

Kids have to learn the hard way sometimes. They need to fall to learn how to walk. They need to get shocked to learn not to stick their fingers in sockets. They need to touch the hot stove to learn not to touch the hot stove. It seems we don't learn something until we do it wrong. Then we know what not to do and what to do. But the hurt, pain, and humiliation of learning that way is never fun.

For the Jews who had failed it was worse than that. Their crime: crucifying Jesus. Peter, in his sermon on Pentecost Sunday, over and over condemned their actions. Over and over he showed them that Jesus really was who he said he was and who they thought he could never be. Peter showed them what Jesus had tried to show them. Apparently they needed to learn the hard way. Just like us I'm afraid.

They learned their lesson. Their failure ended in triumph. It ended in fellowship with Christ and each other. The end of Peter's sermon brings us to the same point. We've seen week after week that we're just as bad as them. We've sinned just as often, done just as horrible of things. Still we have fellowship. Peter's sermon from the first lesson shows us that we're in fellowship with Jesus and with each other. What happens next isn't just for us to figure out. God's not stepping back and letting us do our own thing. He's involved in our fellowship as well. So...

**Devote yourselves to fellowship
Strengthen it through the Word
Show it with love for each other**

Coaches constantly teach there's no "I" in team. But before coming together as a team they are individuals, each with a gift for playing that particular sport. Hours are spent practicing, running, lifting weights, and training. Many of those hours are spent individually. Before you came together this morning you were individuals. God's Word touched each one of you. Peter applied God's Word to individuals too. **"Repent and be baptized every one of you."** No doubt when you heard the law it stung you. It showed you your sins and brought you to sorrow over them. The gospel then swept over you with forgiveness from the cross of Christ.

Spending time together as a team strengthens the team. Chemistry develops. You learn to know what teammates will do, where they'll be, and how they'll react. Christians, you're saved in Christ. The forgiveness of sins you receive individually leads to fellowship in that forgiveness. It leads to a commonality with the person next to you in Christ. But does that matter? We have fellowship with each other but do we care about building the team chemistry? If we don't cherish what we share, we won't strengthen what we have in common.

Its true men often want different things than women. The younger generation might want completely different things than the older generation. Some want new songs in worship, new instruments, everything new. Others want what's comfortable, what we've always done, organ, liturgy pg 15, and the old Lutheran hymns. Some who get less of what they want react by being angry. Some who aren't getting their way lead the opposition and dig in their heels. But aren't we still united in fellowship? How can we strengthen that?

We might be different, but we are still unified in fellowship with Christ. Each one of us was once far off. We were sinful from birth and separated from God. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians read as the second lesson said, **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."** Those words were an echo of Peter's sermon. **"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off."** In Christ you've been brought near; near enough to be bricks in the holy church, the invisible church of all believers. Categories and different desires might seem to divide us, but look for the marks of the church. You make use of God's Word bringing you closer to God. You make use of the sacraments, remembering your baptism and the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins. You practice your faith, congregate for public worship, pray, and practice Christian fellowship to strengthen that fellowship. These tell you you're unified in fellowship with Christ in his church.

The 3,000 that came into the church that first day had responsibilities right out of the gate. **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer."** They couldn't imagine doing anything else but studying God's Word and enjoying this new found fellowship they had. It was devotion, persistence, a strong desire to do these things. Be persistent in your study of God's Word. Be devoted with all your being to the fellowship you have as believers in Christ. It's valuable and you don't want to lose it. Make use of the fellowship, cherish the fellowship. Be here participating and making the effort to listen and learn. Don't let anything stand in your way, that's being devoted.

Today it seems communism has made its way back into the vocabulary of everyday people. People have accused the early Christian church of practicing an early form of communism here. The common sharing of possessions seems to indicate a form of communism that might work. But Luke writes the description of how the early church operated so we learn lessons about sharing and showing love. Christian communism or socialism are too strong. What we know is that the fellowship of faith they shared lead them to show love to each other.

Think of what you do every day of the week. Eat three meals, sleep, go to work, school, play with friends, and on and on. Is coming to church one of those everyday things? Luke records about the early Christians, **"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God."** Think about where they were. See what God's grace had made them now. The change was amazing.

God's grace is no different for you. Once a sinner separated from God you didn't even have a flicker of faith. Dead to God in sin his grace poured over you in Christ. Jesus set things right with you and God giving his life as a ransom for you. Forgiveness of all your sins brings you into a common fellowship. From where you were to where you are is amazing. Don't lose the awe of that change. Remember it daily and continually wonder at how God has brought you to this place, with these believers, to do his work.

Spending time together developing this awe for what God has done in each of us draws us closer together. Strong fellowship among us means love will find a way to show. Love based on our relationship with Christ doesn't see personal possessions as important. Time, money, goods, it all has value when we use it in love to serve. When you give time to paint the hallway, build the float, or volunteer for VBS that's showing love. When you prepare a snack for fellowship time, mow the lawn, or call someone you haven't seen in a while that's showing love. When you give offerings, special donations, or any other gift that's showing love.

Look around because I guarantee that someone here this morning is down and out. Someone feels beat up and mangled. Someone is stressed and strung out. Someone is confused and lost. All of these are among us right now. Seek them out. Show them love. Break past the walls we put up to protect ourselves and get into the personal space. Be willing to share, be willing to listen. Let it be said about us, **"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."** Look for those that are hurting and seek to show them love.

You might not even use charcoal grills anymore. Some consider that the only way to do outdoor grilling. In a charcoal grill, to get maximum performance you need to stack each individual coal up in one pile. Think of that pile as fellowshiping together. Each of you as an individual is a hot coal saved through the blood of Christ. To be at maximum performance we need to pile up in fellowship together. Closeness in the Word will strengthen us to go from here. Then we take that gospel heat to the ends of the earth or at least the corners of our block. It starts with fellowship. Believers love to spend time with other believers. Strengthen your fellowship through the Word. Seek to show love to each other. Be devoted to that fellowship with God and with each other in Christ's love.