

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 2
The Most Important Virtue You'll Ever Develop
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Acts 2:42
Subject: To what did the early Christian devote themselves
Complements: to the fellowship
Exegetical idea: The early Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship.
Homiletical idea: **Get connected!**
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to fellowship with God and with each other.

Introduction

This log may not look that special to you. It's rough. There is spalting on the wood. That's a fancy way of saying that it's partly rotten! But this log is special to *me* because it reminds me of the most important virtue that any of us can ever develop. It reminds me that **the Lord wants us to be connected together in love**. And if you stay tuned, you'll hear the rest of the story!

This is the second sermon in our series on Authentic Christian Community. If you were with us last week, you will remember that we are focusing on a single text of Scripture. That text of Scripture is a description of a Christian church that was raised up in a single day by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in that text, we discover four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community. Does anyone remember where that text is found? The book of Acts, chapter 2, verse 42. Let's read it together. "....."

This authentic Christian community, raised up by the power of the Holy Spirit, was devoted to, passionate about the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Last week, we considered what it meant to be devoted to the apostles' teaching. And

what did we discover was the heart of the apostles' teaching? One sentence. What was it? Jesus is the Christ. Everything else that the apostles taught flowed out of that single, foundational truth. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is both Savior and Lord. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community then is this: they are devoted to the message about Jesus being the Christ. They are passionate about Jesus.

This morning, we want to consider a second essential characteristic of an authentic Christian community which Dr. Luke mentions in our text, Acts 2:42. This Christian community not only devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching that Jesus is the Christ, they also devoted themselves, my bible says, "to the fellowship."

The word translated "fellowship" is the Greek word *koinonia*. This is the first time that the word *koinonia* is used in the New Testament. It comes from the Greek word *koinos*, which means "common," and *koinonia* has the idea of connectedness, partnership, participation, fellowship.

The apostle Paul uses this word, *koinonia*, in his letter to the Christians in Galatia. It's an interesting reference. Gal 2:9. "....." Paul says, "They gave me the right hand of *koinonia*, the right hand of fellowship. They welcomed me as one connected with them in the Lord Jesus Christ."

This *koinonia* fellowship which is one of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community has a two-fold dimension. It is clearly a fellowship between individuals who are devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. This fellowship, connectedness, partnership, between

believers was manifested in some very practical ways in the early Christian church. Look back in Acts 2, at verses 44-47. “.....” What a beautiful picture of Christian koinonia, Christian fellowship. It’s little wonder that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. And that koinonia, that Christian fellowship between brothers and sisters in Christ didn’t just last for a few days after Pentecost. Look with me at Acts 4:32-35.

“.....”

Someone might say, “That looks a lot like communism. Having everything in common.” But this Christian koinonia is as far removed from the 20th century phenomenon known as communism as the east is from the west. This Christian koinonia not only has the horizontal dimension of individuals being connected together. Christian koinonia also has the vertical dimension of also being connected to God. Koinonia fellowship has God at the center. Listen to the testimony of the apostle John in his first letter. 1 John 1:3 “.....” We have koinonia fellowship with one another as we also have fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul adds, in Ephesians 2:1, that we also have fellowship with the Spirit. That is what makes true Christian fellowship so life-changing. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is at the center of our connectedness with one another!

In this koinonia fellowship, they called each other “brother” and “sister.” Do you remember when we used to do that as a church? Call each other “brother” and “sister”? That wasn’t just an old-fashioned form of address. It was a way of saying, “We’re family!” We are part of the family of God! You are my brother. You are my sister. And as part of the family of God, redeemed by the His grace, these early Christians were connected together in a loving

fellowship. In fact, Jesus had told His followers that expressing love to one another was the sign that they were His followers. You can read the words of Jesus, recorded in John 13:34-35.

“.....”

Koinonia fellowship, is a loving connectedness with God at the center. And this koinonia fellowship, this loving connectedness with God at the center is another essential characteristic of an authentic Christian community.

You remember the log? This log is special to me because it is a symbol of koinonia fellowship, being connected together in love. Let me explain. This log came from a tree in my back yard. Hurricane Frances visited our neighborhood a few weeks ago and she made a terrible mess. I was ready to start up my chainsaw and begin cleaning up. But my wife was a little apprehensive. You see, I don't have a good track record with chainsaws. One time, I was using a chainsaw to cut down a tree, and I got so excited when the tree started falling over that I rested the chainsaw bar on my thigh, while it was still running! Not a good idea. That mistake ruined a good pair of jeans, and part of my leg.

On another occasion, I was using a chainsaw to cut a tree down near our house. I thought I had it perfectly planned. I cut my wedge in the right place. Then I made my back cut. But instead of falling that way, the tree got caught up in the branches of another tree. If I had been smart, I would have got some help at that point. Instead, I just made another cut, trying to whittle away at the part of the tree that was still attached at the base. What I didn't realize was that when I did that, the tree would rotate and fall in another direction, right on my storage shed.

Now you understand why my wife was a little apprehensive about me getting anywhere near a chainsaw. So we were both very grateful last Sunday when a group from Forest Lake Church showed up at our house. I don't think that they have an official name, but I call them the CCC, "the Charitable Chainsaw Crew." I'm sure that some of their wives thought that they were just out playing. But they were actually demonstrating the most important virtue that you'll ever develop. They were expressing God's love in action. They cut down all the trees that were broken and the dangerous limbs that were hanging in the trees. And I want to publicly thank Les McCoy and Mark Offenback, and Doug Gondera, and his son Douglas, and Chris Gray and his sons Colin and Devin. I know that ours wasn't the only house the CCC visited that day. Thanks for demonstrating true Christian community, being connected together in love.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you should all join the CCC, the Charitable Chainsaw Crew. Some of us would do well to stay away from chainsaws! But we can all find creative ways to express love to one another as part of an authentic Christian community. Being devoted to the fellowship, expressing love to one another with God at the center is not optional. It is one of the essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community.

