



Acts 2:42-47  
The Church Is...  
“...Sent In Community”

Rev. Brian North  
June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023

This morning we continue the sermon series we’ve been in the last couple weeks looking at the nature of the church. Two weeks ago we talked about how the church is *sent* by Jesus. We’re sent on mission, for his cause. Last week we were in 1 Corinthians 1 and a message that was titled, “The Church is sent *with the Cross*.” In it, we explored the meaning of the cross for us and for others, and how to share the message of the cross effectively in a world that sees the cross as foolishness.

Today we dive a little deeper into something we touched on in the first Sunday, that: **Jesus’ disciples not sent out by him alone, but rather, we are sent in community, as the body of Christ, the Church.** And maintaining a church community – staying on mission together, encouraging one another, getting along with each other when there are political, social, or theological differences – that can all be challenging. As a pastor I knew in Salt Lake City once jokingly said to me, “pastoring would be great if it weren’t for the people.” This sense of community is challenging even for just a local congregation, let alone an entire denomination or the global Church. So, let’s look this morning at what makes the church community what it is, and how we stay on mission together. We are in **Acts 2:42-47** this morning. This is God’s word to you and me today.

It’s clear from this passage that the early church as described here had a deep sense of community that was marked by a few things in particular. **First, as we see in verse 42 and then again in 46, they were centered on “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” which included meeting together each day.** So, from the start of the church, and even before that in Judaism, teaching from Scriptures was important. It gave them a common basis for their faith, and their mission together.

In fact, in the verses just prior to what we read, Peter teaches the disciples and others who were gathered around, and the teaching is rooted in the Scriptures – what you and I would call the Old Testament – but the teaching always pointed people toward Jesus. They taught the Scriptures in light of

Jesus, and saw it pointing to Jesus. Today: we still teach that. We have more than just the Old Testament now, of course – we have the New Testament which is explicitly about and connected to Jesus. And we continue in that tradition of teaching the Scriptures to understand them and be drawn together around this common mission that comes out of the Scriptures, and having fellowship that is centered on Jesus.

**Second, we read that they shared in the breaking of bread and prayer (verses 42 and 46) and praising God (47).** This breaking of the bread may be a shorthand way of referring to Communion – the bread and the cup. It may be more of a full meal. It's hard to know if it is more connected to the teaching and prayer and praise, or if it's more connected to fellowship and a sense of “doing life together.” But again, these are elements of their life together as a community – eating, prayer, and praising God.

**Third, we see that the apostles' lives were marked by the power and presence of God: wonders and signs performed by the apostles, which filled people with awe.** Their lives stood out from the world, displayed the power of God, and were notably different as they lived in a place of spiritual power and authority.

Then we get this statement in verse 44 that, **“All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44).** This undoubtedly refers to the 3,000 who had responded to Peter's teaching, combined with others who had already joined in as followers of Jesus – the 12 disciples, the women who were followed and supported Jesus along with the 12, and others who were in a broader circle of followers as well. This is the beginning of the church community, and we see the incredible sense of “togetherness” that they had throughout these verses, summarized here in verse 44.

They had “everything in common” and verse 45 goes on to show how they cared for one another deeply, meeting needs that they had by selling property and possessions and giving to people as needed. It's an incredible sense of community that we see described here, and in all these verses put together. The result of it all is shown in the last verse: **They had great favor in the community around them, and “the Lord added to their number daily**

**those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).** In other words, the church impacted the people around them positively, which drew those people into their church community and into a relationship with Jesus.

As I read through this passage, I am struck by how their lives are so centered on Jesus, and how they emulate his selflessness and sacrifice in their commitment to one another. They didn't just learn about Jesus' commitment to them and love for them as head knowledge: they lived it out in their church community, which made their community stand out. **They sought to be like Jesus, with the primary mark of that Christ-likeness being a selfless attitude by each person for the sake of their mission together.** They sold stuff, gave as needed, came together regularly, put others first...Selfishness and personal agendas seems not to have had any place in the early church, just as Jesus didn't have a selfish bone in his body. It's like the old saying that “there's no “I” in team.” There's not in the church either”. Of course, there's also the question, “What's at the center of church?” “ur”. ☺ Funny, but terrible theology.

Let me share a story that might help us to think about this: There was once a local charity that had never received a donation from the city's most successful lawyer. So, a volunteer paid the lawyer a visit in his lavish office. The volunteer opened the meeting by saying, “Our research shows that even though your annual income is over two million dollars, you don't give a penny to charity. Wouldn't you like to give something back to your community?”

The lawyer thought for a minute and said, “First, did your research also show you that my mother is dying after a long painful illness, and she has huge medical bills that are far beyond her ability to pay?” Embarrassed, the representative mumbled, “Uh... No, I didn't know that.”

“Secondly,” said the lawyer, “did it show that my brother, a disabled Veteran, is blind and confined to a wheelchair and is unable to support his wife and six children?” The stricken rep began to stammer an apology, but is cut off again.

