

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

August 29, 2021

We Are Better Together “Dedicated to Fellowship” Acts 2:42-47 Rev. Mike Fordham

American photographer Eric Pickersgill came up with a fantastic project called “Removed.” He removed handheld devices from his pictures to show how lonely and strange the “hunched” over pose is when holding our devices. Here is how *Quartz* online business site describes the images, “In each portrait, electronic devices have been edited out so that people stare at their hands, or the empty space between their hands, often ignoring beautiful surroundings or opportunities for human connection. The results are a bit sad and eerie—and a reminder, perhaps, to put our phones away.” *Clearly, the images reveal this strange and lonely new world that we have created to which the frequent use of our devices has contributed. There is a need that we have always had in our world, and it is just as much a need today and that is for real fellowship, community, connecting with each other, and spending quality time together.* For us as Christians, fellowship with other followers of Jesus, is one of the most overlooked and yet essential elements that form us into being fully devoted followers of Jesus. We learn more about this as we travel back to the very first church in A.D. 30 where we discover that the church was devoted to fellowship with each other. What is that fellowship that they were devoted to? What does it look like? What are the many benefits of this fellowship and how can we make this fellowship much richer?

Acts 2:42-47

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. 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.

VERTICAL FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

The word that is used in the Greek text in verse 42 for fellowship is the word, *koinonia* which refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing, having things

in common. This *koinonia* fellowship, this community of mutual interests and sharing had 2 aspects to it. These 2 aspects are described in *1 John 1:3* that says, “*3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*” You could then say that from this passage the first thing that Christian fellowship has in common is a **VERTICAL FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD**. In a sense when a person becomes a Christian, they first join in fellowship with the triune God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are then welcomed into the family of God, in a relationship within the perfect fellowship, the perfect community, the trinity. In a sermon that Kevin Miller preached he talked about the trinity as being the perfect community, the one and only place where perfect fellowship exists. In the trinity there is no one grumpy, critical, cynical, jaded, no jealousy, politics, or power plays. Instead, the trinity is a fellowship of perfect love, support, where each person of the trinity mutually serves one another, all equally giving and receiving love. Miller goes on to say that to be a Christians means that we are invited into this community of love, or as he puts it, “God is a party, and you're invited.” A benediction that we often use talks about each person of the trinity and the fellowship into which we are invited. It says in *2 Corinthians 13:14*, “*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*”

HORIZONTAL FELLOWSHIP WITH EACH OTHER

Once we enter this community of God given to us by the triune God, is a fellowship which is also a **HORIZONTAL FELLOWSHIP WITH EACH OTHER**. In Acts 2 we see that when the church first started in A.D. 30, they started with a little over 3,000 men, women, and children who not only joined in a relationship with God but now were members of the family of God together. They all had in common their love for God and their loyalty to God and they were naturally drawn to each other. The Christians then lived in a world of other religions, a world that was suspicious and at times even hostile to Christianity, one in which Christians were in the minority. When they became Christians, they became members of this new community and then naturally gravitated to each other. One of the things they were devoted to in that community was fellowship. They desperately needed each other in a world that didn't understand their love for Jesus. Today, all of us who are followers of Jesus are members of the family of God, or the kingdom of God. Our allegiance is to King Jesus and not to this world. No matter how diverse and different we might be in our skin color, the language we speak, our nation we call home, our education, our financial status, our political party, or any other differences, as Christians we have something eternally important in common. We believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world, and we now follow Him and as a result we have been forgiven of our sins, welcomed into the family of God, and the Holy Spirit now lives within us and leads us to live our lives according to God's kingdom values. We are now members of this fellowship of the redeemed, called the church. Just as it happened in the first century church so also it happens today that we are now automatically attracted to being with other Christians with whom we've had this life altering experiencing of becoming a follower of Jesus and being adopted into the family of God. As Christians we are not a bunch of individuals following Jesus or as C.S. Lewis once said, “It was one of the Wesleys, I think, who said that the New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion.”

Eugene Peterson also put it this way, "There can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life, apart from an immersion in, and embrace of, community. I am not myself by myself." We cannot be a fully devoted follower of Jesus without the fellowship, the community known as the church.

BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP

There are countless ***BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP*** experienced with other followers of Jesus. The Bible tells us in *Hebrews 10:24-25*, "²⁴ *Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.* ²⁵ *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*" In our fellowship with each other we find motivation to acts of love and good works and encouragement to not give up but to keep going no matter how tough it can get. This motivation and encouragement we experience in fellowship then acts like a kind of accountability that helps to keep us on track. In our fellowship with each other *Proverbs 27:17* tells us, "*As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.*" God uses our relationships with other Christians to mold, shape, and influence our lives and to help each other grow up to be more like Jesus. Another great passage that shows the many benefits of being in fellowship with other Christians is *Ecclesiastes 4:9-12* that says, "⁹ *Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.* ¹⁰ *If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.* ¹¹ *Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?* ¹² *A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*" We are better together in fellowship with each other because we are not alone but find support and help when we are in trouble. In our fellowship with each other we do not stab each other's backs, but we have each other's backs.

