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Upper Thames Missionary Church
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We The Church: Communion of the Saints - NOTES

Acts 2:42, and 46:

42 And they **devoted themselves** to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

46 And day by day, **attending** the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

-in the original language of the New Testament (Greek), the same word bolded above is used in both those phrases, but it's translated very differently into English, as you can see

- I think we're supposed to see the similarity between these two verses. We're supposed to be drawn to the "devotion" the strong and steadfast commitment" that the disciples are making to these things. It's not mere attendance, it's devotion.

-When it comes to Christ's body, the church - Are you devoted? Or merely attending? They're very different.

1. Are you experiencing communion in some way with other believers?
2. Are you becoming inward focused in your walk with Jesus and forgetting that communion is not optional, but a foundation of life in Christ?

What is communion?

Simply - communion, is not a meal of bread and wine or juice people have at church once a month or once a week. That's part of it, of course.

Communion of the saints, is the life shared in the church.

-being united to one another in love through Christ, they have communion in each other's spiritual gifts and graces, and they are commanded to serve one another in these ways by Christ, in public worship and private life, to the benefit of their mutual good, to cultivate both a soft and joyful heart and a body eager able to meet practical needs.

In 2 Cor 9:7 Paul encourages this kind of communion when it comes to caring for other congregations. And in Romans 12 Paul commands this behaviour because we are a body that works together, sharing in strength and compensating in weakness.

But HOW do we commune? What does this look like - and how can we imitate Acts 2:42 and 46 even though we cannot duplicate these practices?

three different forms:

Moments of Communion

Seasons of Communion
Rhythms of Communion

MOMENTS OF COMMUNION

A moment of communion are not like the seasons and rhythms of communion we see in Acts 2

-A moment of communion is not predictable, instead, it's about taking advantage of little opportunities to welcome new people into communion or rebuild communion where time has flown by.

-The church in Jerusalem spread rapidly through extended families and friends. People knew each other in these days and the faith spread.... **If we do not know the people around us, the faith is not likely to spread far or fast.**

-inviting that new person to our church over for lunch

-Or that person that's been coming for a while but you don't really know

-The Challenge

- to devote yourself in that time to the apostles teaching, sermon, and prayer - \

- think about the common ground you have, sharing stories of where you have worshiped before, how God brought you to Mitchell or to the church here, and praying not just for the food, but for things going on in each others lives if you share openly together.

-The Reward

- a great place to open up

-a great way to get to know others

-to foster bonds within the church family that really matter when people need support with children, marriages, grieving, or celebrating.

- while this type of gathering doesn't carry on over time (i.e. regular weekly gathering) it is an important part of the communion of the church, and it builds new relationships and maintains old ones.

Modification: Communion with Neighbours –

- it is vitally important for the witness of our church and the growth of our communion

- first - having a good relationship with neighbours is important for witnessing to Jesus

- second, it is an opportunity to hear their story and share yours in time, too.

-IT is not a forced situation, it should come from the BLESS acronym many of you have heard:

B-Begin with Prayer

L-Listen

E-Eat

S - Serve

S- Share

SEASONS OF COMMUNION

-Everyone from the church should be part of various seasons of communion - because these make up so many of the ways the church is called to interact - the Christians gathered in temples and synagogues for a

while, just like we see in Acts 2:46, they ate in each other's homes - which for many was only for a season, until the church shifted and expanded several years later when persecutions began.

Our church's examples examples:

Coffee before the service - time for communion

Potlucks and Picnics

Christmas Dinner

Easter Breakfast

Woman's Retreats

Promise Keepers or Men's Breakfasts (Grace Lutheran and Bruce Michael's House)

Let's take one that happening right now every week - Coffee before the service

We don't just organize something like this as a church because we like Coffee

- We don't gather in a synagogue or hall of tyrannus to "reason together" (remember two weeks ago! there, but we do a lot of this at Tim Hortons!

-No special title or no special training is necessary, but a willingness to be open and engage

The challenge:

-to not stop at small talk

-What all of us should really be looking for during this time is openness to further connection.

The Reward: a chance to meet someone new here or someone new to you,

-find out a little bit about them and take that a step further by inviting them over later for lunch.

- perhaps over a series of weeks connecting with the same people in preservice coffee so that you can find some common ground and share more of life together

- a *season* of connection has its limitations. For example Sunday morning coffee is about meeting many people and having shorter talks

- you need to move beyond it to a "*rhythm*" to go deeper.

RHYTHMS OF COMMUNION

- something like Connect Groups, a group that spends time together regularly, and knows each other personally

- A worship service gathering is close, but Acts 2:42-46 is clearly describing more than just a large public synagogue or temple gathering.

- maybe 10-20 people and cultivating habits of scripture, prayer and spiritual guidance

- I also strongly encouraged sharing a meal, to help us get used to imitating the rhythms of Acts chapter 2:42 (devoting to teaching, fellowship, eating, prayers).

-Go check out the worship companion on our website - its got devotional thoughts and questions, scripture, music videos, kids videos, and art to contemplate every week for every sermon I deliver!

A rhythm of connection has a few basic parameters that we can put on it:

-it's consistent (monthly / but better weekly)

-it's with the same people (building trust and relationship)

-it's intentionally combining teaching (and reasoning together) prayer and meals (like Acts 2)
-It does **not** need to be a formal group like an official church connect group - although for many people that's going to be the best gateway into this type of connection.
-and it is in full **unity** and **complementarity** with the local church (Notice in acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 46 it's clear that while everybody is participating as one unified community, even though they can't all be meeting in **one** person's house -- they are meeting in different people's houses in smaller groups, but those groups complemented the unity of the whole - they were accountable to the whole - and we're part of the ministry and work and mission of the whole Church of Christ.

The Challenges: Like the other forms of communion, rhythms come with challenges too

- They requires deep commitment - This is a long term rhythm
- it's going to involve a certain amount of chemistry between the people.... if you're going to meet long-term with people you're going to have to get along with them!
- Another challenge is simply that you may find you don't agree with everybody in your group on every matter, welcome to life in the church! As someone once said, UNITY IS NOT UNIFORMITY!

The Rewards: - new perspectives on the scriptures and life lessons from people with different experiences and skills than you,

- your thinking can be sharpened your faith can be deepened
- regular habit sharing your life with other people means people are praying for you and know what's happening in your life
- You're walking in a pattern based on the life of the first Christians who understood the importance of gathering as a group **TO RALLY AROUND CHRIST**
- You can grow to be like Jesus in practical ways, because this is the way that he shared life with his disciples... he ate with them and reason together with them in homes after sitting together in large gatherings and synagogues.
- It reminds us that the Christian life is not and cannot be lived in isolation we the church must be a church that spends life together - communion is much more than the name of a meal of bread and wine or juice - communion is the rhythm of life that describes every aspect of Jesus' church.

Do I need to get into the habit of inviting people over for supper again?

Do I need to get out early for church to have coffee and connect, or be willing to stay longer after?

Is there a way I can begin connecting in a long term rhythm, like starting a connect group?

Think and pray- how is Christ calling you to commune with himself and his church today?