



CONTINUALLY DEVOTED: PARTNERING

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This morning I am going to read to you one of the most astonishing stories in the Bible. This is greater than the parting of the Red Sea, greater than the collapse of Jericho's walls. Greater than the virgin birth of Jesus or His resurrection from the grave. I suppose the only story greater than this one is the story of creation in Genesis. I'm serious.

Yet, as I read it to you, some of you will roll your eyes (figuratively) and you'll slouch back in your seat, thinking, "He's got to be kidding! How is that greater than Jesus' resurrection?" I know you've heard it before. Perhaps you've written it off as just an unusual historical event, or even Bible mythology. But if you're willing to open your ears with fresh attentiveness, and listen all the way through for what the Spirit of God would say, I think you'll agree. Here it is:

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

⁵ Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

¹² And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; ¹⁶ but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.

²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— ²³ this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of

God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. ²⁴ But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

³⁶ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Those who believed the Message about Jesus that Peter proclaimed were converted on the spot, baptized in His name, and entered into a life of spiritual formation that visibly shifted their destiny forever.

Luke (a traveling companion of Apostle Paul, and author of Acts) described that visible shift in four elements: *“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*(Acts 2:42)

This month, we are considering each of these spiritually seismic shifts:

- The apostles’ teaching
- Fellowship
- The breaking of bread
- Prayer

As we consider what each one means, let’s hope to learn how we may engage each one for ourselves by faith, and how each may be seen by the watching world around us.

Here’s why this theme is so important: Once each spiritual shift becomes visible through the ways we live our lives, then we gain opportunities to explain its root/source/reason and its implications to our family and friends.

Too often, we want to tell others the story of Jesus, which has become so wonderfully real to us, *before* they have been able to witness its impact and effect in our lives.

Without the groundwork of visible spiritual formation in us, our words sound like curious stories—unrooted, shallow opinions, without fruit. Our words are not compelling.

Last week, I spoke of becoming devoted to the apostles’ teaching, where spiritual revelation produces a sense of awe, and miracles take place.

Have you heard about Asbury University, in Wilmore, KY? Last Wednesday the students gathered for morning chapel (just like any other school day), and as the students worshiped and responded to a call for confession and repentance, the Holy Spirit began to make His presence known to them.

Here's the thing, the chapel service ended, but the students didn't leave. They continued to worship and pray. Then prayers were spoken over the needs of others, and other nations of the world. Testimonies were shared, sparking more worship and more prayer. The meeting continued into the afternoon, and more students and faculty members arrived. Someone bought and delivered a stack of pizzas in the lobby, and the meeting continued through dinner into the evening. People from local churches began to arrive to see what God was doing, and the meeting lasted all night long. And the next day and night, as more visitors arrived from neighboring schools and colleges. And Friday, through the night, as people from other states and nations arrived to see for themselves what the Spirit was doing—worshipping Jesus, praying for one another, forgiving one another, telling of His goodness. It's been a re-enactment of the verse I read to you last Sunday:

Acts 2:43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Pause right now and add your prayers to those of the students and teachers of Asbury University and the churches of Wilmore KY... "God, revive Your church! Do it again, Lord! And do it here, too."

Fellowship

Today, we're going to think together about the second spiritual seismic shift, and search out what it really means: They devoted themselves to Fellowship. Here's one way it showed up:

Acts 2:44 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.

We often think of "fellowship" as hanging out together—over coffee or a meal, at a game or a movie, taking a walk or going hiking. While these activities *can* involve fellowship, the word itself refers to none of those, nor does it reference any other activity.

It IS about togetherness, but not just physical proximity.

As in many cases, familiar words found in the Bible may have different meaning from their common usage in the world, or their definition in an English dictionary. This is why we have Bible dictionaries—to tell us the word meanings that are specific to their Bible usage.

“Fellowship” (which according to an English dictionary means “friendly association with persons who share common interests”) comes, in the Bible, from a Greek word (*koinonia*) that carries deeper meaning. It may also be translated as “communion,” “sharing,” “mutual participation,” or “partnership.”

So, it has more to do with the *manner* of our togetherness than any of its specific activities. In fact, whatever activities we may enjoy and in which we express our mutuality in Christ—where we act as “fellows” together in the faith—these may be this kind of fellowship.

Notably, this word is also translated in the New Testament as “communion,” which is most suggestive of the spiritual dimension of grace that is elemental to genuine Christian fellowship. Whether we engage in the communion supper together—where we recognize the grace of the Crucified Christ and the life of the Resurrected Christ and the unity of the Body of Christ—or any other activity that affords similar grace and worship, even if it’s informal or spontaneous, Christian fellowship must, in some way, express our partnership with Christ and one another, if it is to be considered real fellowship.

During the COVID season of the last few years, we have discovered that we can enjoy genuine Christian fellowship virtually, *without* physical proximity. After all, the Holy Spirit Himself is the original internet, capable of connecting every human on the planet (and beyond) in real time, even if not in real space.

Of course, Zoom did not invent global fellowship, though it has certainly taken it to a new level. From the time of cave drawings, I suppose, and every form of written communication since then—especially from Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press in the 15th century—the sense of shared faith has been enjoyed by people in far distant lands. The advent of telecommunications—the telegraph, the telephone, the smartphone, and the Internet—have fast-paced the growth of worldwide virtual fellowship opportunities.

