

Title: *Togetherness*

Subtitle: A Deep & Wide Community Develops

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Fill in the Blank: **TOGETHERNESS** is the **ONLY** way forward.

Theme: Peter preaches a powerful sermon under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This results in many getting saved. Their immediate action is to become a community. That community of Christ had the central element of doing life together. They studied, prayed, ate, and did many things as a family. And as they did this, miracles, signs, and wonders happened in their midst, and their community grew (and not just numerically). Christ centered Community leads to miracles.

OPENER:

The hardest thing about the Church....is the church. The biggest threat to the body believers, is the body of believers, at least here in the United states where most Christian's don't face any real significant persecution. The hardest thing about being a Christians is being with Christians. The number one tool the devil uses against us...is us. It is hard to be community!!!

When I wrote that, I found that the word "hard" it didn't quite capture what I was trying to express. It didn't quite reflect how I feel when I don't get to have my way or I have to forgive or show grace or work with someone wired differently than I am (*EXPOUND*) and I confess that when I peeled open a thesaurus in an attempt to find a word that expressed the depths of the challenge of community, I found that the thesaurus came up short. So forgive me for being a little undignified in my expression but the best way I can express what Im trying to say is like this:

“Its “AHHHHH!!!!” To be in community!”

I see some of you understand what I'm saying. Its hard! At least its hard to be Community in the way that word at its core denotes. With the Latin prefix *con-* (which means "together") and the word *munis* (which has to do with performing services) and is often a shorthand reference to public power; to be community means to do services and to share power together. And as a control freak (*STACCATO*), as someone who very much likes to be in charge and have his way, I find myself often struggling with doing things and sharing power with others. I find community challenging.

I'm not by myself right? The idea of community simultaneously attracts and repels most of us. We long for the life-affirming benefits that community can offer, but also find ourselves resistant to the demands that community makes.

Or rather the demand that Jesus makes for us to participate, whole heartedly, full throated and from our belies, with the entirety of our being, our whole selves in community. And make no mistake, it is a demand, the requirement of loving Jesus is loving people.

SELF INTRO:

If we haven't met before...

(Name + Position

BYA Plug

Post Service Invitation to meet 18-25 yr olds)

SERIES EXPLANATION:

And today we are in Part 4 of our Year Long Series through the book of Acts called “The Empowered Church.” Here at Bridgeway, 2023 is our Year of Power. It is all about us as a family discerning how God gets stuff done and what He gives us to get stuff done. We’re talking about power to impact, power to heal, power to set free, power to restore, power to prophesy, power to minister, the power to be nice (I’m really excited for that one for some of y’all). In other words we’re talking supernatural part of our reality that allows us to do what Jesus wants us to do. *(LANCE’S WORDS VERBATIM)*

INVERTED ANALOGY & MAIN POINT:

If you’re like me, when you hear the word “power” there are probably some images that come to mind. For me, see I’m someone who is an avid fan of the comic book series the X Men (*X-Men Pic on Screen*) (*briefly explain Xmen, mutants, omega level mutants*) this is what I think about when I think about Power. I confess when I think about power, an image of folks sitting together and eating is not what immediately comes to mind.

But that is exactly what the author of our text today seems to be inferring. That there is something about community done well, that unlocks and gives access to supernatural, miracle inducing, life changing, ground breaking, power.

FILL IN THE BLANK:

Drop kick someone sitting next to you and say to them “Togetherness!”
.....Is the only way forward.

In fact that is your fill in the blank: **TOGETHERNESS is the ONLY way forward.**

SCRIPTURE:

Turn with me in our bibles to the book Acts, we’ll be in the second chapter, in the English Standard Version Bibles underneath the seat in front of you it is page _____

I just want to walk through this verse by verse and just talk about it a little bit and I’ll let you out of here yes?

42 AND THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS.

I’m going to stop right there because this first verse summarizes everything I want to talk about today. As someone who loves words, I was struck that the author used the word “Devoted” *proskartereó* (*pros-kar-ter-eh-o*)-steadfast, persistent, unyielding— to describe the followers of Jesus’ commitment to the teachings of the apostles—now that makes sense to me.

They were devoted to the study of scripture, understanding of Jesus, aligning themselves morally and ethically with the teachings of Jesus, uprightness—all of these things that in the church world we call holiness. The author says they were devoted to it.

