



Building: Growing Authentic Community (Acts 2:41-47)

I. INTRO

- A. Do you know the year when the phrase *information overload* was coined?
(1964)
- B. During the last few weeks I have read several articles warning how technology and social media have not alleviated loneliness – but, in fact, seem to be increasing loneliness. Studies and statistics to support this are beginning to pile up.
- C. Both secular and Christian commentators have been making this point for hundreds of years – and the Bible addresses this as well:
1. “Loneliness is the first thing which God identified as not good.” --John Milton¹ (16th century) (Gen 2:18)
 2. “The deepest need of [humankind] is the need to overcome our separateness, to leave the prison of our aloneness.” --Erich Fromm²
 3. “All loneliness is really homesickness for God.” --Hubert van Zeller³
 4. “Loneliness is humankind's biggest problem.” -- Dr. Leonard Zunin⁴
 5. “We live on a diet of up-to-the-minute news and 15-minute celebrities, while we ache for a transcendent, timeless touch...The information age may go down in history as the period when our culture forgot the most important thing: That our souls need to breathe and grow. We're separated from God. We're dead people walking...and our technology won't let us see it...Technology projects the myth of control over our mortality.” --Billy Graham⁵ (1998)

II. BODY

¹ 17th century English poet.

² 20th century German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, and philosopher.

³ 20th century Catholic writer and sculptor who wrote about human suffering.

⁴ The late Leonard M. Zunin, M.D. was a psychiatric consultant for the California Department of Mental Health - an authority on attachment and loss and a distinguished researcher and lecturer.

⁵ 1998 Ottawa Crusade.

- A. Today I'd like to talk with you about the antidote to loneliness: Growing Authentic Biblical Community.
- B. We have been making our way through the reaffirmed core values of KHC (core values are what make us unique)...
1. **PROCLAIMING** the good news of reconciliation with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to all people. The Great Commandment fuels the Great Commission (splash)
 2. (Kapena) **CULTIVATING** a passionate relationship with God by glorifying God, enjoying God, and treasuring Jesus Christ above all else. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.
 3. (Today) **BUILDING** a strong church family that meets consistently in various small group settings to "do life" with one other.
 4. (Next week: Jason) **SERVING** the poor, lost, sick, broken-hearted, and marginalized in the South Bay and beyond with active help, love, and care.
- C. There are longer, more detailed descriptions on the website...
- D. The passage I would like us to consider today is Acts 2:41-47. It reflects the birthing of a new community of Jesus followers: *"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."* --Acts 2:41-47
- E. A quick breakdown of the passage helps us to capture two important realities:
1. V. 42 is **WHAT** they did.
 2. Vs. 43-47 is the **FRUIT** of what they did.
- F. **WHAT they did:** *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* --Acts 2:42

1. This verse contains a summary of the essential elements needed in Christian discipleship (see also Hebrews 6:1-2). It's almost a no-brainer because it is exactly how Jesus disciplined the apostles over three years – with the same outcomes.
 - a. Today, we would identify the apostles teaching with reading and studying the Bible. We not only want to read the Bible but we want the Bible to read us. Those in the Rooted class are engaging in a fresh consistency of being in the God's word daily.
 - b. Fellowship is a deep and honest sharing of ourselves.
 - 1) Breaking off a piece of yourself (the good, the bad, and the ugly) and sharing it with the knowledge that you will be loved, accepted, and forgiven.
 - 2) It's being in loving, accountable relationships with people who are not intimidated by you and who are not afraid to speak the truth to you in love (Eph 4:15).
 - c. The breaking of bread almost certainly has a double meaning...
 - 1) They shared meals together. In this first century church the small groups met in homes and shared meals together. It was an opportunity for broken sinners to find connection and belonging.
 - 2) Breaking bread together also indicates they celebrated the Lord's Supper together often (which we will do today). The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the gospel – remembering what Jesus Christ had accomplished on the cross and in the resurrection.
 - d. Praying together in the ways that Jesus had **both** modeled for them and taught them.
 - 1) Years ago Eugene Peterson (MSG) wrote a book entitled *Answering God*.⁶ He makes a strong case that we only pray well if we are immersed in Scripture.
 - 2) We learn our prayer vocabulary the way children learn their vocabulary — by getting immersed in language and then speaking it back.

⁶ HarperOne, Reprint edition 1991.

2. The **fruit** of what they did, v. 42:

a. V. 43: There was a strong sense of awe. Let's not forget that there are two ends of the continuum of awe:

- 1) One is exceeding joy, comfort, and gratitude that the gospel provides.
- 2) The other end is a holy fear or reverence for God that the gospel also provides.

b. V. 43: Wonders and signs were taking place. In other words, the supernatural life and power of God was being poured out regularly in their midst.

c. Vs. 44-47: We see the activity of biblical community in action, including...

- 1) Mutual identification in the gospel
- 2) Equality of social classes and ethnicities
- 3) Unity -- unity is a fruit, not a goal
- 4) Enthusiastic joy
- 5) Praise and adoration
- 6) Favor among the unconverted ("You don't have to advertise a fire! -- Leonard Ravenhill)

d. V. 47: Salvations

G. For most of us, what I just covered will be a review and a reminder that we have heard many times. With the rest of our time today I would like to ask and attempt to answer the basic question: **Why did God design the church this way?** (We heard the "what?" and I'd like to address the "why?")

