

I would like to begin by saying thank you again for your incredible support and encouragement over the last week. I am thrilled to get going. One of the most encouraging moments of last Sunday was how the service ended. You may remember the last thing I said to you was actually a question. I asked, “Who’s ready to see God move?”, and I was struck by the enthusiasm of your response. I didn’t think I’d get a bunch of shrugged shoulders and “yeah, whatever”. But in both services, I got hands raised and an adamant ‘yes’. I love that we gather this morning with anticipation and excitement that God is going to move in us and through us.

2,000 years ago, there was another group of Jesus-followers who were gathered in anticipation, waiting for God to move. It was Jesus’ disciples. They had witnessed his resurrection and had spent time with him for 40 days. But before he ascended to heaven, he gave them a command and reiterated a promise. It’s recorded in Acts 1:4-5.

**[Acts 1:4-5] <sup>4</sup> And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

And a little over a week later, on the day of Pentecost, these followers were gathered together in a house. Acts 2 tells us of a mighty rushing wind from heaven and what looked like tongues of fire filled the house, and that all of them were filled, were baptized with, the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had promised, and they began to speak in other languages. This attracted a crowd, and Jews from many nations heard their language being spoken and inquired. Peter delivered his first sermon, recounting words from the prophet Joel and from King David, and ultimately delivered the good news of the Gospel. The crowd responded by asking Peter what they should do, and Peter responded by saying “**Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**” We’re told about 3,000 responded to Peter’s message. But this section ends with an interesting phrase “**and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.**” Added to what? The answer is that God HAD moved, and on that day, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, based on the finished work of Jesus, the Church was formed. And from that day forward, it has been added to by all who believe in Jesus and are united by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus said, “I will build my church”, he had something specific in mind, but for a lot of Christians, there’s confusion. They don’t know what Jesus intended us to be, intended us to do, intended us to experience. Is the church a place we go to or a people we belong to? Is the church a building for people, or a people being built-up? Is church something the paid professionals do, or do we all have a part to play? Is it a place I go to get my needs met or to meet the needs of others? Is it a 75-minute weekly appointment or a comprehensive commitment of my life? Is it a nice place to go sit in peace, or is it an active, world-changing movement instituted by God?

We begin a new series today called *To Be Continued*, because the work God started on the day of Pentecost is the same work he’s doing in us and through us today. He continues to build his Church through each generation of Jesus-followers, and that work is to be continued through us. So we are going to spend the next several weeks taking a look at the images of the Church found

in the New Testament, like the Body of Christ, Ambassadors, and the Bride of Christ, that will help us understand the who we are, what we are called to do, and why we do it.

And here's my prayer for us, because here's really what I want out of the series: Because of your love for Jesus, I want you to fall in love with His Church. I want you to be overwhelmed by the privilege we've been given by our Savior to be his representatives to the world and join him in his work of redemption. I want you inspired by the potential of the church, to dream about the impact it can have to change the world for the better. Jesus is the hope of the world, and he created his Church to be the conduit of that hope. Millennials: the church is a movement, and there is no greater cause to give your life to than the cause of Christ.

And I want you to fall in love with this church, Fellowship Dallas. I want to celebrate the ways in which we are living out what Jesus is calling us to. I want you to ask God to help you consider the role this church plays in your life, and the role you play in the life of this church.

The first image we going to look at is the one that is most often used to describe the Church. The New Testament refers to believers in Christ as brothers and sisters 342 times. The image of the family is the primary way God has shown us who we are, particularly as we relate to each other. We are not a random gathering of people. We have been purposely assembled by the providence of God, and when we gather, it's a family reunion. I believe there is one passage in particular that illustrates how we are a family, and how we live that out.

**[Acts 2:42-47a] <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people.**

There are two words we really need to understand at the beginning to appreciate how we are a faith family. One expresses our identity, the other expresses the intensity with which we are to live that out.

The first word is "fellowship". We may hear that word and think it has something to do with hanging out, but it's so much more. The original word is *koinonia*, which means "having all things in common", and it was often used to express the intimacy of marriage. This is a interdependent community that is deeply connected, accepting of everyone, sacrificially generous, and has a shared purpose and mission. The concept is so compelling, and so foundational to the meaning of the church, that I heard some have even named their church after it! **It is our heritage because it communicates we are more than mere spectators of each other's lives. Fellowship calls us to be participants in them.**

The other word I want us to understand expresses the intensity with which this fellowship operates: it gets translated as "devoted" in v42 and "attending" in v46. It's a word that means persistence, perseverance, and steadfastness. This is not a fellowship that gathered once a week

for an hour and a half. Their newfound faith was a day-to-day reality and their devotion to God and one another was lived out in the same way. Both words show how the Spirit has radically changed them, giving them Christ-centered affections and reorienting their priorities. Let's see how they live that out.

**The family of God looks up.** When the family gathers, God is at the center of all they do.

This family exists only because of Jesus' work on the cross and the sending of his Spirit. They are devoted to corporate worship as they attend the temple together and to the apostles' teaching. You know what we call that today? Church. From the beginning, God's people have gathered regularly to hear God's Word preached and worship him. Both play a central role. This goes beyond sitting and listening to good music and a nice speech. The Great Commission ends with, "teaching them to **observe** all that I have commanded you." Their devotion includes both knowing and doing what they are taught. The life of this family is also saturated in prayer. It is an indication of humility and a constant dependence on God.

If we are going to be and do what Jesus intended, we too must live a God-centered life. If we don't, it won't matter how we do church. Our efforts will be fruitless. Our affections will change, and we'll begin to look nothing like what Jesus has called us to and created us for. We don't have the apostles around any longer, but we do have their teaching. We are committed to the centrality of God's Word in informing us who we are and in directing all we do around here. We gather to call upon the name of the Lord and sing his praises, and we confess our utter dependence on him through our prayers. And we do this together. There is great gain when you live out your faith with others. I can know God only so much on my own. I can know him significantly more when it's a family affair.

