

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

"All the believers were one in heart and mind.

"No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had."

Wow!

Do you ever open the New Testament, and feel like you are reading a foreign language?

Even though we read in English, or maybe some in German –

It feels worlds distant from us – from our experience. And that worries me.

//

What's wrong with us? //

What are we missing? //

Or maybe -- what are we getting right? /

What would it be like to share "one heart and one mind?" /

What would get us to that place? /

If we took a poll this morning –

If we passed out pens and papers, and asked that question –

*How do we get back to this place – this place of living like the early church?*

We would have a some different answers.

Some would say – pray.

Some would say – persecution.

Some would say – by sharing more together.

Maybe some would say – spend time together in Scripture.

Those would all be good answers.

I wonder if anyone would say this:

We get to this place / of unity in God's presence /

– by doing what Jesus did - serving together – and going out on mission.

Because based on our experience at METRO, we finally found something like real community.

And we didn't find it by looking for community.

It seems that some things are found / when we STOP looking for them. /

We found real community / when we found shared purpose. /

When we found -- a shared mission.

And I think this is always true of real community.

The New Testament has a special word for this kind of community – *koinonia*.

Rich and caring fellowship – shared life.

A feeling of belonging / and safety.

The feeling of being truly loved / and welcomed / and at home with others.

And this special life is oriented / around God and his kingdom.

We don't find THAT kind of community by making community our goal.

In fact when community is our goal we sometimes end up with something false –

It looks like community – but its superficial.

Because in our humanity we want to build community around our strengths.

But community is built / around weakness and vulnerability.

*Community – NT koinonia - is a product of the Spirit.*

And man's wisdom is foolishness to God. //

There is another place in the New Testament that gives us a picture

Of this rich life in Christ.

Of this life Jesus wants for us -- what he hopes for us as a people together.

Philippians 2 NEB

**\*\* Slide 2**

If then our common life in Christ  
Yields anything to stir the heart,  
Any loving consolation / any sharing of the Spirit,  
Any warmth of affection / or compassion,

Fill up my cup of happiness / by thinking / and feeling alike,  
With the same / love for one another,  
The same turn of mind,  
And a common care for unity.

Rivalry and personal vanity / should have no place among you,  
But you should humbly / reckon others better than yourselves..

Let your bearing / toward one another / arise out of your life in Christ Jesus.  
For the divine nature was his from the start;

Yet he did not think to grasp / at equality with God,  
But made himself nothing / assuming the nature of a servant.

He made himself nothing – and took the role of a servant.

That's the picture – the New Testament answer.

If we want unity, we stop asserting our personal rights.

We stop worrying about being right, and who is wrong.

We stop worrying about who has power – and who does not.

Because a lot of us are really control freaks.

And it comes from all kinds of brokenness.

It's not easy to be a servant / when we feel we have so little to give

Or when we fear / that the little we have / may be taken away.

But this is the New Testament answer to community – serving one another.

And it requires vulnerability – and humility.

And the other answer is there in our text in Acts 4. So let's go there. //

So the story in chapter four / is Peter and John brought before the ruling religious council.

And they are commanded to stop preaching.

And they know their lives could be at risk.

They are in a war and they know it.

They organize a meeting to talk about it some more. Um – no.

What do they do? / They pray.

And what do they ask for?

Lord – protect us / and our homes and families.

No – they ask for courage –  
And they ask for God's power to be seen.

Their entire motivation / is to keep on bringing light to a people in darkness.

Their entire motivation is God and his kingdom.

God loves that kind of prayer!

*He cannot not answer it. It's a kingdom prayer -- "Lord, your kingdom come"*

And so – he answers.

The earth shakes, and the building they are in -- shakes.

The Holy Spirit comes in power, and they are anointed with courage.

The whole point of this is mission – so they can continue to partner with God in the Gospel.

And out of THAT desire –

Out of a willingness to put their own comfort / and lives at risk—

They find a rich life together.

And isn't this the kind of community we all want?

We want what they had.

We want to know we are loved as we are.

We want this deep sense of belonging with others.

We want this deep sense of God's presence.

But are we willing to take the risks they took?

They have one heart / and one mind –  
Because it's not about them, and they know it.

They have one heart / and one mind,

Because the Spirit fills / those who are living for the kingdom.

When Betty and I first came to Kelowna in 1998 --  
We found people who were hungry for the kingdom of God.

And we would often get together - spontaneously –

For an evening of fellowship –

And a prayer meeting would break out.

And we used to joke with each other about it..

Because it seemed like every time we got together,  
We would spend half the time seeking God together.

We didn't really plan it that way.

But we were hungry / and thirsty / for God and his kingdom.

And remember the promise?

*Blessed are you –  
When you hunger and thirst for righteousness –  
For you shall be filled.*

We got together for fellowship, and to share our lives.. for sure..  
But our deeper agenda was always God.

So there was this rich element of faith –

We expected God to make himself known to us.

*"Those who come to him must believe that he is,  
And that he rewards those who seek him.. " Hebrews 11*

And there is something about that kind of shared seeking..