H. I have four short answers to that question:

1. **Community lovingly confronts wrong, or bad, attitudes.**
2. **Community provides the best opportunity for maturity.**
3. **Community supplies a release of the supernatural power of God.**
4. **Community draws the unchurched unbeliever.**

I. Let's look at them one at a time:

1. Community lovingly confronts wrong, or bad, attitudes.

- a. *"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" --1 Corinthians 12:21*

- b. It's a strange thing that in salvation we express our great need for God, and thereafter we tend to maintain attitudes of independence towards God's people. Paul put his finger on this in 1 Cor 12:21 when he strongly says we are not to operate as Christians independently, nor dependently – but interdependently.
- c. The gospel says that faith, not (our) works, opens the door to salvation. The reason for this is that it topples our pride and cuts us all down to the same size, preparing us to receive salvation as a gift.
- d. The root of strong independence is most often an unrealistic, unhealthy, pride; or it may be insecurity - expressed as fear of being exposed or hurt. In any case, it needs to be seen for what it is. Self-sufficiency and independence are not the inevitable expression of a "strong personality," but a sin against the church and against Jesus.
- e. If our love for one another is to be more than just mere sentiment, it must be expressed in the context of a deep caring and sharing with our fellow-Christians. Paul describes this in Colossians 2:2 as having our hearts "*knit together in love.*" --Colossians 2:2

2. Community provides the best opportunity for maturity.

- a. "*And we proclaim Him, admonishing every [person] and teaching every [person] with all wisdom, that we might present every [person] complete [i.e. mature] in Christ*" --Colossians 1:28
- b. Jesus is the most mature person who ever lived – and the object of God in all His dealings with us is to make us more like Himself (1 Jn 3:2). (Svendsen 3-stages of salvation: justification → sanctification → glorification)
- c. The interaction between ourselves and our fellow Christ-followers outside of a church service is an indispensable element in the maturing process. It requires that we *walk together* through life situations.
- d. It's fairly easy to be reasonably spiritual on our own; it's when we start trying to walk together that the sparks begin to fly.

*To dwell above with saints we love,
That surly will be glory;
To dwell on earth with saints we know,
That's quite a different story!*

- e. It's in learning how to "dwell on earth" that we're prepared to "dwell above."
- f. One of the most essential elements of our maturing is the stimulation afforded by a close relationship with others who are pressing on with God. *"Iron sharpens iron..."* --Proverbs 27:17

3. Community Supplies a Release of Supernatural Power.

- a. *"If two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."* --Matthew 18:19
- b. Jesus is not speaking of mere mental assent or consenting to pray for the same thing, but an agreement affected by, or the result of, the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts of those who are seeking Him.
- c. As the church moves more and more into community we may expect to see spectacular answers to prayer as this unified condition is fulfilled.

4. Community Draws the Unchurched Unbeliever.

- a. *"...Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."* --Acts 2:47
- b. This is community in action! They had favor with all the people of the city! We know that persecution and tribulation will be normative: In the world you will have tribulation –John 16:33.
- c. However, this *"favor"* (*charis*, or grace) and subsequent salvations were not achieved so much through organized evangelistic activity as it was through the practical expression of the love of God by means of healthy community that drew people to Jesus Christ.
- d. [My experience.] Theologians refer to this as the "spontaneous expansion of the church."
- e. There was no doubt powerful preaching and enthusiastic evangelism, but undergirding it all was the irrefutable example of people who did not simply profess to love each other, but who demonstrated it in a thousand practical ways that friends, relatives, and co-workers could see!
- f. The Gospel of Jesus should be seen as well as heard!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Review - Why did God design the church the way that He did?

1. Community lovingly confronts wrong, or bad, attitudes.
2. Community provides the best opportunity for maturity.
3. Community supplies a release of the supernatural power of God.
4. Community draws the seeker.

B. Church is never to be reduced to an event, when all is said and done, church is an invitation. It is an invitation to engage in the opposite of the typical workweek, which is busy, stressful, noisy, and greedy. It is an invitation to calm, rest, quiet, and generosity. God has always placed Sabbath rest, prayer, confession, and reflection—together as a package that we call worship.⁷

P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Group Leaders

Sermon Dates: 10/8-9, 2016

Sermon Title: Building: Growing Authentic Community

Sermon Passage: Acts 2:41-47

Group Leaders: Don't feel like you need to get through all the questions. Pick one participation question and 2-3 others. Also, feel free to adapt or ask your own questions. The main objective is to underscore the main points of the sermon in an interactive/dialogical way – and certainly leave room for prayer.

P - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. Tell us about the time that you felt the most secure and comfortable in your relationships?
2. Think of a time / season where you felt lonely. What was missing in your life at that time?

A - Application (makes it personal)

3. How are the four priorities of Acts 2:42 the essential elements of a discipleship process?
4. Which of the priorities areas are KHC strong in? Which areas are we weak?

S - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

⁷ *Christianity Today*, October 2016, Vol. 60, No. 8, Pg 40, "Analog Church"

5. As we live out the priorities of v. 42 how do you see vs. 43-47 flowing out of v. 42?
6. Scripture says plainly that, as Christians, we can expect persecution and tribulation (John 15:20, 16:33; 1 Thessalonians 3:4, 2 Timothy 3:2, Romans 12:12). Why do you think this first century church was having “*favor with all the people*” (v. 47b)?

S – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you). [Choose one of the following as a final dialogue question.]

7. In which of the priorities are you strongest? Weakest?
8. Read Acts 3:19-20. Pray for KHC and one another to be humble, receptive, and prayerful as we move forward to serve the purpose of God in the South Bay and beyond.