

West Van Baptist, July 5
Community Day: A Day for Connecting
Philippians 2:1-2

It's Community Day!

No, it's not another new civic holiday or a special day on the calendar. It's just a Sunday event we hold now and then at West Van Baptist when the time seems right. We rearrange the order of service, skip the usual sermon (insert applause!) and replace it with a short reflection. We'll finish early (more applause!), allowing more time to eat lunch together. We'll share information about ministries and events that are happening around the church. In short, we'll spend less time sitting and listening to the pastor, and more time being together as a community.

If you're a guest with us today, you picked a great Sunday to visit. This won't be a typical morning at West Van Baptist, but it's a good day to get to know a few people, to learn about our church ... and to have a free lunch! Your timing is excellent.

Why have Community Day Sundays? We do this to remind ourselves what church is really about.

- The church is not a building. God has blessed us with a beautiful building, and we enjoy gathering here. And we call this place "West Vancouver Baptist Church." But really, the building is not the church. We would still be a church even if we didn't have this facility.
- The church is not the Sunday morning service. We may say "I'm going to church today." But the church exists 24/7. Most of what our church is and does take place at other times of the week, and often in other places.
- The church is not a ritual we perform. We have ceremonies, and they're good. But the ceremonies don't make the church the church.
- And the church is not a legal organization, chartered under Canadian law. Yes, there is a legal entity called "West Vancouver Baptist Church," and it's necessary if we want to own property and hire staff. But that's not what the church *is*, either.

From God's perspective, ***the church is people, who are connected to Jesus, and who are connected to each other because of Jesus.*** Being a Christian isn't membership in an organization, or performing a ritual, or coming here at 10:00 am on Sundays. Being a Christian is a life-changing relationship with Jesus. And that relationship creates another set of life-changing relationships with others who are following Jesus. So the church is people—connected to Jesus, and then connected to each other because of Him.

This is not what most people in the wider world think church is. But it's very clear in the Bible. You can find it in many places; here's one simple example from Philippians 2:1-2. The Apostle Paul says:

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Please notice...

(1) First, Paul uses the phrase “in Christ.” This is a common New Testament expression to describe what Christians are: they are people *connected to Jesus Christ*.

We sometimes say a person is “in a marriage” or “in a partnership.” They’ve entered a relationship that affects who they are and how others treat them. In the Bible Christians are “in Christ,” because we’ve committed ourselves to a relationship that shapes how we think and act, how God views us, and how His Spirit works in us. We are “connected to Jesus.”

(2) This is a life-changing relationship. Paul describes some of the ways it affects us. He says we have “*encouragement*”—help that strengthens our hearts in a discouraging world. There is “*consolation*,” comfort from knowing we are loved by God—which is a very good thing! There is “*fellowship of the Spirit*”—God’s Spirit works in and with us, shaping us and making a difference through us. And there is “*affection and compassion*”—a growing understanding of how deeply God cares about us, and how graciously He forgives and helps.

(3) That “if” in verse 1 is not asking whether these things are true. It is setting up a sequence: “If (a) is true, then (b) should be true as well.” Because we have a real, life-changing connection to Jesus, our relationships to each other should be different.

We should have “*one mind*”—a set of overarching values and unifying “big ideas” that bring us together and put our differences into perspective. We should “*maintain the same love*,” living in a mutually-loving way with everyone in our community, not just a favorite few. We should be “*united in spirit*”—not just cooperating when it’s convenient, but living in unity that flows from who we are at the core. And we should be united in “*one purpose*”—working together on the things God cares about.

So again: the church is people, connected to Jesus in life-changing relationship, then connected to each other because of Jesus. That’s what the church really is.

This is why we talk about Jesus, and sing about Jesus, and share our stories about what Jesus means to us. It’s why we study the Bible and try to understand how God wants us to live.

And it’s why we have Community Days. It’s good for us to stop and remember that church isn’t a building, or a service, or a ceremony, or an organization. It’s people, connected to Jesus, and connected to each other because of Jesus.

So ... This morning we’re going to sing in worship and hear some people share. Let the words we hear and sing be an invitation to think about your own connection to Jesus. Do you have a real, life-changing relationship with Him? How can that relationship grow deeper.

Then we’re going to spend time together: eating, talking, sharing information. That “together” time is important. We can’t really be “*of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in one spirit, intent on one purpose*” if we don’t know each other, and if we don’t talk about our relationships with Jesus. So enjoy the time, and use it well. Get to know someone new. Get to know someone better. Have a couple conversations about the church and its ministries. Today is a day for connecting. Let’s use it to connect well with one another. This, like singing and prayer, is an act of worship for the church as we live “in Christ” together.