But then without even taking a breath, he says that they were also and equally devoted to the fellowship (koinónia)

[Coin-Oh-Knee-Uh]-partnership, contributory help, participation, sharing in, somebody shout “**Togetherness**” and the breaking of bread and we aren’t 100% certain if Luke, the likely author of this text, is talking about literally eating a meal or sharing in the Lord’s supper, but what we see is that Luke essentially says that this community, this first Christian church, thought that Believer’s being together, sharing together, doing life together was as important and critical and valuable to the community as moral right living. In fact togetherness IS a moral right living, it’s a HUGE part of it.

I have never heard anyone preach that. I have never heard anyone say that being together as a Christian family, doing community well is as important to your Christianity as your morality and your ethics. And I certainly have never heard anyone preach community with the same zeal, passion, and sometimes even aggression that we preach Holiness (right living) with. But I submit to you that that is the thesis of verse 42.

Let's keep going.

43 AND AWE CAME UPON EVERY SOUL, AND MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS WERE BEING DONE THROUGH THE APOSTLES. 44 AND ALL WHO BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER AND HAD ALL THINGS IN COMMON. 45 AND THEY WERE SELLING THEIR POSSESSIONS AND BELONGINGS AND DISTRIBUTING THE PROCEEDS TO ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED.

Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to sell all your stuff and give it to the church, some of yall immediately got nervous, stay with me (*HUMOR*)

46 AND DAY BY DAY, ATTENDING THE TEMPLE TOGETHER AND BREAKING BREAD IN THEIR HOMES, THEY RECEIVED THEIR FOOD WITH GLAD AND GENEROUS HEARTS, 47 PRAISING GOD AND HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAY BY DAY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.

There is so much here, but let me give you a little context. Peter, one of Jesus's primary students, has just preached a powerful sermon under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This results in many getting saved (*explain "saved" for new ppl*). Their immediate action is to become a community. So what should I do after I commit to Jesus? Get some Jesus loving friends. This community of Christ in Acts had a central element of doing life together. They studied, prayed, ate, and did many things as a family. And I want the western church, and most certainly Bridgeway, to discontinue "doing church" and start "doing life" slap somebody and say "Together!"

What I want you to see is that the communal life in the church does not occur separately from the Spirit's prophetic work, it exists as a constituent piece of the Spirit's witness about the resurrected Jesus. People saw this way of doing life together and it evangelized them, meaning it helped win them to Jesus. It did this because doing community well is not exactly humanity's strong point. We know that in general people don't do community well. Especially, when there is difference in the community but

even when there is not a lot of difference. Even when the folks are more similar, people have always struggled to be community (SOUTH AFRICA STORY)

So historically people don't do community well but the Spirit EMPOWERS us to do community well. And so when people who don't know Jesus, see the community functioning well, being healthy, especially when there is diversity in it, that causes them to be curious about who this Jesus is, that is the binding, the glue, in that community. Community done well isn't normal. But it is possible.

And Bridgeway, being diverse in thought—(we have about 4000 people, you can ask almost any ideological question and you'll get about 4000 answers) and because of that, we have a responsibility to do community on purpose and do it well because it evangelizes people.

And what we know is that community done well, can only happen through the Spirit of God. The text says **45 AND THEY WERE SELLING THEIR POSSESSIONS AND BELONGINGS AND DISTRIBUTING THE PROCEEDS TO ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED.**

You KNOW that was the Holy Spirit! (*HUMOR*)

ALL of my things...mmm...I might sell some of them (*HUMOR*) but that Xbox is staying put! God wants me to have it!

The Spirit of God empowers us to centralize others. The Spirit empowers us to say I am not at the center, I am not the most important person in the room, JEsus is. And so what matters to Jesus starts to matter to me.

The Spirit Empowers us to say you matter to me because you matter to Jesus. What I have found is that when you prioritize the right things, the right things become priority. That sounds redundant. It is! I'll say it like this, When you prioritize the right things, the wrong things stop being as important. And This community prioritized its relationships. Now if you're an enneagram 2, 6, or 9, you can take a little nap, this part you are an expert in. But the rest of us, have to learn to prioritize the relationships in this community and to prioritize making new relationships in this community. Making more relationships in this community . I know when you wake up on Saturday/Sunday morning you come to the church prepared to worship (*EXPOUND*), I know when you wake up on Sat/Sun morning, you come prepared to learn from the teaching, you come prepared to hear from God, you come prepared to give, some of you even come prepared to serve, but what if we came prepared to build and invest in the relationships here? (*EXPOUND*)

How would that transform your experience here and our experience here? And the more they invested and prioritized the relationships the more things like money, possessions, and physical resources fell into the periphery of their lives. When you prioritize the right things, the right things become a priority. When you prioritize the right things, the wrong things stop being as important.

