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Becoming Together - III
Authentic Fellowship
Acts 2:42-47
March 5, 2017, Jeff Geramo

This is our third sermon in our series called *Becoming Together*, based on Acts 2:42-47. Today we are going to focus on the second thing that Luke says the early church devoted themselves to, Fellowship. I'm going to read the passage once more. Before I do let's remember the context. Jesus had been crucified. Three days later he rose from the dead. He then spent forty days with his disciples teaching them what it means to live with him in his Kingdom, after which he told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them in power so they would be enabled to be his witnesses. Once telling them this, Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud while they watched.

While they were waiting in a room in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit fell on them and they all began to speak in different languages that were unknown to them. The noise of 120 of them praising God at the same time in different languages created a scene and a huge crowd gathered around them and asked them what was going on and how it was possible that they were speaking foreign languages.

That gave Peter the opportunity to explain, through the Old Testament Scriptures, how Jesus was the Messiah they had all been waiting for, and that they had crucified him. They were cut to the core by this revelation, and asked what they should do. Peter told them they needed to repent, that is turn from their rebellion against God and trust that Jesus is the Messiah. Three thousand of them believed and were baptized on that one day.

We will pick it up from there.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

⁴² 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. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

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⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ 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—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.

So, these first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to four things.

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- 1. The Apostles Teaching**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Eating Together**
- 4. Prayer**

Last week we looked at what the Apostles taught these first disciples of Jesus and we saw that

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the main focus of their teaching was to learn how to love each other better so others would see Jesus in them and join them on their journey towards the heart of God.

That's why they were devoted to the teaching of the Apostles. It was for the mission. And the same is true of *each* of the things they were devoted to. They were devoted to them for the sake of the mission of Jesus. Today we are going to try to clear up some misconceptions about the meaning of fellowship. I hear the word bandied about, mostly in Christian circles, but I have heard it used in other contexts as well. When I hear the word used outside of a Christian context it sounds a bit strange to me because I normally think of the word 'fellowship' as 'Christianese'.

When people talk about having good fellowship I think they usually mean those good feelings when you have a very good conversation with someone where you feel a heart connection. And that certainly is a part of fellowship. It is certainly no less than that, but it is much more.

Sometimes we might say something like, "We want to invite you to join us in the Fellowship Hall for fun, food and fellowship." And in a case like that it takes on a looser meaning. The conversation might not be at a heart level at all. You could be talking about the hockey game the night before, or the weather, or anything. So, depending on the context, in English, the word fellowship takes on different meanings or connotations.

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The Greek word, as many of you know, is *koinonia*. It's a noun in the verse we are looking at. Here it is translated as, 'fellowship.' However, *koinonia* is translated using several different English words in the New Testament depending on context.

Here is a basic definition of the word, which does not take the context into account:

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"A relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other."¹

So, based on that basic definition you could have fellowship around any common interest. If your interest is hockey, you could have fellowship around watching a hockey game together. You could talk about the game, and the players, and the strategy, and the bad calls the ref made, and any number of things. You could have a real camaraderie and fellowship with someone around the game of hockey. In the New Testament, however, the word fellowship takes on a much deeper meaning.

Here are a few examples from the New Testament of the same word, or its derivatives.

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Romans 15:26 (NLT)

26 For you see, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia have eagerly taken up an offering for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem.

Take a look at this verse. Where do you see the word, 'fellowship'? You don't do you? However, the Greek word, *koinonia* is here. Which word do you think it is?

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It's the word '**offering**'. The word for 'offering' here is the noun *koinonia*. It's the same word in Acts 2:42 for 'fellowship'. So, here in Romans it has the connotation of giving something to someone who has a need that you can meet. We do that often at CRBC. Today we are going to take up a benevolent offering after the communion service that will go to people in our congregation and community who have a need. When you give to that offering, we experience true New Testament fellowship.

When you give groceries for our food cupboard, we experience fellowship together. A couple years ago someone in our church was saving for a car, but felt like the Lord was telling her to sacrifice her car and

¹ Vincent, M. R. (1887). [*Word studies in the New Testament*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 456). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

give the money towards the mission of the church instead. When she did that, true authentic fellowship was experienced in the church. That's a beautiful picture isn't it?

Let's read our passage in Acts again in light of this.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

42 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. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

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45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 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—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.

There should be a picture starting to form in your minds of what fellowship means for a follower of Jesus. Let's read a few more verses where this same word occurs.

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Philippians 1:5 (NLT)

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

Where do you see the word, *koinonia* here? We saw this when we did our study in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. The word 'partners' here is the same noun, *koinonia*.