Nevertheless, whether we can see one another’s image, or hear a semblance of one another’s voice, or not, Christian fellowship is afforded and enabled, *not* by technology, but by mutual spiritual engagement. No one can make you have fellowship with them. Fellowship requires your intentional participation.

Assembling

Matthew 18:20 *Where two or three are assembled in My name, I am there among them.*

Please notice where the initiative lies... with us. Jesus waits for us to assemble... to assemble in His name (to honor Him, to seek His face, to do His will). That's why we meet together as His church, His people. When we assemble together to honor Him, He is present, He is here.

If you don't recognize that, it may be because you have something else on your mind (honoring King Jesus is not uppermost), OR... Maybe you've never activated your faith with that verse of Scripture. I urge you to believe Him when He says, "I am there among them." Expect Him. Look for Him. And when you spot Him, however brief the glimpse, honor Him—give Him praise, thank Him for showing up.

Apostle John's first letter to believers begins with this testimony:

¹ John 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This fellowship to which we have been invited is with the Triune God Himself. You, and God our Creator! You, and the King of the Universe! The invisible has become visible, and the intangible has become tangible, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

And in case you're wondering why I have mentioned the Triune God while the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned in this passage, it is because John was writing post-Pentecost to a Pentecostal people. The Holy Spirit was already manifest in their lives since that Day in Acts 2, and it was for them, and is for us, *through the Holy Spirit* that this fellowship is made possible.

Come! Have you responded to this invitation? Are you responding today? Figuratively speaking, this invitation has been engraved in stone (written as Scripture) so that the invitation would be extended to every generation and the possibility renewed every day.

Let me reinforce this invitation from both the Old and New Testaments:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. ¹⁹ "If you consent (to come) and obey, you will eat the best of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 55:1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

² *“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.*

³ *“Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.*

In Matthew’s account of His life, Jesus extended that invitation again: *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28)

Jesus Himself told a story about a great wedding banquet to which all the neighbors were invited. When many of the special guests refused to attend with various excuses, *“the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.’”* (Luke 14:23)

And finally, it is echoed in the final chapter of the last book of the Bible (Revelation 22:17): *“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”*

Come and find fellowship. Come and find rest. Why do you resist? Why do you hesitate? Why do you look everywhere else first? Tell Him right now that you hear His invitation.

Sing the song of the psalmist:

Psalm 27:8 *When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, O Lord, I shall seek.”*

Tell Jesus right now, “I come to You, Lord. Meet me here.”

Communion

Finally, let me speak of communion. Not the ceremony, but the spiritual reality from which the ceremony is to spring, and the awareness in which the ceremony is to be conducted.

We may recognize that the foundation of the early disciples’ life together—their everlasting life—was their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, initially fulfilled in a new and spiritual birth into the Family of God. Just here is a critical point that we must not rush past or overlook.

You were born as an altogether unique individual. There is no other “you” in all the world (even if there may be some doppelgänger who looks like you). But you were not born in isolation; you were born into a family—however broken or dysfunctional, however helpful or helpless, however present or absent, however much like you or unlike you, you had a family.

And when you were born again, through trusting yourself to Jesus Christ, you were also born into a family—God’s Forever Family. A unique soul, born into and fitted together with, the worldwide family of believers. And you, to whom I am speaking today, have also been connected to a local church, your nuclear family of the faithful. And as much as you may think that *you chose* to join this church, God our Father was working with you to place you just where you need to be.

1 Corinthians 12:18 Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it. 24 So God has put the body [of Christ] together. 27 All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.

A problem we are all familiar with is how to live with the family God gave us! If the family is caring, it’s not hard in the early years. But as we grow, even a caring family expects more from us—they expect us to join the caring tribe and show care for them, as they have shown care to us.

The journey from adolescence to adulthood is fraught with challenges, for the expectations then rise beyond caring for others to caring for ourselves—it’s almost as if they expect us to live on our own without them! Yet, once we have developed mature self-care and can get along on our own, they expect us to stay in touch regularly and continue to participate as part of the family. All of this can be a steep learning curve, with many misunderstandings and setbacks along the way. But that’s what families do.

One Another

Even, and especially, God’s Family. For Christ has given us His command for Family life: *“Love one another just as I have loved you.”*

Just what Jesus meant by that is broken down for us by His apostles:

“Be devoted to one another.” (Romans 12:10)

“Give preference to one another.” (Romans 12:10)

“Accept one another.” (Romans 15:7)

“Be kind to one another.” (Ephesians 4:32)

“Be subject to one another.” (Ephesians 5:21)

“Bear with one another.” (Colossians 3:13)

“Forgive one another.” (Colossians 3:13)

“Comfort one another.” (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

“Encourage one another.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

“Build up one another.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

“Inspire one another to love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:24)

“Be hospitable to one another.” (1 Peter 1:9)

This is what it means to become devoted to fellowship. No one does it flawlessly, but with the gracious help of the Holy Spirit we may do it persistently, devotedly.

Will you subscribe to God's plan? Will you commit to fellowship with God—Father, Son, and Spirit? And will you commit to fellowship with His children in the local church? That's where you'll meet with Him the most.