

A Sermon for DaySpring
By Burt L. Burleson
“Fellowship and the Breaking of Bread”
Acts 2: 42
June 27, 2004

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching... and to fellowship.”

That’s the little line Luke uses to describe what the first church was up to. So... while they’re formulating their doctrine... they’re also forming their relationships. They were having fellowship... koinonia... or as we like to say it, Supper Clubs.

Someone real good with organization made an announcement about how they were going together in homes to get better acquainted... and tried to mix and match and put folks together who were from different places and different generations.

Single folks...

Married folks...

Widows and widowers.

Rich and not so rich.

And everyone attended... What else was there to do in the first century? No soccer games to get to. No movies to attend. No grad school classes to study for. Getting together in someone’s home was the happening thing... especially with the whole Middle Eastern hospitality thing being so important.

These first century supper clubs were wonderful gatherings.

They’d sit around one of those low tables and take their time eating... really enjoying the food... and especially enjoying the conversation.

One of the older church members would tell stories about a war he’d fought in. Someone else had actually been to Rome and she described its brilliance and showed everyone the souvenirs they’d brought back....

They had one of those little snow things with a miniature coliseum in it.

A tunic that was embroidered. It said, **“My grandma went to Rome and all she brought back was this lousy tunic.”**

A shot glass with a picture of the Senate on it.

The Supper Club found out one of their members had studied with a famous wisdom teacher. And that another one made birdhouses as a hobby. And someone else had lost her mother at birth and been raised by an aunt. Another had been kicked out of the house for becoming a Christian. And another one seemed to be sick with something that made her breathing hard and it wasn’t getting better.

This Supper Club met weekly. Sometimes they’d talk into the night about this or that and sometimes they’d play this game where they rolled dice. They weren’t betting though... not much anyway.

They laughed mostly... one of the members of the group always had a new joke. His favorites were the “you might be a redneck” ones... only in light of the context he changed them to, “You might be a Galilean redneck church, if”

YOU MIGHT BE IN A REDNECK CHURCH IF...

When Jesus fed 5000, folks asked whether the two fish were bass or catfish, and what bait was used to catch 'em.

The pastor says, "I'd like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering," then five guys and two women stand up.

Opening day of hunting season is a part of the church calendar year.

The choir is known as the "OK Chorale".

In a congregation of 500 members, there are only seven last names in the church directory.

Baptism is referred to as "branding".

Finding and returning lost sheep isn't just a parable.

People think "rapture" is what you get when you lift something too heavy.

The final words of the benediction are, "Y'all come back now, ya hear?"

Well, the Supper Club would laugh till their sides hurt. They'd go home full, not just of good food, but full of wellbeing. And when they got to worship on Sunday morning.

They'd smile really big when they saw one another...
and hugs came easy.

And somehow worship was different...

Just more alive. Everything seemed more joyful because they were devoted to their fellowship.

I'm preaching these sermons or really three sermons in one, during this season and looking to this line from Luke where the first Christians were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, and to prayer. And my aim is to say, these three aspects of our life together must all be strong and must all be in balance with one another if we want to be the community God calls us to be.

Last week we talked about submitting to and trusting in a kind of core teaching... it's important... to learn the faith and to teach the faith and to take it deep. It's important to confess it and declare it and bare it to others.

That's been something the Church historically has put a lot of effort into, isn't it?... getting folks to believe the "right things."

But... but the truth is... the church has a pretty "iffy" track record when it comes to confessing and teaching the doctrines about Christ in a Christlike way. We've forgotten, historically, that these "great truths" are about Jesus and Jesus is a living breathing, walking doctrine of love.

We've grabbed hold of doctrines and waved them about and worshipped them, instead of our Lord, to whom the doctrines point. We codified, we bound it up. And we pounded pulpits and people. We excluded and did it too easily.

We've expressed certainty... instead of mystery.

Claimed infallibility... instead of humility.

We've said, "We know," defiantly...

instead of "We believe," reverently.

That's why we need to be as devoted to God's people as we are to God's truth. The truth isn't captured in creeds... it lives... it's always incarnate... and as we live with and relate to real people, with real lives, and real struggles, it changes the way we hold our common belief.

It's held more gently... If I've eaten breakfast with you every Friday for years . . . I'm not going to push you away if your doctrine of the Trinity isn't quite perfect. We hold our common belief, but we hold it more humbly. When I get to know you... and your story... and start caring about you, that's when I remember that living our truths is the point. Not just memorizing words... but rather embodying realities. Becoming the creed.

That happens as we get connected to the reality that is in people.

To the Christ within them...

to the mystery of who they are...

to the grace, eternally present there to work in their lives.