If someone visited the Forest Lake Church for the first time, would they leave saying, "Those people are really passionate about a loving fellowship with God at the center?" In my short time as part of this church family, I've seen many evidences of love being expressed with God at the center. And I praise God for that. Can we do better? Absolutely.

So how can we nurture that koinonia fellowship in our midst? First, we need to realize that the agape love God wants us to express to those around us is not worked up. It's prayed

down. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 5:5. “.....” This agape love is a gift from God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. I want to encourage you to pray each day that God would fill your heart with His agape love, His perfect love, His unselfish love, His self-sacrificing love. That’s the love that He wants us to share with those around us as part of a life-changing fellowship.

A second way to nurture koinonia fellowship is to get connected with a small group within the church family. This is a large family, and it’s a great blessing to gather together in Jesus’ name and worship God. But I believe that koinonia fellowship can best be nurtured in a small group setting. In the early Christian community, the believers met in each other’s homes, in small groups. They shared meals together. They shared lives together, with God at the center. And that model for nurturing koinonia fellowship still works today.

Back in July, I visited a very large Christian church in Seoul, South Korea. In fact, it’s the largest Christian church in the world. They have 750,000 members. It was like going to a huge camp meeting. And they have seven services on the weekend. You say, “How in the world can you experience any kind of true Christian fellowship in a church that large? I’ll tell you how. They have 40,000 small groups! And it’s in the small groups that people connect, sharing lives, loving one another with God at the center.

There are many koinonia fellowship groups that flourish in our church. Some of them are connected to ministries of our church, like the Forest Lake Church Choir, (which incidentally needs some more gifted members) and the Thrift Store Community Service team, and Prayer Ministries. I’m thankful that attendance doubled last Wednesday night at prayer meeting

because we had over 400 specific prayer requests from last Sabbath! And then there's the Quilting ministry. Bodil and I had the privilege of tying some prayer knots in one of those quilts this past Wednesday evening. The quilting ministry team is going to give that prayer quilt to a family that is in crisis. It's a tangible way of saying "We love you" and "We are praying for you." That's beautiful, isn't it? In fact, it's more than beautiful. It's Christian. It's authentic Christian community in action.

There are many other small ministry-focused groups that meet together, and serve together, and are connected together in love with God at the center. And there are other growth-focused groups that meet together—men's groups, women's groups, Bible study groups, Sabbath School groups. All of these small groups are settings where people can connect together in love with God at the center.

I've asked a couple to share this morning how being part of a small group has been life-changing for them. How being part of a small group has helped them to experience koinonia fellowship, where they feel connected together in love with God at the center. Paul and Michelle, would you join me here on the platform?

What was your first contact with the Forest Lake Church?

What helped you to feel more connected in the midst of a large church?

How has being part of a small group changed your lives?

Michelle, you made an important decision last Sabbath. Would you be willing to share that decision with your church family so that we can rejoice with you?

What a powerful testimony! Praise the name of the Lord Jesus! Paul and Michelle, thanks for sharing with your church family. **The Lord wants us to be connected together in love.** Being part of a small group is a wonderful setting to nurture that loving koinonia fellowship within the church family. In that small group setting, our lives are connected together in love with God at the center.

Some of you might be listening and thinking, “I want to get connected! Why can’t I be a part of a koinonia fellowship group? I need to experience true Christian fellowship where God is at the center!” Well, here’s the good news. You can. If you’re longing to experience true Christian fellowship, one of the essential characteristics of authentic Christian community, but you haven’t had the opportunity before, now is the time!

Next Sabbath, we have arranged for various small groups in the church to have tables in the foyer. Come early or stay after the service and explore some of the opportunities to connect with a small group within the church. Some of the groups are ministry-focused. Other small groups are growth-focused. All of those small groups are an important setting where we can get connected, and experience true koinonia fellowship within our midst. And if you have an idea for a new koinonia fellowship group, a young mom’s group, or a widow’s group, or an every man’s battle group...just come and talk to me, or to Pastor Tim, our discipleship pastor, and we’ll help you get connected!

I was part of a small group at the Calimesa church in California. We started as three men meeting together, once a week on Sunday evening from 7:00-8:00 PM. Our group eventually

grew to 8. Now it's 7, because I had to leave. I came to love the men in that group as my brothers. We prayed together. We shared together. We studied God's Word together. We laughed and cried together. A few weeks ago, one of our group members had brain surgery. We prayed for him. We visited him in the hospital. We didn't have to call the visitation pastor. We were there. Because we were connected. And his first Sunday evening home, one of our men's group picked Steve up in his pajamas and brought him over to where our group was meeting. I love those men, and I miss that group. So I'm joining another men's group here at Forest Lake Church. Why? Just for something to do. No. I'm joining another small group because I need to be a part of a small group fellowship, a place where I can get connected together with others in love with God at the center. I need that. And you do too.

The Lord wants us to be connected together in love. So get connected! Get connected with God every day, praying that He would fill your heart with His agape love. And get connected with a small group within the church family where you can experience true koinonia fellowship. And then when we meet for worship, we can rejoice together that we are part of an authentic Christian community. We are passionately devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are connected together in love, with God at the center.

In some ways, the church is like a puzzle. When all the pieces get connected, people will look and say, "Hey, that's a beautiful picture!"