

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Joining Jesus on His Mission*
Service Theme: *Mission with a Little Help from Our Friends*
Sermon Theme: *It Takes a Village* (May 21, 2023)
Acts 2:42-47

It Takes a Village. You've probably heard that phrase before. Often, it's used in the context of parenting. "It takes a village to raise a child," the saying goes. Meaning, it takes an entire community of people—parents, neighbors, educators, law enforcement, lawmakers—all working together to provide a safe environment for children to grow and flourish. But whenever "it takes a village" is referenced, the point is the same: Community is necessary.

There's tons of research on the effect community—or the lack thereof—can have on people's mental health. Without community, the frequency of anxiety and depression skyrockets. A few years ago, during COVID lockdowns, we lived a case study of the effects a lack of community has on people's mental health—and on their physical, and spiritual health too!

But it's not surprising that community is necessary for so many aspects of our lives, because God wired us to need it! Even for perfect Adam in perfect Eden, God knew it wasn't good for man to be alone. Jesus called twelve disciples to form his inner circle, instead of just going solo. Paul was usually accompanied by a team on his missionary journeys. And God designed the church to be a regular gathering of believers, not just individuals living independently. Because community is necessary!

And as we finish up our sermon series today, we'll see that Joining Jesus on His Mission also takes a village! Community is necessary. And not necessary, like it's some burdensome requirement, but necessary as a beautiful, beneficial blessing!

The Book of Acts gives us a fascinating glimpse of such community from the early Christians in Jerusalem. 50 days after Jesus'

resurrection on Easter, on Pentecost God poured out the Holy Spirit on his followers gathered in Jerusalem. And the Christian church was born!

And that newborn Christian church understood the beauty and necessity of community! So much so, that they prioritized gathering. We're told, "***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.***" The Greek word translated "devoted themselves" literally means to cling tightly to something. So you might say, these Jerusalem Christians had a death grip on gathering, and refused to let go! They gathered around God's Word and the teachings the Apostles had received from Jesus and learned and grew spiritually. They gathered to worship God in fellowship of their unified faith. They gathered in the Temple Courts every day. They gathered to receive the Lord's Supper. They gathered to pray with each other and for each other. Spiritual community, just like we're doing today!

But this Christian community didn't just gather on "Sunday mornings." "***They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.***" This community ran so much deeper than just "Hi, how are ya?" near the snacks and coffee in the Temple! They "did life together," all the time!

They shared meals in each other's homes. They spent time together. They got to know each other more deeply. They shared joys and sorrows; hugs and tears; needs, fears, and victories, with one another.

As a community, they literally shared everything. "***All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.***" That's incredible, isn't it? No one saw their stuff as their stuff. They willingly shared whatever they had, even selling their own possessions to provide for anyone and everyone's needs. Simply, they showed each other generous, selfless, sacrificial love. Not because they were all best friends who had so much in common. Certainly they had different backgrounds, different preferences, different personalities, and

different weaknesses. But they showed such love to each other because they all knew that's the kind of love Jesus had shown to them!

To anyone paying attention, it was obvious that God was working in and through this community. Partially because of ***“the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.”*** Obviously, the fact that God empowered the Apostles to do miracles grabbed people's attention. But more than just shock and awe, these miracles verified their message about Jesus! If you claim that Jesus was the Son of God who lived, died, and miraculously rose from the dead as Savior of the world, and then back it up with miracles, people are going to pay more attention to what you say!

But beyond the miracles, it was evident that God was working in and through this community because of their attitudes and actions of love for each other, and everyone around them! And that had a major impact! As we're told, ***“[They] enjoyed the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”***

Really, who wouldn't be drawn to a community like that? There's something infectious about a group of people who genuinely love, care for, and enjoy spending time together. We want to be a part of what they have, to enjoy community like that ourselves!

But God wasn't adding more Christians just because they loved and cared about each other, but because community better equipped these Christians to Join Jesus on His Mission!

What was true for 1st century Christians is true for us 21st century Christians too. It takes a village! While it might seem like evangelism is an individual action—after all, it would be a little intimidating if 20 of us packed into your co-workers cubicle to tell them about Jesus—a Christian community is still necessary! I think that's true in two important ways.

First, as the writer to the Hebrews said in our second reading, ***“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together...but encouraging one***

another.” Community with fellow Christians motivates and encourages us as we join Jesus on his mission of winning souls!

