Uniquely Jesus: The Story Continues November 19, 17

This We Do Together, Part Two, Acts 2:41-47

**Read Acts 2:41-47**

This passage teaches us that the early church started well and strong, because of four priorities.

They committed themselves to the apostles teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

**Coffee Question**

Do you think these four priorities were meant to be practiced by every local church in every generation? Explain.

**Feedback**

I believe the NT would lead us to say yes.

But there is a uniqueness about the community of believers in Jerusalem in the time in which the book of Acts was written.

This uniqueness is explained by the word “daily.”

For a time, it was as if normal life was suspended.

Bob Deffinbaugh says, *“These new believers were like newlyweds – they just couldn’t seem to be apart from one another.”* bible.org

Later, in Acts, and in the letters to the churches planted by Paul and his missionary team, it is very evident these priorities were still practiced; though differently.

Different in what way?

The believers in the churches at Ephesus, Galatia, Antioch, Thessalonica, Corinth, Philippi, lived by these priorities in the context of life best described as “normal” - while working and raising a family.

As we would apply the truth to our life, we need to be aware of these distinctions.

Why? In order to understand that God’s Spirit will take enduring truth and lead his people to live by his truth, even though they may live in different cultures and in different circumstances.

Last week we focused on the apostles teaching.

Today we will unpack the remaining three priorities.

**The priority of the fellowship**.

What does the word… fellowship… mean?

It means a close association, distinguished by mutuality, in which communion, between people, happens.

When mankind’s fellowship with God was broken, that profound rupture, in addition to alienating mankind from God; alienated people from one another.

**Human beings experience estrangement with one another because… they are estranged from God.**

But God was unwilling to leave us in that condition.

**1 Corinthians 1:9** – *God has called you into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ…*

When God acted through Jesus to rescue us, his intent was to repair our broken relationship with him, so that we could again live in fellowship with him and he with us.

Until our fellowship with God is restored, we can’t experience with others

what the Bible calls fellowship.

We can enjoy camaraderie and friendship.

But fellowship with others, as described in the Bible, requires one to first be in relationship with God.

Let’s start there.

Those who respond to God’s pursuit of them, and who receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord, are brought into a relationship with God; they experience an association with Jesus, that profoundly links their life with his.

In what ways?

**Romans 6:6**: *…our old self was crucified* ***with*** *him...*

**Romans 6:8**: *Now if we died* ***with*** *Christ, we believe that we will also live* ***with*** *him.*

**Ephesians 2:5**: *[God] made us alive* ***with*** *Christ…*

**Colossians 3:1**: *…[we] have been raised* ***with*** *Christ…*

**Romans 8:17**: *…[we] are heirs of God and co-heirs* ***with*** *Christ…*

These verses are not describing a casual relationship, but one that is incredibly close and intimate. How close?

**Through Jesus we come as close to the Father, as Jesus himself is.**

The story of the Bible is that Jesus stood in for... all of humanity.

This is why, when we receive him, God views Jesus’ actions as being ours.

This is how his crucifixion…becomes the death of our old nature.

How his resurrection…becomes the basis for the birth of our new nature and the hope of our physical body being raised from the dead.

This is how his inheritance…becomes ours.

Every person who trusts in Jesus, can now interact with God, not as someone they are estranged from, someone who is distant, but as their **Father**.

This new relationship, by which we have fellowship with the triune God, is the basis for the fellowship we have with others, who’ve put their trust in Jesus.

The relationship between all of those who follow Jesus is that of **siblings**.

We are now in the same family – God’s **family.**

What did the fellowship of the believers in Acts 2 evidence itself?

Acts 2:44 - *…all the believers were together and had everything in common.*

What does **“together”** look like?

They would meet as a group every day in the Temple courts – v.46.

But their togetherness was more than simply being in the same place at the same time. Theirs was a deep soul connection.

This explains why they did what v.45 describes - *…selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who had need.*

They looked out for one another – because that’s just what family does.

So as not to not misinterpret this passage, you also have to be aware of what Paul told the church in Thessalonica.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-10: *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.*

*We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.**For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:* ***“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”***

Remember this Bible study principle: Scripture interprets Scripture.

When placed side by side, the Acts 2 and the 2 Thessalonians 3 passages provide a balanced understanding of how practical help is to be given to fellow believers.

While the believers in Acts 2 did not create the fellowship they experienced with God and one another; they were devoted to deepening it.

**The priority of the breaking of bread**

This particular phrase, “the breaking of bread,” is used in the NT, to both describe

a normal meal and the Lord’s supper.

**A MEAL**

Matthew 14:19 – *…[Jesus] gave thanks and broke the loaves.* (feeding of the 5000)

Luke 24:30 – …*[Jesus] took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it*

*to them.* (at a meal with the two disciples who travelled to Emmaus)

Acts 27:35 – …*[Paul] took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.* (on a ship about to be grounded)

**THE LORD’S SUPPER**

Matthew 26:26 – *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and*

*broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’*

Acts 20:11 – *…[Paul] broke bread and ate.* (at Troas)

In New Testament the Lord’s Table was celebrated as a meal – see 1 Corinthians 11.

Given the fact that this expression, “break bread,” can be used to describe eating a meal, or eating the Lord’s Supper, we must ask, how did Luke intend for us to understand it in this passage?

What Luke writes in v.46 suggests to us that it was probably both.

They remembered the Lord’s death daily, when they broke bread and ate together in their homes.

