

Life Together

Acts 2:42-47

February 10, 2008

INTRODUCTION

The church is much more than a collection of individuals, each with a personal relationship with God, who happen to gather together because of what they have in common. Rather, the church exists at the center of our identity and the universe, functioning as the presence of Christ, a life-giving community of joy, an interconnected body, and an expanding kingdom.

OVERVIEW

Following Peter's Pentecost sermon, the believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to teaching *and* fellowship, celebrating the Lord's supper, and prayer (v42). This entire community was marked by awe and fear, and the gospel was confirmed by signs (v43; cf. Mark 16:20). They shared their goods willingly, and sold possessions to meet the needs of those lacking (vv44-45). This fellowship and generosity of heart overflowed in private and public settings and gained such favor with the entire city that new people believed in Jesus daily (vv46-47).

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

There are many reasons for the rarity of this kind of community, but individualism is one central cause. Individualism causes us to see ourselves as fundamentally independent from one another, but in fact we are made for relationship, to reflect God in His triune society: "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created *them*" (Gen. 3:17). We are created to be interdependent, reliant, and identified with others. Failure to embrace this results in either hilarious inconsistency (be your own dog by drinking this beer that 50 million other Americans drink) or tragic loneliness. Our current trend is toward the latter and as sociologist Robert Putnam has shown, Americans have become increasingly disconnected from one another over the past 25 years with less civic, religious, voluntary and informal social participation. Christians who isolate themselves regularly fall away which is why we're told to meet together (Heb. 10:25-26).

AN ORGANIC BODY, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

What kind of community is the church? The believers in Jerusalem acted generously, but why? "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-6). The church is an organic body, all parts relying, benefiting, exalting, suffering with and honoring each other (1 Cor. 12:21-26). This is why we have to know the church locally, nationally and abroad, so that we can act.

We are also royalty: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The salvation that Jesus gives to the church was prophesied by all of God's prophets and obsessed about by angels (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The church is at the center of the universe, God's foolish means to saving humanity. As royalty, we are envied, and as royalty, we rule. "O, Kate," Henry replies, "nice customs curtesy to great kings. Dear Kate, we cannot be confined within the weak list

of a country's fashion. *We are the makers of manners*, Kate, and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouths of fault-finders." As kings and queens, we stop squabbling in our homes, give up pettiness at work, refuse to envy the peasant-cool of secular culture, search and find things out (Prov. 25:2), feast and rejoice, give of our storehouse, reject autonomous politics, and make manners.

LIVING THIS OUT

Jesus tells us that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, but in his kingdom, rulers are the greatest servants (Mt. 20:25-26). So the apostolic community gave themselves to one another and to their neighbors, and so the church flourished (v47). This is why Trinity Church is striving to grow in our love for one another, particularly at the parish level. Make time to break bread with people in your parish. Create an opportunity to serve your unbelieving neighbor. Like the church in Jerusalem, we want to devote ourselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and mercy ministry, and let God add the increase.