

**i. Scripture intro:**

- A. This morning I want us to read four passages of Scripture
  - 1. OT reading: Proverbs 6:16-19
  - 2. Three NT readings:
    - a. Gospel reading: John 13:33-38
    - b. NT reading: Acts 4:32-5:11
    - c. Epistle reading: 1 Peter 3:8-12
- B. What I want you to notice re NT passages: Peter is in all these
  - 1. In John: we see a young Peter struggling to hear Jesus
  - 2. In Acts: we see Peter who's matured quite quickly; now pastoring the exploding NT church in Jerusalem
  - 3. In 1 Peter: we see an old man who's not far from being martyred – still pastoring through the gift of writing
- C. **Before we read, let's pray...**

**ii. Prayer**

**iii. Reading**

**iv. Introduction**

- A. Back in 80's/early 90's one of my favorite authors: Chuck Swindoll
  - 1. He tells the story of a former marine corp buddy who came to know Christ
    - a. Swindoll greatly surprised that this man was converted
    - b. In the military, he cursed loudly, fought hard, chased women, drank heavily, and hated chapel services
    - c. But Christ saved him and turned his life around
  - 2. Chuck ran into him a few years after his conversion and asked how he was doing
  - 3. This is what he said:
    - a. You know, Chuck, the only thing I still miss is that old fellowship I used to have with all the guys down at the tavern.
    - b. I remember how we used to sit around, laugh, drink a pitcher of beer and tell stories and let our hair down.
    - c. I can't find anything like that for Christians.
    - d. I no longer have a place to admit my faults and talk about my battles-where somebody won't preach at me and frown and quote me a verse.
  - 4. Swindoll said it wasn't long after this that he came upon this quotation:

- a. The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality – but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable... You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.
  - b. With all my heart I believe that Christ wants his church to be unshockable, a fellowship where people can come in and say, 'I'm sunk, I'm beat, I've had it.' Alcoholics Anonymous has this quality; our churches too often miss it.
- 5. Chuck said I had stop and ask myself some tough questions
  - 6. I made a list of some possible embarrassing situations people may not know how to handle:
    - a. A woman discovers her husband is cheating on her. Where in the church can she find help where she's secure with her secret?
    - b. Your mate talks about separation or divorce. To whom do you tell it?
    - c. Your daughter is pregnant, and she's run away – for the third time. She's no longer listening to you. Who do you tell that to?
    - d. You lost your job, and it was your fault. You blew it, so there's shame mixed with unemployment. Who do you tell that to?
    - e. Financially you were unwise, and you're in deep trouble.
  - 7. We're the only outfit I know that shoots its wounded
  - 8. We can become the most severe, condemning, judgmental, guilt-giving people on the face of planet Earth, and we claim it's in the name of Jesus Christ. And all the while, we don't even know we're doing it. That's the pathetic part of it all.
- B. This is such a stark difference from the image of the early church portrayed in Acts
    - 1. The Spirit of God had broken through so powerfully that it changed everything
    - 2. We see in the early church the beauty of true community
    - 3. Peter was right there in the midst of it all
  - C. I believe he had this in mind as he wrote (years later) to these believers in Asia minor

1. Whether in the early church of AD 33
  2. Or the churches Peter wrote to in AD 60
  3. Or Providence Presbyterian in AD 2017
- D. We are called to true community
- E. Peter gives us a vision of true community and what it looks like

## 1. **True Community is a unified body**

### A. Explanation

1. We see this in v 8
  - a. Finally, all of you have unity of mind
  - b. Word is literally: *one-mind*, or *same-mind*
  - c. The church shared one mind; were unified
2. Same thing happening in the early church in Acts
  - a. Look at 4:32
  - b. *Full number of believers were of one heart and soul*
  - c. The church was a unified body
3. What does this mean: of one mind?
  - a. Does it mean everyone thought alike?
  - b. Everyone agreed about everything?
4. No, it means that all the believers shared the mind of Christ
5. Look again at Acts 4
  - a. v 32-33 (**READ**)
  - b. It was the testimony of Jesus' resurrection that anchored their unity
  - c. Peter still preaches the same message
    - Look at 1 Peter 1:3 (**READ**)
    - The only reason we can believe and be unified is because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ
    - If we try to have true community in our own effort, it will fail
    - The resurrected Christ is the anchor of true community

### B. Application: Why is this important to stress?

I heard a sermon this week on Acts 4 & 5 by a friend, Brian Habig, and he said this... (among other things I've borrowed for this message):

1. One thing I never want to do is give you a sermon that's devoid of Jesus Christ
2. It would be extremely easy to preach a moralistic sermon
  - a. God says here have unity of mind, sympathy....
  - b. So you just need to exercise better resolve, try harder, and go out there and obey
  - c. Now let's pray and go home

3. No, that's not how it works
    - a. Oh, it works that way with all other religions
    - b. The five pillars of Islaam (going up)
    - c. The eight-fold path of the Buddha (going up)
    - d. By your own power you reach up to the divine
  4. That's not Christianity
    - a. Christianity is God's divine power reaching down to us through the Christ Jesus, the only mediator between God and man
    - b. It's God's power within us that works
    - c. The same power God used to raise Christ from the dead is the same power at work within us
  5. That's why I never want to give you a sermon that's devoid of Jesus Christ
  6. It'd be like me giving you a nicely wrapped present, and you open it up and it's empty
- C. When our lives are centered on Christ, we'll exhibit true community