The early church did that... and what was it the people said of them? **“My, look, how they love one another.”** That's what made the real impression. Not getting things straight in their heads, or their ability to all conform in their thinking... but... their capacity to love and their commitment to live like the one who was love incarnate.

Those of you who have been with me over coffee have heard me say, that in the early days, when there might be only 25 folks in the room... we learned something. We learned that knowing one another changed the way we worshipped.

It was really impossible not to know each other.

Every face had a story.

And we knew most of them.

There was something happening as we were devoted to one another. A kind of awareness... that made all the difference in the world at 11:00 on Sunday morning.

We all knew that O.C. Bridges gave the best hugs and made the best divinity. And we knew what it meant when George pulled out his chap stick.

And we heard about the great conversations over tea at Katy's house.

And we were conscious of all Barbara Tate was doing to help hurting people in our city.

And we heard Gene-isms... Gene Evans, I've always thought of as the Will Rogers of DaySpring.

We walked beside a few young seminarians and cared for them as they wrestled with new things.

We learned that Joel Wright has the driest wit God ever made. A few weeks ago, after an antiphonal reading, Joel leaned forward and whispered in my ear, **“Our side won.”**

We had so many folks walk through the door who needed our love... and they were too worn out to be anything but real with us. We were devoted to them and we found we sang and prayed differently on Sundays.

That's what happens when you step up to the plate and devote yourselves to fellowship. And I invite you and call you to that... Other than worshipping God, it's your first job as a DaySpringer. Connect.

Come to Sunday School,
Join us for take two,
or Lectionary Breakfast...

Have someone over for tea,
show up here and make a friend.

Go serve at the Gospel Café... or join a cleaning crew.

Get in a Super Club... Just like those in the early church did. Sit around and eat and talk... it's holy stuff you're up to there... sacred.

You'll find out things... what it was like for my dad growing up in Beaumont. You'll learn Amy Tiejens from a really large family. And that Al and Susan Josephs met just up the road in the Madera Apartments.

You'll hear about Jeremy Everett's convictions about the poor... and Glenn Kueck's knowledge of history. You'll find out Kent Hoeffner pastored in Alaska... and Scott Bullard grew up on a farm... and that Regina Easley-Young was a missionary in Hong Kong. Leslie Rogers is Episcopalian and is still shocked to be in a Baptist church.

And you'll find out other things too, along the way, you'll find out. Someone will tell you about what it was like for her marriage to end. Someone will talk about losing a job. You might hear a young adult express anger over the closed-mindedness they run into among their peers. And you might hear a senior adult longing for days that seemed better and just more "right."

If you devote yourselves to one another... you'll get in on those kinds of things. The joys of new babies being born... the satisfaction of accomplishments. The worries... the pains... the deeper longings.

If your devoted you'll watch children become teenagers and then become your good friends.

Real life, life up to the eyeballs with God's grace, will be happening and you'll be in on it with one another. The graduations will happen, the dry seasons will be borne, the stumbling and the getting up, the celebrations will be enjoyed and the diagnoses will be heard.

Then... then... you will come here and will stand together and say together... **"We believe... in God the Creator... in Jesus, grace incarnate... and the eternally indwelling Spirit."** And our confession won't be a creedal club it will be life.

They devoted themselves to fellowship... and Luke adds almost redundantly, **"and to the breaking of bread."** When do we not eat at fellowships? Seems a waste of ink and papyrus.

Unless you know Luke... and if you do, you know he's sort of winking at the church, which gathers weekly not just to share meals, but to share The Meal. So there are two meanings.

They devoted themselves to supper clubs... and to The Lord's Supper. Which is I think important to note for any church that cares about community. Something happens around tables, which is important to our life together... and something happens at that table that is absolutely essential.

When we come to that table,
we come empty-handed...

knowing we are in need. That's why I like coming forward and receiving. You have to say . . . I need this. It's an aisle full of need.

As we are devoted... we're going to know one another... and that's not all a picnic, now is it? Community is hard work because inside each of us is saint and sinner. Giftedness and goofiness.

Hang around me long enough and you're going to find out I'm a little obsessive about details. No, it's true. (no comments from the Pastoral Associates). I will frustrate you with that quirk and with other bits of brokenness. My sin will be apparent. As will yours.

But at least once a month we'll all walk down this aisle of need and up to this table to remember... TO RE-MEMBER... to put it back together again... My need and God's grace.

And as I see my need and my sin and God's love for me in spite of it... I'm going to have an easier time being devoted to you and an easier time accepting you. And you might not even notice how obsessed I can be...

or maybe you'll just grin at it...
and chuckle

and bless me anyway.

And all of us... as we take in the presence of the risen, loving Christ... will be devoted as he was.

And folks will come along and say, "Would you look at that—look how they love one another."

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