

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY - Acts 2:42-47

INTRODUCTION - The huge redwood trees in California are amazing. They are and the tallest trees in the world and the largest living things on earth. Some of them are 300 feet high and more than 2,500 years old. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. But that is not the case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other; interlocked. Thus, when the storms come and the winds blow the redwoods still stand.

With an interlocking root system they support and sustain each other. They need one another to survive. So do we! Hence, God has given us His Church which is the body of Christ on earth. When one is baptized into Christ, one is baptized into the body of Christ. Through Christ we are bound together in a community of faith. Belonging to Christ we belong to each other. Fellowship with Christ means fellowship with each other. Through Christ God has made us a family, a community of faith. This is our God-given support system. As such, it is intended to meet some crucial needs in our lives.

Our reading this morning tells us that the very first community of believers gathered together on a regular basis for worship, prayer, study and fellowship. Acts 2:44 says, "...ALL THAT BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER..."

It wasn't easy to follow Christ in the first century. Times were tough and persecution rampant. The early believers were bound together into a fellowship, a community. They needed each other; there is strength in numbers.- It also isn't easy

for us to follow Christ and truly live for Him. Discouragement. Temptation. Sin. Apathy. Failure. Materialism. Unbelieving family and friends. Doubts. Rejection. Unanswered questions. We face so many obstacles in our desire to live for the Lord. God, however has not left us on our own to run the race and fight the battle. He has given us each other.

Our text reveals to us the proper focus of a community of believers. Acts 2:42 says, "THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND TO FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER."

The teaching to which they devoted themselves was the message about Jesus proclaimed by the Apostles. Jesus, the divine Son of God and Saviour, was crucified and buried but He rose from the dead. The apostles' teaching included the words, actions, and teachings of the Lord. The breaking of bread is a reference to the Lord's Supper that they observed. It also referred to other times when they gathered around a common meal. Teaching, fellowship, praying and the Lord's Table were the focal points of the first Christian community.

COMMUNITY - In "The Connecting Church", it says, "The experience of authentic community is one of the purposes God intends to be fulfilled by the church. The writings of Scripture lead one to conclude that God intends the church, not to be one more bolt on the wheel of activity in our lives, but the very hub at the centre of one's life....."

The church or a local community of believers is essential to our spiritual well-being. In the New Testament there are no "Lone Ranger" Christians. Believers needed each other and God expected them to be there for each other. Likewise, we need each other and God expects us to be there for each other. God

has ordained that we play a vital part in each other's faith. For that reason we are commanded in Hebrews 10:25 not to, "...GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER, AS SOME ARE IN THE HABIT OF DOING, BUT LET US ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER...." God has a purpose for putting us together.

And as one commentator points out, "We are unified by our common weaknesses, our common failures, our common disappointments and our common inconsistencies."

Luke informs us that "ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE ONE IN HEART AND MIND."

They were united in Christ into a community of faith. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit they possessed the "MIND OF CHRIST." They made every effort to be led by God's Spirit and to think and act like Christ. Consequently, God used this community of faith to do some powerful things in the lives of countless believers, living in a pagan, godless world. God's plan hasn't changed. He still desires to use His Church to do some powerful things in our lives. The community of faith is absolutely crucial to our spiritual well-being. Through it God desires that we find strength for the journey, places to minister and a never ending source of guidance.

STRENGTH - As we face the inevitable trials, troubles and tragedies of life on this sin-marred earth, God intends that we be supported, strengthened, encouraged and empowered through the community of believers. As we face the storms and temptations of life we should receive strength from each other. Such is God's plan.

In the course of his life, the Psalmist David knew his share of difficult, painful times that tested his faith and sometimes

caused it to waver. In Psalm 61:2 he cried out to God for help saying, "I CALL TO YOU....AS MY HEART GROWS FAINT." Overwhelmed by the trials, heartaches and burdens of life he called out to God for help and strength. Then in verse 5 he rejoiced because God had answered his plea.

"YOU HAVE GIVEN TO ME," he said, "THE HERITAGE OF THOSE WHO FEAR YOUR NAME..." God had strengthened his faith and empowered him **through fellow believers**. It is a fact that God works in our lives through other believers!

During the times when we are overwhelmed by trials, heartaches and the burdens of life we, too, need to be strengthened and encouraged by fellow believers. When we wonder if God really does love us and care for us we need God's people. God, in His providence, chooses to come to us through His people. Through other Christians we can sense and know God's love and care. When we are loved and cared for by another believer, especially during painful times, we gain a new sense of God's love at work, through them, for us.

One writer says "When God's love feels distant or non-existent, the body of Christ's love is real and tangible...." That is why we cannot afford to stand alone; to go it on our own. We need each other; we need the community of faith.

There are many dangers of standing alone. I was in Italy for Christmas where we had 6 inches of snow overnight, it was interesting to see the effect. Down one of the runs stood several large groves of tall, young pine trees, the branches were bowed down with the heavy snow - so low that branches from one tree were often leaning against the trunk or branches of another. Where trees stood alone, however, the effect of the heavy snow was different. The branches had become heavier

and heavier. Since there were no other trees to lean against, the branches snapped. They lay on the ground, dark and alone in the cold snow.