## 2. **True Community is a blessing body (a body that blesses)**

### A. Explanation

1. We see this in v 9 (**READ**)
2. We are called to bless
3. What does it look like to bless one another?
4. Peter gives us negative examples and positive examples
5. Both examples Peter uses economic/financial terms
  - a. Negative
    - Don't repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling
    - Reviling: insult
    - If someone insults you, don't insult back
    - Peter uses a financial term: *don't pay back with the same currency*
    - Rather...
  - b. Positive
    - Bless
    - To this you were called
    - We have been called to bless each other
    - Blessing should be our currency of choice
    - When we bless, we are blessed
    - We obtain – we "inherit"
    - When we bless others and give away blessing; God replenishes us

- B. Application: What does this look like in the church?
1. A few places we can look
    - a. Rest of v 8: sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind
    - b. We see this in action in the early church
    - c. Acts 4 gives a picture of a blessing body
  2. Look there again
    - a. v 34 (**READ**)
    - b. This passage can make us really excited and really nervous at the same time
      - We have a description of communism
      - But it's not communism in the governing sense
      - What's unique about what we see here?
        - 1) Spirit-led: all the giving was voluntary
          - § Apostles didn't make people give
          - § People gave voluntarily
          - § Not everyone gave as Barnabas did
          - § Later in Acts we read of Philip the Evangelist (Paul and Luke stay with him in his house)
        - 2) Giving was PRN
          - § Pro re nata: *as the need arises*
          - § Communism, secular sense, works like this
          - § Take every one's money and put it into a big pot (or account) and divide it equally
          - § But that's not what's going on here
          - § v 35: distributed to each as any had need
  3. So the question is: what needs arise in the church that you have been given the currency to bless with?
    - a. Could be a financial need
    - b. Could be a listening ear
    - c. Could be sympathy
    - d. Could be prayer
    - e. Could be encouragement
  4. True community is a blessing body

### 3. True Community is an honest & vulnerable body

- A. Explanation
1. In vv 10-12 Peter is quoting Psalm 34
  2. Specifically he wants to highlight God's disdain for deceit and hypocrisy
    - a. It was deceit that Satan used to trick Adam & Eve
    - b. It was deceit in the early church that costs the lives of Ananias & Sapphira

3. We read that story and ask: isn't that a little harsh of God?
    - a. Think about it like this:
      - We tend to think major sins deserve major punishment
      - And little sins deserve little punishment
        - Murder, rape, mass destruction
        - Those sins deserve death!
        - But this little thing A & S did?
    - b. Bottom line is sin is sin
      - It's those smaller innocuous sins we think are harmless that really do major damage
  4. What was going on in Ananias' heart?
    - a. Prob. saw the recognition Barnabas got
    - b. Wanted some recognition too
    - c. Either way he & his wife were leading others to believe they were more righteous than they really were
    - d. They wanted to appear more righteous than they were
    - e. Peter says: you have not lied to men, but to God
- B. Application: A true community is an honest & vulnerable body
1. It's not major sins that destroy a church
  2. It's the minor sins that will destroy us
    - a. Hypocrisy
      - Acting like you're more spiritual
      - Jesus reserved his harshest words for Pharisees
    - b. Pretense – Latin for pretending (pretending to be someone you are not)
    - c. Self righteousness
    - d. Gossip
  3. These are like termites that slowly eat away at the foundation
  4. This is why once a month we have the greeting: You are a broken mess
- C. Illustration
1. Last night at the dinner table Khen Tombing was telling us that one of his children is not walking with the Lord
  2. Norma Downing said: the more I take a good look at families, I see there is no perfect family
  3. Every family has brokenness
  4. When Khen shared this...
    - a. It brought about greater love for him
    - b. Greater compassion and sympathy
    - c. Greater respect
    - d. More prayers
  5. Honesty & vulnerability are some of the most powerful tools God uses to advance his Kingdom

#### 4. **True Community is a loving body**

- A. In John 13:35 Jesus said: All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another
- B. Peter says *brotherly love* should define us as belonging to God
- C. I forget this (as did Peter)
  - 1. We think: if I look good (polished and put together), people will come to Christ because they see how good I look
  - 2. Or we think: If I make a lot of money and show the world how much God has blessed me, surely they'll come to Christ
  - 3. If I have the perfect family because I am living by God's rules: that will attract others to Christ
  - 4. As a preacher, I confess I think: If I preach really good sermons, people will come streaming in and come to Christ
    - a. That way of thinking is like studying the south end of a north bound moose
    - b. It's excrement
- D. It's when we love one another that will show the world what Jesus' real disciples are like

#### v. **Conclusion**

- A. My friend, Brian Habig, tells the following story of a church not too far from us
- B. In a church not too far from us a man who had a pretty bad life
  - 1. Had acquired some foul tattoos & a rapsheet to go with them
  - 2. Spent some time in prison and got even more tattoos
  - 3. Also found Christ in prison and was transformed
  - 4. When released, he found a church and began attending
  - 5. Joined the church, and the church loved him
- C. Because his arms and neck and hands were full of tattoos – many of them blasphemous and offensive, he wore long sleeve shirts because he was so embarrassed
- D. People noticed this and told him they loved him anyway
- E. Folks in the church began giving money to help him remove the tattoos
  - 1. Finally more than enough was given he had to say, no more
  - 2. And because tattoo removal is so painful, members would drive him to the clinic and sit with him holding his hands or sitting close so he wouldn't have to suffer alone
  - 3. Would drive him home so he could rest
  - 4. Finally the doctor doing the laser removal was so impressed by this church and what they were doing that he said, "I can't keep charging you for this. From here on out it's free."
- F. That's true community right there!
- G. May the Lord Jesus do the same in us