

A Family of Belonging

Acts 4:31-37

Discussion Question: What have been the most noticeable 'aftereffects' of the last two years for you personally, your family, your vocation?

Read together: Acts 4:31-37

Verse 32 says that the believers 'were of one heart and soul'. We have heard these words before: 'one', 'heart', and 'soul'. It is from the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Luke is making a key point: They were of one heart and soul because it flowed from their recalibration of who God is.

They heard the words of The Son, who says be one as I and the Father is one. They were eyewitnesses to Jesus' way of being: every healing, every conversation with the outcast enabled people to belong; these actions flowed from the very heart of who God is.

For God is not three persons in isolation, but a family of belonging.

John Zizioulas from his book "Being as Communion" makes the point:

It is "Only in communion that God can be what God is, and only as communion can God be at all. In contrast to the Western idea that personhood can be defined in reference to the individual in isolation, Zizioulas sees that it is only 'in relation' that true identity can be found."

The church for the people in Acts was not a club, or an event, she was a way of being as each person participated as an 'image of God.'

In other words, being part of a community is not simply a thing to do that makes us feel good or helps us to tick off the church thing; being part of a community makes us who we are in our very personhood. To be human is to belong and reflects the very being of God who is relational love.

It is our shared experience, our shared stories, our moments in our homes together around a meal, it is our common music, that makes up who we are in our very being as Christ's body.

Discussion Question:

What does it mean for us to belong as a church in the 'Grey Zone'?

In Verse 33 it says that 'there was a great grace upon them all'. This verse is nestled in between two similar actions in v32 and v34. The early church recognized that their sharing of who they were - their sharing of possessions, their sharing of meals – happened because of the work of grace amongst them, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't a 'try harder' or 'personal effort' way of being, it was a gift of the Spirit. This reminds me of Peter's invitation in one of his letters, 1 Peter 2:4-5, "*Come to him*, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, *let yourselves be built into a spiritual house*, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We are each 'living stones' infused with the personal and empowering presence of God's Spirit. Let us hear Peter's encouragement to all of us, 'let yourselves be built into this spiritual house'; allow the Holy Spirit to heal and restore us, allow the Spirit to recalibrate us and draw us into the family of God.

Discussion Question:

What is the Spirit inviting you into in this new context? What do you see the Spirit guiding us into?