That kind of hunger and thirst.

The Spirit loves it. And he shows up with blessing and power.

So even way back in Deuteronomy 6—a book we think is all about law..

We read of this hunger for God / and the promise of his presence. **\*\* Slide 3**

*“You shall love the LORD / with all your heart / and with all your soul  
And will all your might.  
And these words, which I am commanding you today,  
Shall be on your heart;*

*And you shall teach them diligently to your sons  
And you shall talk of them / when you sit in your house  
And when you walk by the way,  
and when you lie down / and when you rise up...”*

And we found that when we did this,

We were one in heart and mind. [Kierkegaard – “purity in heart”]  
//

But what about the second part of this text? **\*\* Slide 4**

We see the apostles preaching,  
And we see the poor cared for –

This is evidence that the Spirit is at work--

The Gospel in word / and in deed.

But what about this radical kind of sharing –

From time to time houses and land are being sold / and the money is brought to the church.

Our clue for the meaning is given in verse 11 of chapter 4.

Luke quotes Psalm 118,

*“The stone you builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”*

It’s the same verse Paul quotes in Ephesians 2.

And it comes from Psalm 118.

And it connects us back to the big story – the big picture of what God has been doing in Israel.

Whenever we are looking at some dramatic passage in Acts /

We have to take that page / and put it back into the book –

Back into the frame of the Big Story.

Everything -- we see happening in Acts / is the fulfillment of promises  
God made to Israel.

God promised a deliverer:  
one like Moses, who would lead his people out of bondage.

And we just heard this story in Acts chapter 3. Luke writes

For Moses said,  
‘The Lord your God / will raise up for you a prophet like me /  
from among your own people; / you must listen to everything he tells you. /  
Anyone who does not listen to him /  
will be completely cut off from their people.’”

And Psalm 118 / sits right in the center of this big story / of promise and deliverance.

Half way through the Psalm, in verse 13, we read a quote from Miriam’s song.

They sing this song together,

Right after Moses has led Israel through the sea, and Pharaoh’s army is destroyed. **\*\* Slide 5**

*I was pushed back and about to fall --  
but the LORD helped me!  
The LORD is my strength and my song;  
And he has become my salvation.*

Then a bit later we get the revelation of the cornerstone.

[Verses quoted on Luke 19 the triumphal entry..]

And this is a Temple psalm.

Psalm 118 pictures the priests /coming to the gate of the Temple, **\*\* Slide 6**

The doors are opened.. the gates of righteousness..

And they enter and pray, “Lord, save us!”

And then they pronounce a blessing.

And they go right up to the horns of the altar.

Then when the Psalm continues,  
we are back to Miriam's song of triumph in Exodus 15.

*"You are my God and I will praise you.  
My God, and I will exalt you!"*

This is Israel's story of God's deliverance – God's salvation.

*It's no less than our own stories – like leaving Russia and finding freedom.*

And for Israel,

Remembering this story is bringing it to life again.

They followed the cloud by day,  
And the pillar of fire by night.

Dramatic, concrete signs of God's presence and protection –

His covenant of love.

And then that became the Temple – a concrete sign of God's presence and blessing.

God really dwelt there - in the Holy of Holies.  
And in there was the arc of the Covenant –

That held the tablets of stone where God had written his law.

*Laws written with God's own hand.*

But remember how this has *all changed* -- from Old Testament - to New.

Now WE -- are the living Temple. / God comes and dwells -- *within us*.

His laws are no longer on tablets of stone,

*But written on human hearts.*

So this temple, with Jesus as the cornerstone, is each of us. **\*\* Slide 6-B**

We are each added as *living stones*, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 (21-22)

*In him the whole building is joined together  
and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

*And in him you too are being built together  
to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

*You are no longer strangers and aliens./ You are no longer Mennonites / or non-Mennonites.*

YOU ALL – are a dwelling in which God lives *by His Spirit*.

This is incredible stuff. //

What is the point of a cornerstone?

You builders know all about this.

A cornerstone provides the orientation / for the whole building.

If the cornerstone is level and square, all the other stones will be right.

The whole building / depends on the first stone. //

Sometimes we forget that Jesus alone holds this position.

We measure ourselves by others – and we get either depressed or jealous.

But only Jesus can tell us who we are.

There is only one measure – only one Corner – Jesus.

And only he can say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” /

Which brings us back again to the “gates of righteousness.”

Jesus is the gate for the sheep. //

I can look at Acts 4 and get depressed. **\*\* Slide 1**

Where is the life of God -- in my life?

Where is the life of God -- in our church?

We are all so broken. /

But Jesus is all the life we need. /

I’m not sure we really believe it. /

Jesus is the door. He is our way -- into the life of God. /

Often we look at our lives and we feel so far from God.

We know we are not what we ought to be.

And we don’t see much evidence of God’s power in our lives.

So what do we do?

We follow the wisdom of the foolish builder.

If at first it doesn't fit – *use a bigger hammer.*

We try harder.

Or we get depressed because we know it's NOT in our power. //

But OF COURSE it isn't in our power.

