

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences Or Less

Ancient Future Church 2 - Intentional Fellowship (Acts 2.42, 46)



1) We've never been more connected or lonely: the loneliness epidemic preceded CoVid, is as adverse to one's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, afflicts more than 3 in 5 adults, and is more about the quality of one's relationships than the quantity.

2) One of the costs of this relational detachment is diminished self-awareness: as Carl Jung described it, you can only know yourself fully as a "I" when you know someone else fully as a "Thou."

3) "Fellowship" was a word borrowed from the Greco-Roman world and transformed by the 1st Christians to describe their relational life; the New Testament use of that word describes something richer and deeper than how we often use the word in the modern American church.

4) The 1st church was "devoted to fellowship" (Acts 2.42), which meant purposeful, not ad hoc, relational investment, and shared learning and prayer, the outcome of which was a joyous, open heart (as described in Acts 2.46).

5) In short, we need to see relationships as a spiritual discipline or habit, every bit as much as prayer, service, or study.

6) Two words we need to associate with our relational life as Christians: it should be intentional, not merely sporadic or spontaneous, and it is indispensable, something we cannot live without, any more than we could live without the scriptures or prayer.

7) Interestingly, the New Testament often uses the "fellowship" word group about our relationship with God (see, for example, 1st Cor. 1.9, 10.16, and 13.14; Phil. 2.1; 1st John 1.3).

8) The implication of the N.T. using "fellowship" of both our relationships with God and each other is quite clear: we are meant to be as close with others as we are with God.

Quotes to Consider

"God has put this Word into the mouth of others in order that it may be communicated to us...God has willed that we should seek and find his living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of another person. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself...He needs his brother as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation...The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in "Life Together")

"True belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves...(and) is not passive. It is not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. It is not fitting in or pretending or selling out, because it's safer. It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn to be present with others..." (Brene Brown, in "Braving the Wilderness")

"In true community we are windows constantly offering each other new views into the mystery of God's presence in our lives: a truth, a beauty, and a love which is greater, fuller, and richer than we ourselves can grasp." (Henri Nouwen)

Intentional Fellowship - Personal Application

A worthwhile exercise this week would be to ask yourself a series of "who, why, how, what, and when" questions about your own intentional relational life as a Christian.

- "Who and why" = Who in your life would make a good spiritual traveling companion or relational investment? Why? (Why is God leading you toward them in particular? Why does their past action or character make this a wise or worthwhile relational investment?)
- "How, what, and when" = If you can identify a few people with whom you want to build a closer relationship, how will you do that? How will you communicate with them (email, calls, etc.)? How often would you like to do that, so that you don't inadvertently lose touch? What specifically do you want to talk about? What would you like these interactions to look like? How can you invite one another to be a little more open, vulnerable, and honest?

Intentional Fellowship - Opportunities at KirkWood

1. Would you like to be a part of a Zoom small group, even if just for the duration of CoVid, as a part of your intentional relational and spiritual life? Let Pastor Chris or the church office know.
2. Would you and your friends like to gather in our narthex to see and care for one another? We've even got a new Keurig machine for you and your friends to use. (We'll ask that you exercise appropriate distancing and wear masks, of course.) Let the office know and we'll schedule a time for you to meet up.
3. Would you like to learn more about how to build close spiritual friendships in your life? Maybe this subject intrigues you but you're not sure where to go from here? Let Pastor Chris know, and if there's enough interest, we could do a Zoom seminar on the subject.