

Theme: The Church is called to be a community that worships together, shares life together, and is on mission together.

I. The LOTR - A Story of Community!

- A. Tolkien's epic saga - is about community!
- B. This comes across in many ways
 - 1. The Fellowship of the Ring - first book
 - 2. At the heart is the friendship of Frodo and Sam
 - 3. Only by uniting together can the people of Middle Earth overcome the forces of darkness
 - 4. The saga begins and ends in the Shire!
- C. This is because community and relationships lie at the core of what it means to be human!
- D. Today: Life Is Better Together!

II. The Church Community

- A. A community that worships together

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts... Acts 2:42, 46

 - 1. Verse 42 is a description of the "liturgy" of the early church for its worship - teaching the Word, fellowship, the Table, and prayer.
 - 2. Verse 46 reminds us this was the regular practice of early believers - not an occasional activity!
 - 3. The central facet Luke wants to communicate about the Church is that is a community that gathers for public worship.

- 4. There are many Christians today for whom gathering for weekly worship with the Church is optional but this is not the teaching of the New Testament.
 - 5. In Scripture, the lifeblood of the local church community is that we gather for worship - coming together to hear God's Word, pray, come to the Lord's Table, and fellowship with one another.
 - 6. Notice that fellowship is part of worship!
 - 7. We are not called to simply come to receive from and give to God - we are called to receive from and give to one another as part of our worship!
 - 8. We need to make gathering each week a priority!
 - 9. Come early and stay late - this leads to blessing!
- B. A community that shares life together

All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, Acts 2:44-46

 - 1. Verses 44-46 describe the life of the believers outside of gathering for public worship.
 - 2. The community that worships together should share life together!
 - 3. This was a community that ate together, cared for one another, and even sacrificed to help one another.
 - 4. If I do not gather with God's people weekly for worship, I will find it difficult to connect with the local church community.

5. But the fellowship that begins in gathered worship feeds into the sharing of life outside Sunday worship.
6. This certainly includes connect groups - youth group and other connect groups.
7. It also includes joining in other fellowship opportunities - men's and women's groups, fellowship luncheons, bonfire, etc.
8. But it includes building relationships totally outside of any planned church gatherings - sharing life together.
 - a. Eating together after the Sunday gathering
 - b. Going to a ball game, museum, or zoo together
9. It also includes caring for one another - praying for one another, meal trains, helping with practical needs, loaning a car, etc.
10. The possibilities are almost endless: look for ways to be together and care for one another - this leads to blessing!

C. A community on mission together

- praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47
1. The community that worships together (praising God) is on mission together (enjoying the favor of all the people and being added to daily).
 2. This is the beginning of the church going forth to make disciples of all nations.

3. A local church must not be simply focused inward, but must have a vision and mission to reach the world - from its city to the end of the world.
4. We are blessed - to be a blessing! The life of God among us must spill out as we serve and reach others!
5. This certainly includes our personal reaching out to others - invite people to the worship gatherings or fellowship events, and personally share the Gospel.
6. It also includes the community serving and reaching together - the county fair, the easter egg hunt.
7. We are exploring more possible ways to do this as a congregation in the coming days.

III. Applying the Word - Life Is Better Together!

A. Why Life Is Better Together

1. We were created for community
 - a. We were made in the image of the Trinity, the Divine Community - so we are relational!
 - b. It is not good for man to be alone - more than about marriage!
 - c. This is true whether we are introverts or extroverts, young or old, man or woman - we all need relationships to experience full blessing
2. We were redeemed for community
 - a. The method of salvation was the incarnation - which is consistent with creation and human nature, and also means that redemption was inherently personal and face to face.
 - b. We were redeemed by Jesus and made part of the Church - we need the church community!

- c. This is why discipleship is Love (worship), Connect and Serve (sharing life), and Reach (mission) - it flows straight from Acts 2!
- d. This is why the Scripture knows NOTHING of a Christian life apart from real community in a local church.

3. Do I truly see that I am created and redeemed for community?

B. Why building community is hard

1. Sin

- a. Sin not only separates us from God - it separates us from one another!
- b. We will offend one another, fail one another, struggle with one another - this is guaranteed!
- c. Because of sin, we find it easier to hide or run than to walk together through the difficulties!
- d. But like fine wine, relationships get better over time - and this requires not running!

2. Current cultural issues discouraging community

- a. The fracturing of the calendar - everyone is on different schedules more than ever before
- b. The digital world makes us used to living on our own schedule - and community can flourish in this environment!
- c. There are blessings from these new technologies and freedoms - but also potential problems!
- d. COVID has exacerbated both of these issues
- e. COVID also got us out of communal practice and into more of an isolationist posture

3. Is either of these isolating me from community?

C. Building Into Community Today

- 1. Ask if anything is keeping me from pressing into community
- 2. Make gathering for worship in person each Sunday a high priority
- 3. Come early and stay late each Sunday!
- 4. When you can't physically come - join by livestream
- 5. Become part of a connect group
- 6. Join in other fellowship opportunities we will be having in the coming months
- 7. If you have not seen someone - reach out to them
- 8. Reach out to family and friends who are not gathering with a church - many are open to invitations!

D. Communion

- 1. Here we experience communion with God
- 2. Here we experience communion with one another
- 3. Our common Gospel
- 4. Come and experience true communion

Life Is Better Together!

Acts 2:42-47

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Communion

Romans 15:5-6

Teaching keywords: Community; Church; fellowship

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47