“Thirdly, did your research also show you that my sister's husband died in a dreadful car accident, leaving her penniless with a mortgage and three children, one of whom is disabled and another who has learning disabilities requiring an array of private tutors?” The humiliated rep, completely beaten, said, “I'm so sorry. I had no idea.” And the lawyer said, “So, if I didn't give any money to them, what makes you think I'd give any to you?”

On the surface, it's a joke about money...but, but there's a deeper issue revealed in it that gets at the heart of the difficult nature of community. The deeper issue is the lack of commitment to the well-being of others.

**“Commitment to the betterment/well-being of others” is what true community is built on – especially Christian community where Jesus is the model and example we strive to emulate.** Who else was as committed to the betterment and well-being of other people as Jesus was? As Paul says in Romans, Jesus died for us even while we were yet sinners. That's how committed to us he is. And so, the Church is committed *together* to live into the mission that God sends us on. That sense of community, centered on Jesus, is a global thing...but most of us experience Christian community in the context of an individual church.

Here at Rose Hill, like the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church, it's important for us to be on this mission together, in community with and for one another. The only way it will work is if we put others before ourselves, much as the early church did, and do it for the glory of Jesus. And it's not as if the early church was made up of people who all had the same backgrounds and views on other facets of life, making this easy. They were varied – Greeks and Jews. Polytheistic background and monotheistic. “Anything goes” culture and morals vs. strict rules and moral code. As I heard someone say a month or two ago, the early church was like the Republicans and Democrats getting together for one joint national convention and together supporting one political candidate to be President. **We also have our different experiences, different politics, different views on a variety of things, and we also find our unity in Jesus and because of Him we are in community with one another.**

This summer, we will have a greater sense of being in community with one another as a church body, as we join together in one unified service starting

July 2. It will be at 10:00. It will merge elements of both services together. So, there will be some aspects of the service that you will particularly enjoy and benefit from. There may be some aspects that you'd wish were different – things you'd add, or things you'd subtract. But just as we see the early church making sacrifices for the benefit of each other and for the sake of being in true community together, and for the sake of the mission of the church...**Just as they lived selflessly then, I believe we can as well.** We're not asking anyone to sell property and belongings and give to meet people's needs as this passage talks about...we're simply bringing our two services together. 😊

Now, there's one more thing to say about this coming together for one service. Your Session – which is me and the Elders of the church who are actively serving in that role – have sensed that God may actually be leading us to have one service not just for the summer, but beyond as well. Why go to one service for an ongoing time? For all the reasons I just stated: to help us have greater community, to practice selflessness, to put the needs of others before ourselves, to have a greater sense of mission together, and to be an intergenerational church where we interact with each other more than we currently do on Sundays. **In short, we believe going to one service makes us a stronger, more unified church community.**

This last week at our staff meeting, we each introduced ourselves to Jenifer Fenn, our new Preschool Director. I asked each staff person to share something that we appreciated about Rose Hill Church. One or two people talked about the sense of family we have here, where people genuinely care for one another and support one another (not unlike this Acts passage). I shared that I appreciated that Rose Hill has been a place that has been open to change and new ways of doing ministry. There is a lot that's different here than when I became pastor 10 ½ years ago – (I was a change, to start with, after a 25+ year pastor preceding me) staff, session size, denomination, worship service added, and more. But I also said to them, “We may test that openness to change more than ever before this fall as we stay with one service.” I believe that we can and will make this change and do it well, because I believe this church is centered on Jesus and his mission, and nothing else.

You know, one of the most common metaphors in Scripture for the church and its relationship with God is marriage. The Church is the bride of Christ. And: **Marriage, where a husband covenants to put his wife's needs and desire before his own, and she covenants to put his before hers, is an example of the kind of sacrificial love that we need within the church toward one another, as well.** Marriage is not a transactional relationship – “you give me this, and I'll give you that...” or “If you give me this, then I'll give you that.” That's not healthy language or behavior in the covenant of marriage. And it's not healthy in the church, either. Jesus didn't go to the cross for us pending our good behavior or pending our promised love for him or anything like that. He just did it because he has made this covenant. It's his promise, and his word, and his word is sure. He did it. And then our part of the covenant is to live on mission for him.

So, we have the joy and honor of living in that covenant with him, but also with each other. **We covenant together, and when we do that well, it makes for a great community, that demonstrates the love of Jesus and is attractive to others.** It's one of the things I love about our denominational name, which has this word in it (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians). We covenant with God and with each other to love selflessly, trusting that others will do the same for us.

So, my prayer is that we will be more Christ-like, and love one another well with a selfless love, because this is our church community. I don't want to be like my pastor friend in SLC who said pastoring would be great if it weren't for the people. I think pastoring is great *because* of the people. Churches are great because of the people, when we live together in truly Jesus-emulating community. This is a great church for that same reason. That's been my experience, and I believe it will continue to be so. And I pray that as we gain a deeper sense of community and put others in the church before ourselves...**I pray that we will enjoy the favor of all the people around us, as the last verse in today's passage reads.** Perhaps the Lord will add to our number daily as well as the verse says, but that's in His hands, ultimately. I do believe, however, that if we selflessly love one another well – including in our worshipping life together – I think that will be really attractive to other

people, and God will do amazing things through this community of believers here at Rose Hill Church, as we together become more like Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.