Carl F. George, in his book, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, says that 59 times in the New Testament there are commands and words of instruction that we can only be faithful to keeping in fellowship with other Christians. 21 of the 59, 1/3rd of them call for Christians to love one other. You cannot do that alone. Scores of additional passages encourage *all* Christians to love their neighbors as themselves, build up the church, be involved in mutual edification, be like-minded, be of one accord, to do good to each other, wash one another's feet, be at peace with each other, honor one another, accept one another, counsel one another, stop passing judgment, be patient, offer hospitality, care for one another and carry each other's burdens, and that is just a sample of the many instructions. The Bible depicts the fellowship of all believers as a body with many parts and each part cares for each other. As it says in *1 Corinthians 12:26*, "*If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.*"

We understand those words more than ever today in our fellowship at Killearn. For those who may be worshiping with us for the first time, online or at home, or those who have been with our church family only since this past year you have understandably not

have had the privilege of knowing Tim Willcox who served as one of our associate pastors here at Killearn from 2016-2020. Tragically, this Wednesday I got the call that I dreaded from Tim's mother-in-law telling me that at 54, almost 55 years of age, Tim passed away due to Covid somewhere around 6pm. I know that so many of us are hurting for Tim's family, and ourselves. It's so hard to believe and even accept. It feels like a nightmare, at best, surreal that we are even talking about it. Thankfully, Tim's family and we ourselves do not have to carry this burden of saying goodbye to Tim all alone. When one part of the family of God hurts, we all hurt together, and we are hurting. My hope is that when we get together and talk about Tim we will naturally support each other as we share stories of what we remember about Tim. Hopefully our memories of Tim will remind us of Tim the coach, the husband, the dad, the fisherman, the man who loved boating, the Miami Dolphin fan, the wonderful servant of God he was not only with us here at Killearn but also before where he served as a teacher, youth pastor, missionary, and much more. Hopefully, when we talk about Tim, we will also mix in a bunch of laughter with our tears, because if you knew Tim you knew what a nut he was. I shared this story with our staff in Tim's staff going away party about how you can take the boy from South Florida and put him in North West Florida but you can't take the South Florida out of the boy. Missy and I joined Tim and Sheryl for the Red Hills Horse Trials that occurs every year at Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park just off of Meridian Road. It is an outdoor event in a rural setting and so most people dress appropriately for the occasion. Tim showed up dressed in board shorts, Tee Shirt, ball cap, and flip flops like he was headed to the beach or going out on the boat. I cracked up and asked where he thought he was going. It didn't faze him a bit. He proudly brought South Florida to Red Hills. I'm so grateful that I can say that Tim was, as he and I used to say about each other, my brother from another mother. I am also grateful that one day we will experience the greatest fellowship of all time when all of us who are followers of Jesus Christ will be together with Tim in eternity where we will experience together the endless adventures of eternity. My heart breaks now as I miss him dearly, but that pain of loss is also mixed in with hope. Our relationship with Tim and each other and our hope for eternity is all made possible because of Jesus who gives us this fellowship, the community here in this world that points to the perfect fellowship we will all experience one day in heaven. Until we are all together for eternity in that perfect fellowship in heaven, we get just a hint of what it will be like, through our fellowship that we have with each other in this life.

HOW CAN WE BE DEVOTED TO FELLOWSHIP WITH EACH OTHER?

How can we make our fellowship with each other richer so that it is a taste of the perfect fellowship to come? We first do so by doing what Jesus said in *Matthew 22:37-39*, "*Jesus replied, 'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'*" ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹ *A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*" This includes both enriching our fellowship vertically with God and horizontally with each other. With God we grow closer in fellowship with Him as we regularly spend personal time alone with the God each morning in prayer and reading of our Bible. In this way we share our hearts with God

and hear God speak to us, drawing ever closer to the perfect fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We also strengthen our horizontal fellowship with each other by spending regular times with fellow followers of Jesus in fellowship doing all kinds of things together which will also strengthen our relationship with God. In fellowship together we regularly worship together, serve together, give to the needs of others together, pray together, study the Bible together, attend student ministries together or have our children attend our children's ministry together, open up homes after church on Sundays just to share a meal together or coffee or just hang out, meet regularly in one of our small group Life groups, just hang out with a small group of friends for fellowship, play together, entertain together, grieve together, meet in Sunday School together, connect together over Zoom if you are not able to be in person with others due to the pandemic. All of this requires intentional effort to regularly be in fellowship with fellow followers of Jesus. If we do so, God will use our fellowship to strengthen and transform every area of our lives.

I can say with 100% certainty that you need us, and we need you. Being together ideally in person, if not virtually temporarily through technology, is essential if we hope to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. No one can do it for us. It is up to us to make this a priority in our lives.

Icebreaker I – Do you have a funny “Pastor Tim Willcox” story you would like to share? If you didn't know Tim, who is someone in your life who always managed to make you laugh?

Icebreaker II – How can we be devoted to fellowship with each other? Name a few practical ways.

1. Why do you think these people got together?
2. What word best describes the atmosphere in this passage?
3. What made the early church so appealing to others?
4. If you had been invited to be a part of this community, what would have been your reaction?
5. What did these 3,000 converts end up doing? How is God with them?
6. What do you devote yourself to daily?
7. What is the closest you've come to experiencing the kind of close fellowship described here in Acts?
8. What keeps the church from experiencing this kind of fellowship now?
9. What aspect of life in the early church do you most desire for Killearn UMC?
10. How is Killearn UMC's fellowship like and unlike the fellowship here?
11. What are you doing to make your church the kind of place that will attract others to Christ?
12. How will this example affect how you get involved here at Killearn UMC?