2/10/2019 Message – Being In Christ

 A prayer from the book of Psalms 19: 14 May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen

 The passage for this week is from Acts 2: 42 – 47 *42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*

 This is a picture, a glimpse of the early church, the community of Jesus followers.

**1. Being in Community**

 None of these people grew up in the Body of Christ. The majority of the people in the community were Jewish by faith.

 Many of them could have had a personal experience and/or personal knowledge of Christ Jesus and His teachings. Very likely they were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

 Some had been kicked out of their families, their homes because of their conversion, their choice to believe in and follow Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, the long-awaited promised Messiah!

 A common misconception about the first Christians (who were Jews) was that they rejected the Jewish religion. But these believers saw the message of Christ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of everything they knew and believed from the Old Testament.

 The Jewish believers at first did not separate from the rest of the Jewish community. They still went to the Temple and synagogues for worship and instruction in the Scriptures.

 But their belief in Jesus created great friction with Jews who didn’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Thus, believing Jews were forced to meet in private homes for communion, prayer, and teaching about Christ. By the end of the first century, many of these Jewish believers were excommunicated from their synagogues, the community they grew up in.

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 This community of believers in the first century had to open their hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit within and learn how to live like Christ, but that was OK because the people who had lived with Jesus during His ministry on earth were still around to instruct them.

 In verse 42 the word devoted means to spend one's life and resources, as a sacrifice, in this case to teaching, fellowship, sharing the table, and prayer. Some versions use the words continued steadfastly which means single-minded commitment to a certain course of action.

 In other words, they were all in, together/united for the purpose of being in a community the family of Christ.

 These four practices— teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers— provide insight into the priorities of early Christianity. These same practices should be what we devote ourselves to in the church today.

 I was reminded at the revival meeting last night that the word together does not always mean they were under the same roof all the time. It means they were united, harmonious and at peace with one another.

 The sacrificial unified nature of the community is explained in Acts 4: *32 All the believers were united/together in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.*

 As committed as this community of believers was, they had their troubles, other wise why would there have been the need for the letters of correction from Paul, Peter, and others. This correction is just as important for us today as it was for the early church.

 In preparing this message I came to realize, God lead me to understand all the things we share together in Christ:

· We share the same Lord Jesus.

· We share the same guide for life.

· We share the same love for God.

· We share the same desire to worship Him.

· We share the same struggles.

· We share the same victories

· We share the same job of living for Him.

· We share the same joy of communicating the gospel.

 Seems we have way more in common than we may think.

 How often do you gather with your church family for worship, teaching, meals, and prayer?

 These relationships are of great importance but the one relationship with eternal value is the one we have with our Savior and Lord Christ Jesus.

**2. Being in Relationship with Christ**

*44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.*

 The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers’ lives. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them.

From its beginning the church linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices (Apostle's teaching, fellowship, sharing meals, and prayer) relationships, and experiences that gave people space in their lives to "keep company", to have a close living growing relationship with Christ Jesus.

 Well that was the plan for them, but we have many more ways of communicating with each other and the Word is available for our individual reading, and study whenever and where ever we want it.

 So why do studies show so many people express extreme loneliness/isolation and why is it more likely to find the Bible gathering dust on the unreachable shelf instead of tattered, worn, and written in from constant use?

 Do you communicate, seek out time with your church family on a daily basis and are you in the word regularly, on a daily basis?

 We are called to be in personal loving relationship with Christ Jesus and love each other as we are loved by Jesus, who gave His life to save us from our sin and eternal separated from God.

 Our relationship in God's family, comes with the responsibility to love and care for one another in every way possible. God’s family works best when its members work together.

 These are not just words, this is Scriptural instruction for how to grow in Christlike living.

 As Paul wrote in Philippians 2: 1 – 5 *1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from His love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

 Some people— even Christians— live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. Paul stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose.

 Jesus' life taught us to lay aside selfishness and treat others with love and respect, common courtesy. Considering others’ interests as more important than our own links us with Christ, who was a true example of humility.

 We are part of a forever family, and as it says in Romans 8: 17 *joint heirs with Jesus in God's Glory.*

**3. Joyfully being in Christ**

 *46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.*

 A healthy Christian community attracts people to Christ. The Jerusalem church’s zeal for worship and brotherly love was contagious. A healthy, loving church will grow in numbers.

 Do you have a zeal for worship and brotherly love in your Christian community? Zeal is defined as energetically enthusiastic in pursuit of a cause or objective.

 Last week I was with my daughter and her family for a few days. On Sunday morning our youngest grandson Marcus, he's 9 was so excited about going to church he said, "I get to go to church".

 He expressed an excited anticipation of being with his church family that he loves and cares about and that loves and cares about him.

 This excited anticipation to be together with our church family is an attitude sometimes sorely missing in our churches.

 I worked with a nurse who had the same attitude about caring for the people she greeted at the door and brought back to prepare for a procedure. She would greet them with a cheery "I get to be your nurse today".

 This was not just a job, a chore that she had to do, she expressed a true caring spirit toward the people in her care, they felt it and appreciated it.

 Obedience to the Word was and is an important part of being in a community of Christ followers. As Paul wrote to the Philippians *4 Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

 The account of Joshua and Jericho is as great an illustration of obedience to God as found in Scripture.

 The walls, there were two one inside the other, of Jericho surrounded the city. They were immense and considered impenetrable. The people of Jericho were considered ferocious and barbaric, practicing child sacrifice.

 But, in spite of all this the mighty Jericho crumbled. Joshua never swung a hammer, his men never rammed a door or pried loose a single stone. Joshua was obedient to God and God gave him Jericho.

 The early church devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles which they received directly from Christ Jesus Himself. Their obedience to these practices and love for each other benefitted the community of believers in that the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

 Is this 1st century Christian community even possible in our 21st century culture?

 Closing Prayer for the church from Colossians 3: 12 – 15

 *12 Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*

 *13 Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

 *14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*

 *15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

 *In Jesus Name amen*