

January 19, 2014

Being Community: A committed, nurturing community

Acts 2: 42-47, Acts 4:32-35

In being a Christ-centered community, we make a promise to one another.

It's a promise that declares, "we matter to one another," "you matter to me" "we are not a community without you."

It's a promise that David Augsburger expresses as "a stubborn loyalty to one another."

He explains: "stubborn loyalty to the community of the Spirit is joining the circle around Jesus as the primary social location where we learn to act toward all others as, in reality, we act toward Jesus."

The promise we make to one another is: "we will be a committed, nurturing Anabaptist community."

Today, I will focus on our being "a committed, nurturing community"

Next week, James is exploring what it means for us to be an Anabaptist community.

Such a committed and nurturing community is a living community because it is centered in Jesus Christ and seeks to act toward one another as if

– and we are

– ministering to Jesus as we minister to one another.

Being committed and nurturing are not just actions that somehow we develop in ourselves.

Being a committed and nurturing community is the result of our being a community filled and led by the Spirit of God, who receive one another because God has sent each one of us into each of our lives.

Being such a community begins with receiving one another and continues in our life together as we worship God, offer hospitality, express generosity and give witness.

Our life together as a Christ-centered community is rooted in worship, hospitality, generosity and witness.

This is evident from our Acts texts:

Worship: devoted to apostle's teaching, breaking of bread, prayer, praising God, filled with awe

Hospitality: broke bread in their homes and ate together with sincere hearts

Generosity: had everything in common, sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need, no one claimed their possessions were their own, shared everything they had.

Witness: testified to resurrection of Jesus, enjoying the favor of all the people; God added to their number those who were being healed, set free, (saved); with glad and sincere hearts

Let's take a closer look at each of these to understand how they lead us to be committed and nurturing as a community.

## **Worship**

Being committed and nurturing begins in our life of worship together.

John Stott in his reflections on Acts relates that the fellowship of Acts 2 is expressed in a context of corporate worship. “Moreover, the definite article in both expressions (literally, ‘the breaking of bread and the prayers’) suggests a reference to the Lord’s Supper on the one hand . . . and prayer services or meetings (rather than private prayer) on the other.” (p. 84-85)

Worship was both formal and informal.

It took place in the Temple courts and also in their homes.

Worship was not something they merely did when they got together on the Lord’s Day, it was a daily practice – a giving attention to God, a daily remembering Christ Jesus, a daily lifting up of prayers.

I remember when I was in college – ORU – the opportunity that was given us for daily worship.

Not just the encouragement of having our own devotional time (private worship and prayers), but also opportunities for corporate worship.

Besides the mandatory Chapel services twice/week, opportunity was given at noon everyday to participate in communion

– worship, sharing of bread, prayers.

Chapel was a time for speakers,

But participating in these daily services of communion was a connecting with Jesus Christ and with one another as we broke bread together.

There is something that sets a day apart as different when it is rooted in worship.

There is something that roots our lives when we live in an attitude mindful of giving glory to God

– we see so much more, we are aware so much more of God’s actions in the world.

There is something that creates us to be a different kind of community in the world, a community committed to one another, a nurturing community

– nurturing the life of the Spirit in us, when we live our lives filled with worship.

This context of worship is more than the acts of worshiping God; it leads to an enjoyment of God, of being with God, of being with people who enjoy being with God, and extending the love of God with all whom we are among.

## **Hospitality**

And from this context of worshiping God, our being committed and nurturing as a community grows within a context of hospitality.

We make space for one another in our lives. We do not see one another as a burden, but ones in whom we share in the life of Christ Jesus.

Well, let me change that.

Yes we can be a burden to one another: asking for help may mess with what I have planned for the day.

But being a community rooted in hospitality says

– yes all that's true

– but I care more about you than my schedule, I care more about you than the “inconvenience” of helping out.

In our rushing around world

– everything has become a burden that is not focused on myself.

But what breaks through this self-focus in our lives is the breaking of bread.

Breaking bread, being at table is perhaps the greatest way we share in the hospitality of Christ.

Breaking bread is more than eating food

– in our North American culture we have commodified our meal times

– food has become fast as we see meals as times for fueling our bodies.

But meal times were meant for the enjoying of slow food

– meant to be times for fueling our spirits as well.

When we slow down our lives to break bread with one another

– we regard one another differently.

Yes, tending to the needs of others causes us to change the course of our days

– but such burdens are not a weight we carry, these are burdens we gladly take on because we love one another

– and we show our love for one another by taking the time to break bread.

When we have communion in worship, it adds to the length of the service ->

– but we take the time to break this bread together because we are committed to being community with one another.

Jesus often took the time to be at table with persons

– a lot of life is shared when we share food in common.

Sitting down at table is about taking time to be with one another, sharing life, hearing stories.

Breaking bread is not about the food, rather it is about having time for the ones who are at table with us.

Breaking bread together gives us time with one another

– and as we give time to one another

– we discover ways in which we need to be with one another – praying, helping, supporting.

Hospitality is to make space for one another – sitting at table with slow food helps us do that

– as we declare that we are a committed and nurturing community.

## **Generosity**

Out of worship and through hospitality, generosity flourishes as a natural response.

How can we not be generous as we share our life together in worshiping God and making space for one another.

These practices of worship and hospitality not only open our lives to God, but also to one another.

We come to realize that all we have is a gift from God  
– life, talents, abilities, possessions  
– and so there is nothing that we have that we to withhold or hide from God  
– nor the ones with whom we share all that God has given to us.

This life we have in God together is one that is rooted in abundance  
– the abundance of God  
– and so we willingly give to one another that is God's.

That is why we read in the New Testament that even poor communities (Thessalonians) shared beyond their ability to give assistance to the community in Jerusalem.

They were sustained by God and so they gave generously to their sisters and brothers in Jerusalem.

Being a committed, nurturing community is expressed through generosity.

### **Witness**

In being a community in the context of worship, hospitality, and generosity, we cannot help but be a witnessing community.

The witness we are called to is not to come up with some tactic to share what is going on in our lives

NO, what we witness to is what we live out everyday  
– we are merely giving expression to what is part of our day to day lives; giving expression to a different way of being human in the world, and being humane with one another.

Being a Christ-centered community empowers us to be human like Jesus is human.

Jesus had this kind of witness in mind when he expressed in Matthew 28, Mark 16  
– “as you go about living your lives  
– be witnesses, make disciples, be the people of God, be who the Spirit is making you to be.”

“Be a committed and nurturing community”

The early Christian community expressed this and so do we:

With glad and sincere hearts  
– they lived with joy, they enjoyed being together, being the people of God with one another; taking time together with one another  
– in worship, at table, in homes, sharing and supporting one another.

Their life together was a time of being open to and expressing the joy of the Spirit  
– **an infectious joy**

As we break bread together this morning  
– let us take the time to be with one another – to be reminded what kind of community we are called to be in Christ Jesus . . .  
– **“a committed and nurturing community.”**