure to thrive syndrome".

There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian.
- John Wesley

What can happen when we start to experience true fellowship? Again this question is answered for us in Scripture.

John 13:35 (Jesus said)
"Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Or as it says in Acts 2:47
all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

They were praising God for their fellowship, people in general like what they saw, and were being saved and becoming part of the fellowship.

See insert in bulletin and answer two questions.
First: What do you expect out of this church?
Second: What should this church expect from you?

Detach and leave answer to first question here today (we will collect them before you leave. But, keep your answer to the second question for yourself. I ask that you take it out during your quiet time this week and ask God to tell you what you should do and how and when and where.

Also consider giving to the "Community Fund." This is another practical way to respond to this message. We use that fund to help those in our church with needs.