

Sermon Response Guide, May 19, 2024
Acts 2:46 “Devoted to Community Life”
Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

We are continuing our series on Acts 2 titled “Devoted: The Markers of a Spirit Filled Church.” We are exploring what the early Christian’s devoted themselves to following the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Today we are going to explore the early church’s devotion to community life. The early church was an interdependent community. In verse 46 we read, “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.”

This is an important conversation for us to have. We are up against numerous technological and cultural forces that isolate us relationally. Isolation takes a toll on our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. It also takes a toll on the well-being of our society. Derek Thompson wrote a fascinating article in [The Atlantic](#) last month titled, “The True Cost of the Churchgoing Bust.” He writes:

“As an agnostic, I have spent most of my life thinking about the decline of faith in America in mostly positive terms. Organized religion seemed, to me, beset by scandal and entangled in noxious politics. So, I thought, what is there really to mourn? Only in the past few years have I come around to a different view. Maybe religion, for all of its faults, works a bit like a retaining wall to hold back the destabilizing pressure of American hyper-individualism, which threatens to swell and spill over in its absence.

It is not everyday that you hear an agnostic lament the decline of church in a secular news publication! Thompson’s article goes on to explore how the communal life of religious communities provides a vital context for support, friendship, meaning making, and accountability. Community life is vital for us on so many levels.

It is also difficult to sustain. Acts 2:42-47 gives us a pretty idillic snapshot of the church. People are meeting daily to support and encourage one another. They are sharing resources and sharing meals. They have a high level of commitment to community. However, it doesn’t take long for this new community face challenges. The golden years of church life don’t last very long. In just a couple chapters the church faces a dispute over how resources are shared. Later in the book of Acts, disputes arise over theology and ethics. The New Testament letters address all kinds of factions, quarrels, and conflicts. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews writes to the early church, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.” People are starting to drift away.

We face similar barriers to community life today. Only now, we have a whole new set of technological realities that amplify and accelerate the decline of community life. If we are to devote ourselves again to fellowship, we need a renewed vision. We need to discover the reasons why we are called to a communal life.

Community life, and friendships are not just a beneficial add on to our life. The scriptures teach that relational connection is actually a necessity component to being a human being.

In Genesis 1:26 we read “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” What is interesting about this is the use of the plural tense. God says, set us make humanity in “our” image. What Genesis 1:26 suggests is that we were created with this community gene. To be made in the image of God is to be made in a trinitarian or communal image.

This is why Jesus final and parting prayer is that his disciples would experience unity with one another. He prays, “may all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” This is Jesus main concern, his parting prayer before he is arrested.

Paul reiterates a similar idea in his metaphor of a the church being like a body. We need one another to thrive. To live in isolation from the diversity of community is disabling. It is like having a body that is missing out on essential parts and systems. There is a reason why we suffer personally and as a society when we are isolated. We are going against the grain of how we were created

The word for “fellowship” in our text gives us some important guidance as to how we might renew our commitment to one another. The word “koinonia” comes from the root word for “common.” Later, in our passage we read the the early church had all things in common (koinos).

This word teaches us that the community is held together because we hold something in common. The church’s unity is in Christ. The people have a common share in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. 1 John 1:3 says that our “fellowship (koinonia) is with the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.” In 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul speaks of the “fellowship (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit.”

This theological reality reframes our relationships to others. It helps overcome the forces that divide and isolate us. Our common identity in Christ sustains us when we disagree, get into conflict, or have passionate differences of opinion. It holds us together when relationships are difficult and straining, or when we simply would rather stay home and disengage. This foundational fellowship (koinonia) that we share in Christ, enables us to see one another as people who are beloved children of God.

May we, devote ourselves again to koinonia. Let us not give up meeting together as many are in the habit of doing. Fellowship is vital for our flourishing as human beings, for our growth as disciples, and for the common good of our world.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. What barriers disrupt your experience of and commitment to community life?
3. What do we gain from being relationally connected with others? What do we gain from community life that we can’t get from personal spiritual practices?
4. In what ways can you devote yourselves to koinonia this week and in the weeks to come?