

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP NOURISHES THE HEART
Acts 2:42

INTRODUCTION:

Do you remember the Lone Ranger? He wasn't really, you know. I mean he wasn't really alone. He was called "The Lone Ranger" because he was the last surviving Texas Ranger of a group of six who were ambushed in a box-canyon. Badly wounded, the sixth Ranger, whose name is Reid, was found by an Indian brave named Tonto. Tonto recognized Reid as his childhood friend who had rescued him after renegade Indians murdered his family. Out of gratitude, Tonto nursed Reid back to health and the two friends become inseparable crusaders for truth and justice.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto depended on each other. Roy Rogers and Pat Brady depended on each other. The Cisco Kid and Pancho depended on each other. Zorro had a mute sidekick name Bernado and they depended on each other. It seemed like every cowboy had a sidekick. There really were no lone rangers fighting for the right.

I suspect that the reason for that is that it is instinct within us to know the need for partnership: for fellowship. God never intended that there would be lone rangers. He intended that we would depend on one another.

The huge redwood trees in California are amazing. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth but that is not the case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other: intermingled, interlocked, interconnected. Thus, when the storms come and the winds blow the redwoods still stand...together. On its own, an individual redwood tree would have a hard time remaining upright but firmly rooted with others, it can stand.

In a similar manner, if we are to stand in the storms of life, we need one another. Acts chapter two relates the account of the birth of the church...on the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after the first Easter. On that day, the whole gospel was preached for the very first time. The whole gospel not only includes the fact that Jesus lived a remarkable life and conducted a remarkable ministry while on earth, it also includes the fact that Jesus died a horrible death to pay the penalty for our sins and then, most remarkably of all, was raised from the dead three days later as proof that he is God's son and our savior.

When that first full gospel message was first proclaimed, 3000 people accepted the truth of the message and dedicated themselves to live for

Jesus. But they did not live for him alone, nor were they supposed to. They lived for him in the context of a community of other believers. Acts 2:42 tells us: *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* All of these are activities and disciplines that they did together. They functioned as a community.

God still intends for the disciples of Jesus to live in community so they can support one another. The fellowship of the first community of believers needed to be nurtured and the fellowship of this community of believers needs to be nurtured, too. Both are strengthened in the same ways.

It is revealing that the Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. The root meaning of the word is “common.” In the fellowship of the church, we derive strength from some common elements.

I. WE SHARE A COMMON FAITH

It should come as no surprise to you that not everyone believes what we believe. On the [cnn.com](#) belief blog, I was shocked to read the bitterness and acrimony of the atheists who have written in to attack the church and to attack Christians. One of the most smug, condescending and contemptuous comments was that Christians, “have some magic invisible friend that confirms that all they do and say is somehow universally right.”

That is a pretty gross misunderstanding of the relationship that Christians have with God. Far from confirming that everything we do and say is right, God convicts us that much of what we do and say is wrong.

The Body of Christ, which is the church, is nurtured and nourished by the common faith we have that God is real. We are strengthened by the common faith we have in the truth of God’s Word. We are fortified by the common faith we have in shared values and shared virtues.

You see, I can go to a St. Louis Cardinals’ baseball game and have some things in common with the thousands of people around me but that’s not enough to create fellowship. Those seated closest to me may not share my faith in God, my faith in His word and my faith in His will for His world. We can be all be fans and still not be in fellowship – if we lack a common faith in the most important facts of life.

Within the church, we derive strength from our shared faith. And we derive strength from our shared family.

II. WE SHARE A COMMON FAMILY

I love the way Bill and Gloria Gaither phrased it in one of their earliest gospel songs:

*You will notice we say "brother" and "sister" around here
That's because we're a family and these folks are so near.
When one has a problem, we all shed a tear
And rejoice in each victory in this family so dear.*

Everyone wants to belong. It is our nature. It is the way God made us. And I have a suspicion that the people who most want to belong are the ones who deny it even to themselves. In my experience, the aloof loner is quite often a person who has desperately wanted to fit in and be a part but who feels he has been rebuffed, hurt and frustrated and who has given up trying to be a part of the lives of others. But don't be fooled. Just because a person has given up trying to belong doesn't mean he has given up wanting to.

The fellowship of the church is designed to be inclusive across all those divisions that so often fracture our world. In Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul declared, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The church is supposed to be a place where everyone belongs – because we are part of the same family. I think this idea may have been expressed best in the lyrics of another song. Do you remember this one?

*Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you've got;
Taking a break from all your worries
Sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?*

*Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came;
You want to be where you can see,
Our troubles are all the same;
You want to be where everybody knows your name.*

That song was the theme for the TV program, CHEERS, a show about a bar. But those words should describe the church: a fellowship "where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came and where you can see that our troubles are all the same." Our hearts are nourished when we share that kind of common family.

III. WE SHARE A COMMON FEAST

Not only are we united by a common faith and a common family, we are united by a common feast.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services asks this question:

What is dinnertime like in your home? Is it convenient for family members to heat up their own meal in the microwave at different times and retreat to their own corners of the house?

For many families, eating dinner together has become a lost art—but it proves to be a simple, effective way to reduce the risk of youth substance abuse and to raise healthier children. Before family dinners go the way of the dinosaur, let's make the effort to preserve family mealtime.

The facts are on the table: eating dinner together every night keeps the doors of communication open. It's the perfect time and place to reconnect and to show your kids that they are your priority. Sitting across the table is where and when you can find out more about your children's likes, dislikes, and daily life. Having this information can help you direct your children toward positive activities and behavior, reducing the likelihood that they will get involved with alcohol, tobacco, and/or illegal drugs.

This piece by the Department of Health and Human Services concludes:

The importance of regular family activities to share ideas and find out "what's happening" is a great way for a parent to be involved, discuss rules, monitor activities and friends, and be a good role model. The benefits of eating together will last long after your meal ends, especially if you make family mealtimes a regular activity. Take the family meal off the endangered species list and move it back to the VIP list!

What is true in the family is true in the family of God. The family is strengthened by sharing a common meal. The family of God is strengthened by sharing a common meal. Our shared meal is the Lord's Supper. In the King James translation of I Corinthians 10:15-17, it is called "the communion of the blood of Christ" and "the communion of the body of Christ." The New International Version translates it as "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ." But regardless of what words you employ, the thought that comes through quite clearly is that this common feast is something we are to do together and our common participation helps to keep us together. It is our shared family feast.

IV. WE SHARE A COMMON FUTURE

Not only do we share a common faith, a common family and a common feast, as Christians we share a common future.

Our Father loves us and has made plans for us to be with Him forever in His own home.

In John 14, Jesus said,

14¹ "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

You see, for all of his disciples, Jesus has prepared a common future: to be with him in his Father's house. For all of God's children, the Father has prepared a common future: to spend eternity with Him.

I believe all of us want that future. But I also believe that some people don't think they will receive it. Some people don't think they deserve it. Some people believe God wouldn't really want them if He really knew them.

Dave Galloway told of a soldier who had just returned from overseas. His parents were socialites: very well to do. It was near Christmas, and they were getting ready to go out to the first of the round of parties of the Christmas season. Just then the phone rang. It was their son on the phone. "Mom," he said, "I'm back in the States." She said, "That's wonderful! Where are you? Will you be home for Christmas? Can you get here in time for the parties? Everybody will just love to see you."

He answered, "Yes, I can be home for Christmas, but I want to ask you something first." "What is it?" she asked. "Well, I have a friend with me from the army. Can he come?"

"Oh, of course," she answered. "Bring him along. He'll enjoy the parties, too." "Wait a moment, mom," he said, "I need to explain something about him. He was terribly wounded, & lost both legs & one arm. His face is disfigured, too."

There was silence on the phone for a while. Then the mother said, "That's all right. Bring him home for a few days." "No, mom, you don't understand. He has nowhere to live. He has no one else. I want to bring him home and let our home be his home."

The mother was quiet again then she said, "Son, that just wouldn't do. What you're asking would be very unfair to us. Why, it would disrupt all our lives. I'm sure there are government agencies that would be more than glad to take charge of him. Look, just you hurry home for Christmas now and maybe you can visit him once in a while. Darling, I'm sorry, but

we've got to rush or we'll be late for the party. Call us again as soon as you know when you'll be home. Goodbye."

When the parents returned home from the party that night, there was an urgent message from the California police asking them to call. They telephoned the police and the officer said, "I'm very sorry to have to call you, but we just found a young soldier dead in a motel room. His face is disfigured and he has lost both legs and one arm. From the documents on him it would appear that he is your son."

I want to tell you that no matter how defaced, disgraced or debased you are, your Father still loves you and He still wants you to come home. That is the future that awaits you if you will accept it. And I want you to know that this church, your family wants you to share our common future.

CONCLUSION:

We share a common faith, a common family, a common feast and a common future. We call these common, not because they are ordinary but because they are shared. We live in such a fragmented world that such fellowship is most uncommon, most precious and most important. A common faith, a common family, a common feast and a common future: friend, these are the ties that bind.

INVITATION: #426 – *"Blest Be The Tie That Binds"*