

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
April 28, 2013**

Church Fellowship sermon series – #2

Acts 2:42-47

We Gather Together

- 1. Crowded Loneliness**
- 2. The History of Fellowship**
- 3. Our Fellowship**

Hymns:147 (vv. 1-3) – 382

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

We live in a world where people are connected with one another in more ways than ever. Through ever evolving technology, the world has become a very small place. We can have face-to-face conversations with people on the other side of the world. We can know everything about a person's life without ever meeting them in person. We can watch events unfold even before they become "news." Mankind is constantly inventing new ways to help us connect with the world around us.

Yet, despite all of these new ways to connect, more and more people in this world are feeling disconnected. This dilemma that

affects many people has been called "crowded loneliness." We live right next to each other, we are connected to more people than ever before, yet people feel alone without any real connections. You see it in the airport or on the bus, where crowds of people sit shoulder to shoulder, all talking or connecting... to someone else through the device in their hands. You see it in restaurants where two people sit across from one another, catching up on the events of the day...as they scroll through Facebook and Twitter. People excel at communicating their thoughts through status updates and emoticons, but they struggle to connect with the people who are supposed to be closest to them in life. And so in a connected world, many people feel disconnected and alone.

Obviously, this is not what God had in mind. He didn't create people to be disconnected and alone. He created us to be connected and together, in close relationships. He wanted us to be doing life together. To be associating with each other. He created us to have fellowship with one another.

God wants us to have fellowship with one another because he knows how great it is. In the Bible, God tells us that he is one (Deut. 6:4). But in his oneness, there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those three persons are inseparably connected. They serve one another. The Holy Spirit leads people to the Son. The Son leads people to the Father. The Father gives up the Son and sends out the Spirit. They work together. They dwell together. They are one, together. And they show us what fellowship is: an association; a close relationship; a perfect 3-in-1 fellowship of unity, harmony, and selfless love.

When God created mankind, he wanted man to know and work and live with that same kind of fellowship. So he created mankind perfectly, in the image of God. Their will was perfectly united with God. They loved him. They wanted to serve him. They wanted to be with him. They had perfect fellowship with God, and so they had perfect fellowship with one another. Since they understood the will of God, they understood the will of one another. Can you

imagine that? There was a time when mankind was in perfect fellowship and communion and unity with one another. There was no disconnection. There was no arguing. There was no selfishness. No hurt. No tears. No sadness. There was a unity with all true believers on earth. And it was good.

But Adam and Eve began to wonder, "Maybe there is something better than this fellowship we have with God." And so, they established a fellowship with the devil. They joined him in his rebellion and sin. And that sin ruined mankind's perfect fellowship with God. They could no longer be where God was. They couldn't stay in his Garden. They had to leave his presence. When they thought about God, they felt fear, guilt, and shame.

When their fellowship with God was broken, their perfect unity with one another was broken as well. They began blaming one another immediately. They became self-conscious. Their relationship would no longer be perfectly loving and selfless, instead they would be filled with anger and selfishness. Fellowship was destroyed. Its blessings disappeared, until Jesus showed up.

Jesus came as the ultimate fellowship-restorer. That is what atonement is all about. It makes people at-one with God. He took a relationship that was ripped apart by sin and brought it back together. He reversed what the devil did. He put separation between mankind and the devil – the way that it should be – and put people in fellowship with God once again!

And look what happened to the fellowship amongst people once their unity with God was restored. Immediately, we see the results. We heard about it in Acts. ***"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.. 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, ⁴⁷ praising God."*** These Christians, whose relationship with God had been fixed, wanted to have fellowship with other children of God.

As they gathered around the Word of God, they prayed together; they studied the Word together; they worshipped and praised God for all that he had done for them, together. But their communion was so much more than gathering together for church. These people did life together. They were together every day and they had everything in common.

Look at all the blessings that they enjoyed as a result of the fellowship that they had with God and one another. They, themselves were filled with joy, their hearts were glad and their connection was sincere. And it led to more connections. It led to more fellowship. Listen to what happened, ***"⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles... ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need... they were enjoying the favor of all the people... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*** As people noticed what was happening in this church, outsiders were filled with awe. They wanted to know the source of this fellowship. People wanted to be a part of this early Christian church. They wanted that communion. By enjoying fellowship inside the church, the greatest thing happened. As they enjoyed worship, as they enjoyed life, as they enjoyed one another, more and more people learned about their Savior. What a beautiful thing that was and is!

All these years later, we are a long way from that early Christian church. Yet, here are God's people; still gathering together, gathering for the same reasons as those early Christians; gathering around the same teachings as those early Christians. But as you gather today, maybe you feel yourself wishing that you could have been part of a church like that, that was so closely connected, that had such fellowship, that found such joy in everything that they did. As you think about your church compared to theirs, maybe some questions are going through your head. If we gather just as they did, why do I sometimes not feel all that connected? Why do I not have any clue what that person's name is over there? Why didn't joy fill my heart

as I woke up this morning because it was another Sunday in which I get to gather together? Why have I given no thought to eating together this afternoon with those new people who have joined our fellowship this past year?

It is because the sin that broke Adam and Eve's fellowship long ago still infects our lives today. It is because the sinful nature that we are born with still rears its ugly head in our lives. It is because the devil still works hard to break our fellowship. So, we fight and argue. We are petty and jealous. We are cold and stand-offish. We whisper and gossip. We are selfish. We are imperfect. And all of those things and many others affect our community and our fellowship.

So what can we do?

As you think about that question, remember what led to that joyous fellowship in the early church. They didn't have fellowship teams working night and day to bring people together for fun events. They didn't have a committee that brought people together who shared different interests in life. They didn't even have fellowship that was devoid of problems. (Just look at the New Testament epistles for proof of that.) But their connection was made possible, their connection flourished because they had Jesus. They were brought together by the work of Jesus. Their connection was the result of their common faith in him. Their time spent together was first and foremost centered on gathering around the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. They had Jesus in common. And people knew it. And their love for him showed itself in their love for each other and for other people in this world.

And guess what? We have those things. We have a connection with God the Father through the work of Jesus. We confess a common faith together each Sunday as we gather around the Word and Sacrament. We have everything that led to this blessed fellowship that we saw in the early Christian church.

If ever there is a time that you are feeling disconnected, if ever there is a time when you are feeling that you have nothing in common

with the person sitting next to you, if ever you are struggling to find joy in your church, remember exactly what it is that connects you to this place. Remember the tremendous bond that you have with those who gather here with you. Remember your source of joy. You have Jesus in your life.

And because of that, you have fellowship. You have fellowship with God the Father. You have fellowship with every one of the members of Holy Trinity whom you gather with. So instead of thinking of all the things that make you different from one another, celebrate that tremendous bond that connects you all. Celebrate it naturally just like those early Christians.

And if you do, you, and we, will experience many blessings.

Remember there are many people in this world who feel that crowded loneliness. They are looking for fellowship. Fellowship is a blessing that God has given to his church. Fellowship is a beautiful expression of the Gospel. It shows people who don't know the message of the Bible how wonderful a fellowship with God is. When we live loving lives of Christian fellowship with one another, others will be attracted to it; they will want to know how they can be a part of it. And more people will join our fellowship. And they will be filled with joy. And we will be filled with joy. And we will have new fellowships to enjoy.