

Have Fellowship With One Another:
Rev. Lynell M Caudillo
Created for Connection
January 28, 2018

Acts 2: 42-27, Hebrews 10:19-25, I John 1:1-4

Have you ever had a conversation with a stranger, made a brief personal

connection, and then you both go your separate ways...only to regret later that you did not exchange contact information? Perhaps it was an encounter at a social gathering, in a waiting room, or on a bus or train. Just this morning I heard a report on NPR about such encounters on the Dutch Railway. Apparently such things happened often enough that back in the 1990s they started adding printed "message boards" to their magazine. Now they've put one on a social media site called Tumblr. Reportedly about 4,000 relationships start each year on the Dutch Railway, and last year they hosted three marriage ceremonies of couples who met on the railway!

I read an article recently about a Japanese business called "Family Romance" which has actors for hire, who are ready and willing to "act" as any relative you desire from a baby to a grandparent. The CEO Ishii Yuichi predicts that with the exponential growth of his business and others like it, 'a la carte' human interaction "will become the new norm".

There seems to be no limit to what this company will do: it provided an infant to a pregnant woman who had not yet delivered her own, so she could introduce the baby to her dying father. They have provided grooms for fake weddings that the attendees did not know were staged. And women have "rented a boyfriend", saying that it is easier to schedule two hours a week to interact with an "ideal" boyfriend, than take the time to create an authentic and strong connection or relationship with a "real" person. This way there is no disappointment, no conflict, no jealousy, no bad habits!

(Katrina Trinko, "Will Renting Friends Be as Popular as Calling Uber?" Acculturated Blog, (11-17-17)

(I'm not making this up!!)

Wow—what do you think?

We need each other. Perhaps you recall in the creation story in Genesis, it is like a litany, naming what God created each day, followed by the phrase, "and God saw that it was good." This pattern is repeated six times, and on the seventh, it was pronounced "very good". However...in chapter 2 of Genesis, God has second thoughts...while he created humanity in his own image, God now decides that *there is one thing that is NOT good*...do you recall what that was?

Genesis 2:18 "The LORD God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*"

This too is a reflection of the image of God, for we believe in a triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three persons of the trinity live and work in community. So naturally it would not be good for Adam to be alone.

God created us for connection with others, God made us for community.

Our focus today is on the “command” to “have fellowship with one another.”

You may well belong to one or more organizations—Kiwanis, Rotary, PEO, a book or hiking club, a lodge/fraternal organization or whatever—these are all great groups that serve a purpose. However they differ from the church in this one aspect: The “glue” that holds the church—the body of Christ—together is the Holy Spirit, who takes us deeper into the heart of God.

One scholar pointed out that in the two God-ordained organizations—the family and the church/body of Christ—**we** do not get to choose who belongs! We certainly did not choose our parents or our siblings...and it is so in the church as well, we do not get a vote on whom God saves and selects to be our brothers and sisters in God’s forever family.

This is problematic. Why? Because you and I may not LIKE everyone in our family or our church family, *let alone, love them!* Ah! But that is exactly what God intends—so that we must stretch, and grow and learn to love one another in all these “one-anothering” ways of relating that we have been focusing on during this series of messages.

Today the focus is - “have fellowship with one another”. Perhaps you have been introduced to the Greek word: “koinoia”. (say it with me: Koin-o-ne-a) It is the word that is translated “fellowship” in English. It means literally “to hold something in common” or “to share something.” I John 1:3 reads: “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” This is the most precious connection we share, next to our connection with other believers. But what does “koinoia” mean? And what does it look like?

First, I will tell you what it is NOT. It is not what we commonly call: coffee hour or what happens in the “Fellowship Hall” after worship. It might be, but most likely it is not.

“Koinoia” is a quality of relationship(s) that develops over time. These qualities involve a depth of intimacy that is the outcome of mutual sharing. It is nurtured as we study God’s word together, as we share life’s challenges and concerns, and as we pray for one another. “Koinoia” also results from worshiping and serving God together. “Koinoia” is a soul connection, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

These things *might* happen during “coffee hour” but are much more likely to happen within the context of a small group Bible study, or in a group that serves together, such as the choir, or a mission team.

“Fellowship” is God’s intention for us – To have deep and meaningful relationships with people of faith who share with us, and with whom we share - life’s journey.

God created us for connection on two levels: the vertical and the horizontal. That is, God designed us to be in relationship with God through Jesus Christ—that is the vertical aspect. And God also created us to be in fellowship/ koinonia--relationship with one another, which is the horizontal aspect.

This is evident in the passage from I John 1. John is writing encourage “koinonia” between believers, as it is a reflection of the “koinonia” or fellowship that exists between Jesus, the Spirit, and the Father! (v.3)

Jesus himself modeled this. In his ministry, he poured his life into his twelve disciples with whom he traveled, lived day to day; he broke bread with them, he shared his life and teaching with them, together they prayed, ministered, and worshiped. And within this group of twelve, Jesus had an inner circle--Peter, James, John--of three who were even closer to him than the rest.