Keep that in the back of your mind because we are going to continue our scavenger hunt and gather up several more occurrences of the word *koinonia* and paint a picture of what true fellowship for a Jesus follower is.

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Philippians 4:14–15 (NLT)

14 Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. 15 As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this.

Here are two other examples of the root word *koin* from which *koinonia* derives. The word 'share' in Philippians 4:14 is related to the same word, *koinonia*. It is the verb, *synkoinonaow*.

And then in verse 15 the word for 'gave' is the verb, *koinoneo*.

You should be starting to connect the dots to see a picture unfolding of what kind of fellowship it was that the early church experienced.

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2 Corinthians 8:23 (NLT)

23 If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And the brothers with him have been sent by the churches, and they bring honor to Christ.

Here we have another noun from the same root, *koinonos*. They were partnering together, working on the mission of Jesus.

And then in Revelation we have an adjective.

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Revelation 1:9 (NLT)

9 I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us.

The adjective here is *synkoinonos*. And again, it means partner, but partnering in three things: in suffering; in God's Kingdom; and in patient endurance.

Are you starting to get a picture of what fellowship was like? It was much more than a heart warming conversation, though it can include that. It was much more than a fun party together, although it can include that. It was far more than cake and coffee in the Fellowship Hall. However, I certainly hope it is not less than that. Cake and coffee is very important if you are a Baptist.

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The kind of fellowship they had was **a shared, active participation in the greatest mission on earth**. That shared mission was so front and centre that it came before everything else. They worked together for one purpose. They gave sacrificially of their time, energy, talents, and finances to make sure that the mission of Jesus was not compromised. They were willing to suffer for the mission. They were willing to set aside their personal preferences so the mission would be accomplished. They didn't let petty arguments get in the way of their mission. Nothing would distract those first disciples. There was no room for pride. There was no exalting of one person over another. They shared everything they had. They didn't hoard. Everything was about the mission, to lead people to become committed followers of Jesus Christ.

Now, as you read some of the letters from the New Testament you can very quickly see that it didn't take long for them to get sidetracked. Paul had to continually remind them of their mission. It's the same with us. Sometimes we forget what the mission is. Sometimes we think the church is here to meet our needs. And if the church no longer meets our needs and no longer does things the way we think they should be done we leave and go to another church. We sometimes forget that the church is here to reach out to others with the love Jesus. True fellowship is working together for just that. But we get easily distracted.

Sometimes we forget the mission and think our job is simply to study the Bible and learn more about God, or to categorize the Bible into various theologies. We should be learning more *about* God. We should be understanding theology better. Those two phrases are synonymous, by the way. Theology is simply 'the study of God'. So, we should all be theologians, but not just gleaning more knowledge *about* God as an end in itself.

We need to get to know him on an intimate level, so that we become changed by him, so that others would see Jesus in us and join us on our journey towards his heart. That is his call on our lives. We need him to change us so we care about the things he cares about, which is bringing lost people into his kingdom.

There are a couple cases in the New Testament that came to my mind right away when I was thinking about this.

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Galatians 5:13–15 (NLT)

13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

What was happening in this case was that there were some legalists who were in the church in Galatia who were telling the followers of Jesus that in order to be truly saved they had to follow the Old Testament laws, and especially circumcision, sabbaths and religious festivals. Paul told them that Jesus came to free them, not only from their sin, but from bondage to the law. He said that Jesus satisfied the law by his death and resurrection, that is, every law except the law of love which sums up every other law.

Paul was calling them away from arguing about things that were not important, things that would break their fellowship, and distract them from the mission of Jesus because of their infighting. He said, we are called to freedom, but not freedom to do whatever would satisfy us. Our freedom is so we can serve each other in love so, authentic fellowship is possible, so that the mission of Jesus can be accomplished through us.

Here is another case in Philippians. Paul describes what authentic fellowship is here.

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Philippians 2:1–16 (NLT)

1 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? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

That is the exact definition of fellowship.

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3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

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7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. 9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We are fellowshiping around this mission. This is what we are called to do.

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12 Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

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14 Do everything without complaining and arguing, 15 so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and

perverse people. ¹⁶ Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless.

This is the essence of true fellowship. Sometimes, as Christians, we behave as if it is more important to be right than it is to be kind and loving. Look at how Paul describes Jesus here. He gave up his rights as Lord of the universe, took the form of a slave, and bent down to serve humankind, sacrificing everything, even to the point of death.