In his book that this sermon series is based off of, Pastor Greg Finke encourages us to build a ***“missional community.”*** That is, a group of Christians we regularly gather with to support and encourage each other as we seek to recognize and respond to what Jesus is doing around us every day as we join him on his redemptive mission. And these missional communities are intended to look a lot like the Christian community we meet in Acts 2!

We should build missional community with people we enjoy doing life with—sharing meals in each other's homes; going to a show or an escape room together; hitting the beach with the kids or grandkids; spending time together outside of an hour or two Sunday morning.

But what transforms a group of friends into a powerful missional tool is what we do within that time together. A missional community gathers to be motivated to carry out our work: Being fed and nourished by God's Word. Receiving encouragement and support from others when we're struggling or feeling defeated on our mission. Being inspired as we share stories of the ways God has been working in our community's lives. Learning and being equipped, as we share insights and give advice on the best ways we can capitalize on the opportunities God is giving us. Praying for each other, and being prayed for—both for life's struggles as well as the mission we join Jesus on! Loving accountability to join Jesus on his mission, because we know our missional community will ask what we've been up to!

To accomplish these purposes, Pastor Finke encourages missional communities to ask each other the following 5 questions—which sound a lot like the things the early Christians gathered for: **1.) How did you see God at work this week? 2.) What has Jesus been teaching you in his Word? 3.) What kind of conversations are you having with “pre-Christians”? (Note that optimism!) 4.) What good can we do around here? 5.) How can we help each other in prayer?**

Gathering with missional community allows us to follow the basic rhythm God has designed for his people—to gather together, and then go out into our life’s mission field feeling motivated, encouraged, equipped, and supported by what took place while we gathered! So, it takes a village to be better able to Join Jesus on His Mission!

And community is also necessary because it’s an easy way to bring people outside our missional community into contact with it. Kind of like the Evangelist Matthew did.

Before Jesus had called him to be his disciple, Matthew was a tax collector—one of the most untrustworthy, despicable, hated professions a Jew could have. Because tax collectors were lapdogs for their hated oppressor Romans, and because tax collectors often cheated others to line their own pockets, they were *persona non grata*.

But after leaving behind his former profession to follow Jesus, he didn’t cut ties with everyone he’d known before. Rather, Matthew brought them into his new life! He threw a party at his home, inviting Jesus and his fellow disciples. But he also invited his former coworker tax collectors. Why? Because he wanted the people who were lost like he’d been, to rub shoulders with Jesus, his followers, and his message. And who knows how many of those tax collectors also came to trust in Jesus?

Gathering as a missional community also gives us a great opportunity to invite our unchurched or unbelieving friends to rub shoulders with and get to know Jesus’ followers—and through them, Jesus and his message! You probably realize that people have stereotypical views of Christians. That we’re all “holier than thou” hypocrites; that we’re all stick-in-the-mud “church ladies” who live dour, joyless lives. That we’re judgmental and cold towards anyone outside our church circle. What an opportunity then to invite your unchurched, non-Christian friends to see that Christians are really sinners who know we’re in the same boat as everyone else; but whose lives are filled with joy and love toward others, because we know the perfect love that God has shown to us and the world! And that will have an impact on people. Just like with the Jerusalem Christians, people will be drawn to know

what’s so different about those Christians, who live and love with purpose and joy.

I’m reminded of the Beer of the Month Club. One summer during Seminary, I helped out at a church in Radcliff, KY. And every month, most of the men of the congregation held Beer of the Month Club. Every month, someone hosted at their home, and supplied two craft beers for everyone to try. We’d watch sports, play yard games, eat good food, and talk. It was pretty simple and fun. But that summer, at least 3 men became members of that church because their Christian friends invited them to Beer of the Month. And they got to know solid Christian men, who were fun to be around. And they wanted to learn more about the Jesus who motivated such men to live and love like they did. Gathering together as a missional community gives us the chance to let unbelievers see Jesus’ love through our words and actions!

And so my friends, it takes a village to Join Jesus On His Mission. And this church can be that village for you! Maybe you’ve already built a missional community here. If so, intentionally use the time you already spend together to encourage and motivate each other for the work God has called us to do! If you don’t have a community like that yet, step outside of your comfort zone, talk to some people, and see what you can get started! If you’re nervous or don’t know where to start, ask me, and I’ll happily help you get connected! But whatever the case, don’t miss out on the opportunity God gives us to better join Jesus on his mission by gathering together with a missional community—so that God’s kingdom, this beautiful community, will grow even more.