When the storms of life hit, we need to be standing close to other Christians. We need each other; we can't stand alone. The closer we stand in community, the more we will be able to hold up. Throughout our lives and especially during tough times, God desires to strengthen and empower us through the community of believers. He expects us to support each other during the storms of life. That is why we need to be an active part of a community of faith. We need others and they need us.

MINISTRY - The community of faith is crucial to our spiritual well-being because it is the place where we find special opportunities to minister. "Those in the community of faith do not merely absorb Christ's love individually; their changed lives also reflect his love corporately." Our union with Christ creates community responsibilities." We are called to minister and serve. We all have a God-given responsibility to reach out and minister to each other. Love acts; it serves God and others.

Verse 44 says, "ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER AND HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON."

Their ministry to each other included sharing of material goods to meet temporal needs. The early church shared much more extensively as a result of economic and social sanctions that were imposed upon its members. It was Christian sharing at its best. This is still God's plan for meeting the needs of His hurting children. If we are not ministering to one another through a community of faith then

many needs go unmet and many reach the erroneous conclusion that God doesn't care about them.

GUIDANCE - The community of faith is crucial to our well-being because it is the source of much needed guidance, direction and even correction. As someone has aptly said, "we need the community of believers because none of us is as smart as all of us!" In Psalm 73:24 the Psalmist says "YOU SHALL GUIDE ME WITH YOUR COUNSEL..."

God yearns to guide us safely through our earthly pilgrimage, sparing us many wrong turns and harmful paths.

Ephesians 3:10 declares that "GOD'S INTENT WAS THAT NOW, THROUGH THE CHURCH, THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD SHOULD BE MADE KNOWN."

God wants to guide us but he has chosen to do it through His people in the community of faith. He gives us wisdom for the journey as we study His Word and pray together. Looking to the Lord's people we are much more apt to be guided down those paths that enrich our lives rather than wreck them. As we share our lives together God counsels us with advice that improves our relationships with Him, spouses, children and those around us. He guides us regarding proper priorities, values, morals and ethics. Through our interactions with each other and His Word He helps us make right choices and good decisions.

The guidance we receive through the community of faith is absolutely essential to our well-being, especially in these times when right is wrong and wrong is right. Through His people God guides us away from sinful paths. So many ways of the world look so enticing and so acceptable. They promise to bring us great pleasure. They are presented as harmless. We are told they will bring us happiness and fulfillment. But they don't. They

bring us only heartache and regret.

Hebrews 3:13 says, “EXHORT ONE ANOTHER....THAT NONE OF YOU BE HARDENED BY THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.” Without a doubt, sin deceives. It promises much but delivers little. Were it not for the community of faith we might more easily and readily succumb to temptation and sin.

But through the community of faith we are guided into paths of righteousness and we are able to resist the sinful and deadly ways of the world. It is a fact: we all need the community of faith more than we often realize.

DIFFICULTIES - Being in the community of faith is, however, not without its difficulties and frustrations; It can't be otherwise since it is made up of sinners. The mark of community - true biblical community - is not the absence of conflict and difficulties but the presence of a reconciling spirit. In our humanness we all do things to rub others the wrong way and to offend. We all, at times, will be hurt and we will hurt others. Our old sinful nature often causes problems.

Nevertheless, we must not back away from the fellowship of faith. We must make an unwavering commitment to a community of believers where we can be strengthened, find places of ministry and receive much needed guidance.

Our plight is not unlike that of a group of porcupines that the famous philosopher Schopenhauer once used to illustrate a point. A group of porcupines were marooned one bitter cold night in the middle of a large frozen field. There was no way to escape the biting wind. They could not burrow into the

frozen ground. As they huddled together to keep warm, their sharp quills began to pinch and hurt. The closer they moved together, the more the pain increased. Some of the animals could not bear the pain and drew apart to sleep alone. In the morning they had frozen to death, the rest survived.

In our humanness there are times when we hurt each other and the tendency is to pull away and go it alone. We must resist that tendency.

CONCLUSION - We were created for community. The journey of life and faith is often trying, difficult and painful. Discouragement. Relentless temptation. Debilitating sins. Doubts. Ridicule. Burdensome weaknesses. Heavy burdens. Unanswered questions. Rejection. Little wonder God has given us the family of God and the fellowship of believers. It is an absolutely essential source of strength and guidance.

Ephesians 2:19 reminds us that as a result of our relationship with Christ, “...YOU ARE NO LONGER FOREIGNERS AND ALIENS (SEPARATED FROM GOD), BUT FELLOW CITIZENS WITH GOD’S PEOPLE AND MEMBERS OF GOD’S HOUSEHOLD.”

In Christ we are a community of faith, a special place where we can minister and be ministered to. We need each other. Therefore, the community of faith needs to be a priority in our lives.

Acts 2:42 says that the early believers “DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO FELLOWSHIP” ...to the community of faith. Let us do likewise in whatever way we can in these unprecedented times.