What was important was this 3000 influx of new believers, many of whom may not have been from Jerusalem but after being converted would have decided to stay in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians

had to share if they were to survive. But when you invest in knowing each other, sharing with each other becomes less hard.

Now I want to be clear about something, I am not up here promoting that our church starts experimenting with communism. The Christians that did life like this in Acts did it because it was necessary, and it was also voluntary, temporary, and not without flaws. So I want to be clear that I do not think that this specific example of selling everything and living together is explicitly prescriptive (telling us what to do) today, it is descriptive (telling us what happened) and it is up to us under the influence of the Holy Spirit to figure out what does it look like to operate under the principle of community, of knowing and sharing life with each other in deep and sacrificial ways looks like in our context today. They had to share money and housing and possessions to survive, what do we have to share in order to survive?

I don't have all the answers, but I'll start with this, lets share our pain and our joy. We have to share each other's pain. As a Believer, I'm not going to let you hurt by yourself (EXPOUND)

I will share in this with you. I'll share my joy (be biggest cheerleader EXPOUND)

I will share my testimony, I will share what the Lord has done, I will share solicited wisdom and advice, I will share information, I will share time, I will share opportunity, And yes I will share resources. In Jesus' name I bind that hoarding spirit that lies and tells you if you give that you will lose, IT. IS. A. LIE. And we cannot just do it within these four walls. You know how many Pastors that Pastor Lance is mentoring and teaching and sharing with. Because if the church is to survive, sharing is a requirement. What if every

day when you woke up, a part your morning liturgy, your morning litany, your morning prayer was “Lord what would you like me to share today?” And what we see is that knowing and sharing is the formula for GROWING. This is the church growth model, laid out for us.

46 AND DAY BY DAY, ATTENDING THE TEMPLE TOGETHER AND BREAKING BREAD IN THEIR HOMES, THEY RECEIVED THEIR FOOD WITH GLAD AND GENEROUS HEARTS, 47 PRAISING GOD AND HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD (who did it??--The LORD!) ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAY BY DAY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.

If we take care of each other, God will take care of growth. It isn't about having the most prolific preachers, the best singers leading worship, the most spectacular Christmas service. Our Christmas service was dope because we have dope people and we have dope people because our people take care of our people.

Somebody shout “togetherness!”

...is the only way forward.

Listen, It is important to acknowledge that Acts, taken as a whole, does not hold up this depiction of an all consuming corporate life as central or primary in the church's experience. It doesn't depict this way of living as easy or convenient. In a few Chapters, you see them deal with all the struggles that come with community. I am not trying to suggest community is this easy perfect problemless utopia. But I do believe that these verses

represent the best of what God's people are capable of, in the power of the Spirit. It shows us what the Holy Spirit can do. These verses do not lay down rules or specific structures for Christian living. In their context they indicate that the reign of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ creates the potential for mutual service that embodies God's family.

It is critical not just for us and for our growth but because the community of faith exists as an extension of Lord Jesus' commitment to bring salvation to the world. And in our year of power, before we can start talking about prophecy, before we can get into calling down angels, we gotta master community. I'm more interested in the Holy Spirit teaching us to hold our tongues than teaching us to speak in tongues. I'm more interested in hands that hug than hands that heal. I want to see people get delivered from alcoholism, I want see sight restored, I want see cancer flee, but I am equally invested in seeing people get delivered from prejudice, friendship restored, and selfishness flee.

And be clear, there will be moments of frustration in our attempts to build community that's an authentic expression of the gospel, and our best efforts will remain a flawed expression. But it is an empowering thing to realize that we are not left to their own devices in creating such an environment. The ministry of God's reign that Jesus inaugurated during his life and secured by his death, resurrection, and glorification is not merely a thing of the past or a faint hope for future days; it continues, sometimes barely perceptibly, in the corporate life of communities of faith today, right here and right now. It is important to underscore that Acts 2:42-47 describes a community of faith that operates in the power of God's Spirit.

The Power of Common Unity.

CLOSING:

So here is your assignment, and I can't follow up with you, I can't follow you around and make sure you do it, but I am asking you, yes you too introverts and shy folks, before you leave the campus today (before you log off the broadcast online), introduce yourself to someone you don't know. Do it in groups if you need to. (SLIDE w/Instructions) Tell them your name, where you're from, what you do that you enjoy, and tell them what brought you to church today.

What if you did that every week for the rest of this year? Those small interactions may be just a sparks, but a lot of sparks all over this building, could set it ablaze with the power of family, and becoming family around Jesus is the precursor for miracles, signs and wonders.

PRAY