Likewise, when the disciples were ready to go on a “mission trip”, Jesus *never sent them out alone, but in pairs*. That in itself is instructive.

In his book, *Being Mortal*, Medical doctor Atul Gawande tells about Bill Thomas, who started working as the medical director of a nursing home in NY state in the 1990s. Bill was 31 years old and had no experience in eldercare. He was shocked by the “three plagues” of nursing home existence: boredom, loneliness, and helplessness. He was determined to do something about this. His plan? Introduce gardens, children, and pets to the environment.

At the time, this was groundbreaking. Unheard of, actually. There was no precedent for it. But after introducing two dogs, four cats and 100 canaries—yep, you heard that right, 100 canaries, things began to change. (Maybe because the canaries arrived before the cages, and they were released into the facility’s beauty salon!)

The results were extraordinary! Within a year’s time, the number of prescription medications that residents consumed were cut in half, with a particular reduction in psychotropic drugs. Mortality was reduced by 15%. This was the beginning of a larger program called appropriately, *Eden Alternative*.

Why was it so successful? The doctor concluded that everyone, regardless of age or mobility, needs dedication to a cause greater than oneself—even if that is caring for a pet, feeding the birds, or watering plants. What matters is that having a sense of purpose adds meaning to one’s life. Furthermore, we all need meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. (*Being Mortal*, Ch. 5, A. Gawande)

When we are connected to life and to one another, we thrive. When we become disconnected, we die.

As we move through the seasons of our lives, relationships can be what sustain us through the hard times. If married, we know that one person cannot satisfy all the needs of another. If single, one needs relationships all the more. Mutually supportive relationships do not just happen. That would be nice, but the reality is that we must be intentional about cultivating community.

Why? Because the time will come, when we need emotional or spiritual support. We might need practical help too, depending on the situation. If we have cultivated community—we can lean in when we need to. Likewise, others can lean on us when they need to.

Who do you call at 2 a.m.? Who do you call when you're confronted with a crisis? It used to be extended family members, but many of us now live in far flung places. Once it might have been colleagues...but now folks change jobs more frequently, or if one is retired, that may not be an option.

Biblically, there is a clear case for community, for building relationships within the body of Christ. That said, some of us might purposely avoid relationships. Why? While there are many rewards (which I've noted above), there are also risks. It is costly. It costs us time, and we are busy. We don't make it a priority.

It is risky: what if I go deep and share something of significance, and others don't respond appropriately? What if confidences are not kept? What if people don't like the "real me" that I risk sharing?

Clearly there are both risks and there are rewards to the hard work of "Koinonia". There are no guarantees, however, I trust that God can guide us as we seek to be faithful disciples, sharing the stuff of life—the ups and the downs--as we walk together—and with Jesus as our constant companion.

Today the flu epidemic is shaping up to be the worst in nearly a decade. Twelve thousand people have been hospitalized with confirmed cases of the flu, an increase of 3,000 cases in just one week, with an unprecedented number of deaths in those under the age of 12, according to the CDC. Some hospitals are pitching tents and flying in medical personnel to meet the demand. (Seattle Times, 1-27-18, [This flu season is worst in nearly a decade](#), reprinted from Washington Post.)

There is another epidemic going on that is much less reported and even more widespread, affecting 40-45 % of the American population. Any idea what this epidemic is? Loneliness. Defined as "perceived social isolation", long term studies have shown that loneliness is on the increase. Did you know that chronic loneliness can reduce one's life expectancy by 25%?

(Note: There is a difference between solitude—time alone—and loneliness, which is a persistent lack of meaningful connection with others.)

Today technology can meet so many of our needs, one doesn't even need to leave home: Go online to order groceries and they can be delivered. Pay bills on line. Do course work online. Watch a podcast of a worship service. Connect with friends on Facebook or Instagram. It's all good, right? Right. But God created us for connection, for relationships. Personal relationships.

That is why God sent his son Jesus: God with skin on. We need one another.

Andy Crouch, an author and editor of Christianity Today magazine, wrote about his friend David Sacks. At age 49, David, an internationally celebrated photographer was diagnosed with cancer so aggressive that it decimated his life in a matter of months. Andy told how during the last days of David's life, he often visited David and his wife Angie. Along with other Christian friends, they walked through this valley of the shadow of death with this couple.

Andy describes this experience in his own words: Being at the side of David's bed ..."was one of the hardest places I have ever been. It was one of the most holy places I have ever been. It was one of the best places I have ever been."

“We are meant to build this kind of life together: the kind of life that, at the end, is completely dependent upon one another; the kind of life that ultimately transcends, and does not need, the easy solutions of technology because it is caught up in something more true and more lasting than anything our technological world can invent. We are meant to die in one another's arms, surrounded by prayer and song, knowing beyond knowing that we are loved. We are meant for so much more than technology can ever give us—above all, for the wisdom and courage that it will never give us. We are meant to spur one another along on the way to a better life, the life that really is life.” This is koinonia, the fellowship for which God created us!

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and **to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every 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.

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,** ²⁵**not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

I JOHN 1: 1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³**We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.** ⁴We write this to make our^[a] joy complete.