**The family of God leans in.** When the family gathers, members are cared for.

Vv 44-46 show us this community is characterized by radical generosity. They are committed to meeting the needs of their family members at great cost to themselves. And while it is not a command to sell all your things and give it away, they are an example to us.

You see they not only go to the temple, they meet in smaller gatherings in their homes. We call that Life Groups! Don't miss this. If we're going to live like this, we're going to have to risk getting close enough to know what someone's needs are. And if we are going to accept God's provision of care through the kindness and generosity of his people, we're going to have to get vulnerable enough to ask for help.

Not only did they share their stuff, they shared themselves. **I'm convinced the most valuable resource we can give to someone else is our presence.** Consistent time with our family members is the only way to create relationships, and it sends the message they matter.

If you don't know where to start, follow the early church's example and go have lunch together. The sharing of meals is central to this community. Christians love to eat! Remember Michael's announcements last week and his story about his Life Group? It included the phrase "fried pickles with ranch dipping sauce"! There is something holy about sharing a meal with someone!

**“Hospitality involves welcoming, creating space, listening, paying attention, and providing. Meals slow things down. Some of us don’t like that. We like to get things done. But meals force you to be people oriented instead of task oriented. Sharing a meal is not the only way to build relationships, but it is number one on the list.” -Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus***

I did some research to see how we are living this way in our Life Groups, and I was amazed at what I found because I learned of how groups met their members’ deepest needs.

I learned of a group who has cared for a member as the effects of Alzheimer’s set in and forced her to move into assisted living. Fellow members used their financial and legal expertise to help manage her estate, and they visit her regularly, giving their time to love their sister in Christ.

I heard a story of how a group took care of a family who tragically lost their son in an accident. I heard of a group who helped take care of their fellow members’ kids while they tended to an ill parent, and how a cancer survivor in the group comforted that member as she navigated her mother’s illness. I heard of a family whose house was flooded, and their group members helped move really heavy stuff out of their house.

When I went looking, I have to admit I was hoping to hear of dramatic stories of sacrifice and service...but something else struck me. I also heard stories simply of time together, how groups pray for one another regularly, bear one another’s burdens. I heard of shared meals, of growing friendships, of helping make ends meet when someone had a need.

I realized there’s no earth-shattering moment we read about in this passage. The compelling part is that they are doing their lives together, **day by day**. The drama of this passage is the regularity with which they love each other. Yes, there will be moments of huge need in our faith family, and we’ll go rushing in. But I believe the power of this picture of the early church is the consistency with which they participated in each other’s lives. **‘Day by day’ is the substance of relationships. It is the rhythm of Christian fellowship.**

This morning, if you are not in a Life Group, we’re giving you an opportunity to join one. I know a lot of our groups aspire to live like this passage, and they want to invite you in to their fellowship. Now, I’ve heard some say, “the church is *making* us do Life Groups”, and I get that it can sometimes feel that way when we make a change and put so much emphasis on it. But know, after studying this passage, this is what we want for everyone at Fellowship. **We have no interest in forcing you to participate in a program, but we are inviting you to become a part of a people.** Take a few minutes after service and go meet some people. God may surprise you.

**The family of God launches out.** When the family gathers, the world notices, and the world responds.

**[Acts 2:47b] And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

This Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered fellowship is a living billboard for the Gospel, and God uses them to draw people to himself.

V43 says awe came upon every soul. Now, there are families all over reality TV who inspire awe in people, but we're talking about a different kind of awe here. The word is often translated as "fear". Those in Jerusalem recognize the divine activity and self-sacrificing community, and they are taking notice. Now God can do miracles any time he pleases, signs and wonders are always at his disposal, but he most often uses them during the inauguration of a new work. That doesn't mean we're incapable of living in a way that creates awe and draws interest from the world.

The world can be awed by the transformed lives in our family. You ever met someone completely different after they trusted in Christ? The guy who loves his family like never before, the person who gives up drinking, the mean lady who is suddenly nice, the fearful person who now lives with a sense of peace. The world notices too.

The world will be attracted to a group of people who are full of love and joy. I've told this story before, but my extended family was all together a few years ago for a funeral and, among us, there are a handful of believers. We naturally gravitated towards each other, gave the secret handshake and wink, and began interacting with each other. It was nothing spectacular. We were just enjoying being together. A few days later, I talked to another family member who said, "I watched you all and I saw that you had something together, and I want it for myself."

The world will also take notice when we are, as v46 says, together. It's more than just proximity, though. It means "with one accord" or "with one mind". It's talking about unity. I said it last week, and I'm sure I will say it many times in the days ahead. One of the most compelling testimonies the church has these days is unity. One of the things I love best about our church is that we are full of people who may have no reason to be together other than Jesus. In a day where everyone is picking sides, imagine how captivating a community can be where everyone is for Jesus and for each other.

There is someone here this morning who's never been to Fellowship before and yes, they're checking out the facilities, are listening to the music, and evaluating the preaching. But for most newcomers, the thing they really want to observe is the Fellowship family. And there may be someone here who doesn't know Jesus and they're looking at you and looking at me and they're making a decision about God based on what they experience. They will learn more about Jesus today from what they see in us than what they hear in my words. A Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered fellowship shows Jesus long before they ever have to say his name. The family of God shouts the love of Jesus to the world.

When the family gathers, God is glorified, members are unified, and the world is notified. We can be that church, but it will require a devotion to God and each other to do it. But what an impact we can have if choose to live that way with each other and for each other, to the glory of God.