Their fellowship with God and one another didn’t just happen when they went to the Temple; it spilled over… into their homes.

Something significant happens between people when they eat together; particularly when they eat together in the Lord’s presence.

Consider these examples.

Exodus 24:9-11: *Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up**and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky.**But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.*

How incredible was it that these seventy-four men were permitted to see God with their eyes and live?

But here’s what I find strange.

Others who had a vision of God, fell before him, trembling.

But these men ate and drank in the presence of God.

Was it God’s suggestion that these men picnic with him?

I can’t see it being their idea.

And who brought the food and drink?

Again, I can’t see them travelling up the mountain with food hampers.

It was God’s idea that they eat and drink in his presence.

Something significant happens when people eat together in the Lord’s presence.

After his resurrection, John 21 tells us about a beach breakfast that Jesus shared with his followers.

Again, it was Jesus’ idea that they eat together with him.

Something significant happens when people eat together in the Lord’s presence.

The Scriptures speak of a great feast at the end of this age and the start of the next; a feast called the *“wedding supper of the Lamb.”* Revelation 19:9.

It’s a meal planned by God to be shared with all his people.

Isaiah foresaw this feast and he described it in 25:6-8:

*On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.*

*The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.*

Isaiah did not describe a happy hour with appies thrown in.

When death is finally overthrown, and all is made right and new, God leads his people to celebrate that event by feasting.

Why is eating together in the Lord’s presence so important?

**Because it captures the essence of fellowship.**

The Bible teaches us that our fellowship with God is not reserved just for those moments that we would call sacred; but that it happens, in the everyday rhythm of our lives, including the eating of our meals in our homes.

The believers in Acts 2 experienced fellowship with one another when they ate together.

The closeness of proximity, around a table, and the conversations that happened there, led to a closeness of soul and a rich sharing of life.

**The priority of prayer**.

The Greek word in this verse is actually plural – prayers.

This last priority, described in Acts 2:42, is not referring to personal, but to corporate prayers.

These new believers made it a priority to pray together. When?

v.46 – *every day* (See also Acts 3:1)

Why did they pray together?

Jesus had taught them to do so.

But additionally, remember - in one day, they had gone from being a community of 120 people to being one of more than 3000.

This presented challenges, as you can well imagine.

Which is why they asked God for his help and his resources.

And as they prayed together Jesus performed wonders and miracles through the apostles - v.43.

Their times of prayer were the training ground... where they grew in confidence that the mission of going into all the world, was indeed possible.

They daily saw that Jesus was with them, and that Jesus heard their prayers and responded to their requests.

**Do we need to pray together like they did?**

We are endeavoring to be a church on mission – so… yes.

Our understanding is that it is normal, not extraordinary, but normal, for every believer to advance the kingdom of God, by using their natural and spiritual giftings, in service to others, according to their life circumstances, in specific areas for which God has placed a passion within them – so… yes.

Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

Without him, our accomplishments will be limited to our natural ability.

When we pray together, we access the resources of heaven and the power of the Spirit to accomplish that which is beyond our natural ability.

To fulfill our vision of being God’s agents of a spiritual awakening in Sooke, requires that we as a church be devoted to praying.

If, on a daily basis, each of us is to be in the right place at the right time, then, we as a church are to be devoted to praying.

For us to see where Jesus is at work, requires that we as a church be devoted to praying.

For us to speak the gospel with compassion and boldness, requires that we as a church be devoted to praying.

The extent of what will happen through our lives and efforts, in the next months, and in the years ahead, will be the result of our prayers.

The story told in the book of Acts is not the story of extraordinary people.

It is so easy as Erwin McManus says, *“to rescript the text to be a picture of heroes of the faith rather than the simple lives of the faithful.”* Unstoppable, p.205

The actions of those believers confounded everyone who knew them.

The apostles were described by the ruling elite in Jerusalem as being ignorant and unlearned men.

Yet with people like this, and many more like them, God began his revolution of faith, love and hope.

The book of Acts is not a *“highlight reel of spiritual superstars.”* Unstoppable, p.207

The people we meet in the pages of this book give to us a glimpse of what the **normal** Christian life looks like.

These were people who lived by the four priorities described in our passage, and as they did so, they made their lives available to the Holy Spirit to use in ways they never dreamed possible.

These four priorities are to be ours.

They are our radical minimum standard.

They remind us, not only who we are, but define what we do and how we do it.

In light of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, where he gave his all, how could we ever dare to think “a little” is enough?

Some of you right now may be feeling uneasy.

You many think you’ve heard me say, “We need to do more,” and you don’t have more to give.

Let me state it as clear as I can.

Neither this passage…. or myself…. is asking you to do more.

So, take a deep breath and let out a sigh of relief.

If you have believed in and received Jesus, you’ve already given him the right to do with your life whatever he chooses.

That commitment allows Jesus to re-order your priorities, if and whenever he thinks it is necessary to do so.

In light of how important his mission is, I am certain of this:

Jesus will more than likely cut from your life non-essentials so that you have time for his priorities!

What I’m asking you to do is this: would you talk with the One you invited to be the leader of your life?

Would you ask him if your current priorities are in line with his; or if there is anything in need of change?

And then before you even know his answer, will you tell him that you’ll cooperate with him, if there are any adjustments to be made?

That your answer is yes – before you even know the question?

Silent Prayer

The Blessing

Jude 24-25