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God has called us to have that kind of fellowship with each other for the sake of the Good News of Jesus. He has called us to be so united in the mission that we never let our petty differences get in the way. He has called us to be united around one purpose as the body of Christ on earth, working together for the mission of Jesus. And all of our preferences and traditions, if they are getting in the way of his mission, would be set aside so more people can meet Jesus through us. That is why we are here as a church. It is the only reason.

True fellowship means that we are united, sacrificially, lovingly, purposefully, and authentically so God can use us to work together to bring more people into fellowship with us and ultimately with him. Let's not let anything get in the way of God's purposes for us.

How are your relationships? Is there someone who belongs to the Body of Christ with whom you feel you cannot fellowship? Is there something you can do to restore that broken fellowship? How about your relationship with God? Is there something in your life that is breaking fellowship with him?

God created us for vibrant, authentic fellowship, communion and community. There are lots of things that get in the way of all of these things. The root of every breach of fellowship goes all the way back to the fall of humankind in the beginning of time. Ever since Adam and Eve ate of the fruit that God forbade them to eat, our fellowship with God has been broken. As soon as that happened, what was the first thing they did? They covered themselves up. Shame caused them to pretend they were something they were not. They pointed their fingers and blamed each other and they even blamed God. Fellowship was broken. Communion between them and God, and them and each other was destroyed.

Ever since that time God has been gathering for himself a people who would be all about partnering with him in the greatest mission on earth, to restore fellowship between humankind and God and humankind to one another. The only way this is possible is if we admit we are broken and need Jesus. We need to take off our masks, or as the Apostle John would say, live, or walk in the light. We need to quit hiding, stop pretending and let Jesus free us so fellowship with each other and with God is possible — **so he can fulfill his mission through us.**

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1 John 1:7–9 (NLT)

⁷ But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light,

That means we are not hiding. We are open, authentic, honest about who we are and who we are not. We are okay not being okay, but not being okay staying there. If we live in the light as he is in the light

then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

God created us for fellowship. He created us for fellowship with him, and he created us for fellowship with each other. And when *either* fellowship is broken his great mission for us is compromised. That

was the main reason the first church gathered together. They were on mission. Their lives were about something bigger than what they could see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or accumulate. They had been commissioned by the God who created the heavens and the earth to partner with him in his work to redeem all of humankind. And in order to be successful in that mission they would need to allow the Holy Spirit to change them so true fellowship could happen.

Friends, we so desperately need Jesus. We need him to change us from individuals who think only of ourselves and our own wellbeing, to the church unified and actively partnering together with Jesus to fulfill his mission on earth to love more people into his kingdom.

Today we are going to celebrate communion together. One of the things we remind ourselves of when we celebrate communion, in addition to the main truth that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, is that we are now his body on earth.

Here's what Paul said to the Corinthian church.

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1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (NLT)

16 When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? 17 And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body.

We are one body. We are not simply a bunch of individuals each doing our own thing. We are one body, with one purpose and one mission. And what God wants to do in us is to continue to transform each of us, as individuals, so we fit together in perfect unity into the Body of Christ, so that when others look at us they will see the love we have for each other and be attracted to Jesus.

Let's take a couple minutes of silence and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us before we celebrate communion together. If there is someone with whom you do not have fellowship make it your aim to do whatever you need to do to repair the fracture so the mission of Jesus is not compromised.



Becoming Together - III
Authentic Fellowship
Acts 2:42-47
Week of March 5, 2017

Objective of this study: To discover what the essence of true fellowship is and to allow the Holy Spirit to move us closer to it.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 133** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Back yard BBQ's, picnics by the lake, or hanging out at your favourite coffee shop with friends?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47.
 1. Describe the setting of the first church again. What events preceded its launching?
 2. From the passage, what was fellowship like for them?
3. Read the following passages in which the word *koinonia* (The same word translated, "fellowship" in Acts 2:42) is used and then redefine what true Christian fellowship is: Romans 15:26; Philippians 1:5; Philippians 4:14-15; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Revelations 1:9; Philippians 2:1-16; 1 John 1:7-9.
4. What should the end goal of our fellowship be (from Acts 2:42-47)?

Work (30-45 minutes)

(Be careful not apply this next part to someone else)

1. Read Acts 2:42-47 again thinking about what was discussed above.
2. Is how the New Testament describes fellowship how you normally experience it? If not, how is it different?
3. What are some changes you and your Growth Group need to make in order to be more in line with the New Testament picture of true fellowship?
4. Talk together about specific steps you will take to move towards becoming that kind of group.
5. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other and for your friends and neighbours who do not yet know Jesus.