It was NEVER in our power.

It is all about HIM and HIS power.

HE is the gate. HE --is the way / and the truth / and the life.

He is the only cornerstone -- the only measure. /

And maybe we forget –

Because we don't have experience to guide us..

SO maybe we forget -- *God is a good father.*

If we ask for a fish -- will he give us a stone?

*How much more will he give the Spirit to those who ask him.*

//

So Psalm 118 takes us back / into the story / of temple and priesthood.

Right back to the Exodus, and the story of Moses and Aaron and Miriam.

And now we have to make one more connection.

Because Moses, Aaron and Miriam are all descendants of Levi. //

Why does that matter? / **\*\* Slide 7-A**

Remember that Joseph had twelve sons, and Levi was one of the twelve.

Only descendants of Levi could serve as priests in Israel.

After the Exodus – after God delivered Israel from Egypt,

All first-born sons were Holy to the Lord.

God took the first-born of Egypt and killed them.

But he took the first-born of Israel -- and made them Holy.

So after Egypt, all first-born of Israel were dedicated to service in the temple.

But when Israel arrives in the Promised land -- this changes.

In the book of Numbers the land is divided by tribe,

With each tribe assigned a portion of land. /

Except – the tribe of Levi.

The entire tribe of Levi is set aside as priests to offer sacrifice. /

Of all the twelve tribes, only Levi does not get a portion of land.

The priests are not to be land-owners. /

Why not? What is God up to here? /

And here we get a big window into this mysterious God.

God is a jealous God.

He is like the groom – and together we are the bride.

He wants to be our only lover. No competition.

He wants all our hearts – all of us.

God wants his priests to have no distraction – he wants no competition for his attention.

SO what do they get instead?

For the Levites, God is their inheritance. **\*\* Slide 7**

Deut. 18:2

“And they shall have no inheritance among their countrymen:  
the Lord is their inheritance, As He promised them.”

And Peter writes to us,

“You also, as living stones, are being built up / as a spiritual house  
for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices  
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:5 //

**You – are a Holy priesthood.**

And this means that YOU – inherit / the kingdom of God.

God is our inheritance!

The kingdom of God is our land!

My destination is God – HE -- is my home.

And if we really believed that, would it be so hard to care for others?

Would we be so protective of our lives and our things?

God is your inheritance.

And one who has God – has everything.

This is why Peter writes that,

*His divine power has granted to us -- **everything** / pertaining to life / and godliness*

But we live with so many kinds of fear. So we protect ourselves.

The Father says,

*“Fear not. You are mine. I have bought you with a price.”*

*“It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*

Sometimes we have seen consecration – the dedication of a priestly role –

as a strange kind of separation.

As if work in the church is the highest good..

And work in the world is less good.

The worship leader is holy . The farmer is not.

But we KNOW this isn’t true.

Was Jesus less Holy / in his first 30 years of life..-

Working as a carpenter?

That view makes the incarnation senseless.

Rather, the holiness of a carpenter, or a farmer, or a housewife –  
Is found in their dedication to their task.

Any task we do – offered to God in the spirit of humility and love – is Holy.

*Therefore **whatever** you do – in word or in deed –  
Do it all to the glory of God.*

That is the role of a New Testament priest –

Offering all the world back to God.. this world that is in rebellion..

And so making everything Holy.

[One of the reasons for a tithing in Israel, was so the priests could stand and serve.  
SO when we see Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus  
Selling a field and bringing the money to the apostles  
This is Luke's way of saying, "The old priesthood is gone."]

Priesthood is no longer about separation.

And no longer about blood lines.

If you are IN CHRIST you are a priest / in the line of Levi.

*"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God."*

*"Now you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."*

The new priesthood is all those who are filled with the Spirit.

So for us as priests, the question is this: What limits your priesthood?

What comes between you and God?

How will you deal with those things?

You will need help.

Spiritual strongholds are almost NEVER defeated  
By one Christian standing alone.

You will need help to remain dedicated to God.

Who will help you?

If you humble yourself God will exalt you.

And if you hunger for righteousness – for God - you will be filled. **\*\* Slide 8**

Jeremiah says,

Then you will call upon Me / and come and pray to me,  
And I will listen to you.  
And you will seek Me / and find Me,  
When you seek me with all your heart. 29:12-14

The Lord says,

The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none.  
And their tongue is parched with thirst.

I, the LORD, will answer them myself,  
As the God of Israel – I will never forsake them! Isa. 42:17

For the mountains may be removed!  
And the hills may shake –

But my lovingkindness will not be removed from you,  
Says the Lord who has compassion on you... (Isa. 54:10)

*O Lord, who is like you among the gods?  
Who is like you – majestic in holiness!  
Awesome in praises! Working wonders..*

*You have redeemed your people,  
According to your promise.*

*Turn now, O Lord – and heal us.  
We are a weak and needy people.  
Show us mercy according to your covenant love.*

*Remember your word to your servant, In which you have made us hope.*

I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber;  
indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life;  
the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.