

Series: Trading the Individualism of Babylon for the Communion of God's family.
Sermon Text: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 121

Good morning, friends and family. We're in lesson 2 of our summer series about "Trading the individualism of Babylon for the communion of God's family." Last week we talked through a couple metaphors of how God in the Scriptures describes the church. We talked about the church being the temple of God, and the body of Christ, we even read how the church is the bride of Jesus Christ. And we talked through how salvation is not simply an individual action, but that from Genesis to Revelation the bible is clear that: A person was and is saved to community. To be in Christ, to abide in Christ, is to be part of the temple of God, part of the body of Christ, part of the bride of Jesus Christ.

Today, I want to jump into helping us put some skin, quite literally, on how this whole salvation into community looks and feels like. There's a beautiful passage near the beginning of Acts, in chapter 2 (and echoed in chapter 4), that describes how the early church lived out this united communion of believers. If you want to follow along in your bibles...turn to **Acts chapter 2** and bookmark **Psalm 121** while you're at it. I'll let N.T. Wright (Acts part 1 commentary p.44) set the stage a little: *"Acts begins with the risen Jesus and the apostles having an extraordinary conversation, and then the spectacular events of the day of Pentecost take place 40 days later. Immediately following the miracles and wonders at Pentecost, Peter addresses the puzzled crowds, which is the first public statement of the good news about Jesus and his resurrection and about God's rescue operation through Him."*

And chapter 2 **verse 41** reads: ***So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*** The Spirit of the Living God was at work to bring a scattered people back into community. In reading the first couple chapters of Acts, careful first century readers would have been reminded of a bunch of promises God made to his people. Let's look at three real quick.

Ezekiel chapter 11:17-20. Allow me to read this: *"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its*

abominations. And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

Deuteronomy 15:4 declares: “*But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.*” Jeremiah 32:39 reads: “*I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.*”

I’m grabbing a few snapshots of Scripture because as we read about the Holy Spirit dwelling with His people in Acts chapter 2:42-47, I want us to realize that what I’m about to read HAS ALWAYS been God’s plan for his people. So, with this in mind, let’s read on in ***Acts 2:42-47, And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.***

As I read that passage, who did you imagine was breaking bread together, and fellowshiping and sitting under the apostles’ teachings? Who did you envision praying together? I remember reading this passage as a young college student in Bible class and imagining a bunch of young people in their early 20s, all gathered around, kind of like a commune, sharing everything they had and living on a compound somewhere with no electricity. But I didn’t quite account for the messy reality of the early church.

- What about all the adults with jobs who were clocking out late, tired & hungry?
- What about all the old, retired people needing regular assistance and help?
- What about little kids running around making messes and getting into trouble?

- What about mothers who are trying to manage the house and stay on top of the never-ending demands of home life?
- What about all the sick and injured, the lame and poor, who rely on the generosity of others?
- What about all the language barrier difficulties, and racial and cultural tensions?

With 3,000 baptized and added to their numbers, how messy would this kind of community life have been? And all of this within Roman occupied territory and under the empire's nose! What was it like for these early Jews and Gentiles, claiming the risen Christ, to trade the individualism of Babylon for the communion of God's family? [In Revelation, Babylon was code for Rome for 1st century Christians]

- How do you handle stress in your life?
- How do you cope with a major loss in your life?
- What do you do to manage painful and difficult emotions?

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tends to ask these questions a little differently. The bible doesn't use what and how as much as it asks who. The bible likes to ask salvation questions with a who and a where.

- Who helps you manage stress in your life?
- Who is with you in your major loss?
- Who do I go to when the pain of life is too hard to bear?

Can you feel the difference from how/what to who/where?

In Psalm 121, the writer asks his salvation question. He writes: *"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."* On this side of the Risen and Ascended Christ, on this side of Pentecost with the Holy Spirit dwelling with & among the temple of God, animating the body of Christ.

- “Where does my help come from?” an overworked father asks.
- “Where does my help come from?” a wheelchair bound person asks.
- “Where does my help come from?” a tired mother of 1/2/3/4/ *cough* 7 asks.
- “Where does my help come from?” a little child trying to figure life out asks.
- “Where does my help come from?” asks the hurting, the broken, the hungry, abandoned, the homeless, the lame and sick and deported and on and on...

You may be asking, “Where does my help come from?” What is God’s answer? The Man from Nazareth answers in John 13:34-35, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Did you hear that!? Did you hear what Jesus just said? You all, the church, are God’s primary answer to a broken and weary world! Just like the apostle Paul keeps hammering home in his letters. God delights to work in and through his temple/body to accomplish His goals. Paul puts this beautiful truth this way in Colossians 3:16-17, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”

Where does your help come from? Look around everyone. Look to your right... you are looking at God’s temple, the very place where God’s presence touches earth. Look to your left... You are seeing the body of Jesus, His hands and His feet. Look in front of you... You are beholding the bride of Christ. Look behind you... You are glimpsing the very image of God. God’s help comes from each and every one of us, to give help and to receive help in turn, according to our season of life. God delights to use our hands to bring help, and to receive help... this is how we love one another.

Ephesians 4:15-16 reminds us of who we are, “*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*” I invite you to join me in a very old and very famous prayer that some of

you may know. I want to take you through part of Saint Patrick's Prayer. Saint Patrick was a fifth-century Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland. Known as the "*Apostle of Ireland*." And yes, it's that St. Patrick who we celebrate once a year by wearing green. And as we pray this prayer (It'll be up on the screen) I'll ask a who question: "Who might be the person God is using to answer your prayer?" And also, "Who is God bringing into your life so you can answer their prayer?" This will help us to literally put skin to our big idea this series of Trading the individualism of Babylon for the communion of God's family. Would you join me in this prayer?

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me...

God, who encourages and strengthens me in my life?

God's might to uphold me,

God, who supports and lifts me up?

God's wisdom to guide me,

God, who guides me with wisdom?

God's eye to look before me,

God, who watches out for me?

God's ear to hear me,

God, who listens, really listens to me?

God's word to speak for me,

God, who speaks much needed truth into my life?

God's hand to guard me,

God, who keeps me out of trouble?

God's way to lie before me,

God, who helps me navigate the dangers of this world?

God's shield to protect me,

God, who protects me from damage and harm?

God's hosts to save me...

God, who comes around me when I'm in need; who keeps me safe?

And as you've been following along with me on the screen, I now encourage you to look around you this morning, as I read the last half of St Patrick's prayer. Look around and make eye contact, smile and have a joyful face! For as you look around, you are seeing the very hands and feet of Christ that help you. And be glad, for you are the hands and feet of Christ to others in this room.

Christ shield me today

Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that reward may come to me in abundance.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.
Amen.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Link to [Saint Patrick's full prayer](#)