

Series: Marks of a Thriving Church (Acts 2:42-47)

Sermon: Unified Servanthood (Acts 6:1-7)

Date: Sunday October 30, 2022

Cornerstone Christian Community Church

Good Morning! I hope you have all been enjoying the warmer weather this last week. I recently read that due to unusual patterns the Fall colours have been extra vibrant. So it isn't just you. It really is more beautiful. Adriana, our youth intern has been inviting me out to play ultimate frisbee and recently invited me out to join some young adults in a 5k run. So far, I've said no. Mostly because I've been busy on the days that they go. But I would be lying if I said it didn't cross my mind that running with 20 year olds as a 40+ guy might be very humbling.

I can see it now. At the starting line (even though it's not a race), I'd be ready. Then we start running. I have a burst of energy and I'm actually keeping up with them. The first kilometer or so I feel great. Eventually, there's an adrenaline dump. I'll need to slow down or I'll burn out. I need to get into a rhythm that will get me through the race. I have to remember, that although it might be a nice little 5k sprint for the youngsters, for me it's a full-fledged 5k marathon. They will be cheering me on along the way, and Lord-willing we will all finish together. If I hurt myself or get lost, or left, I would hope that they would come for me.

Whenever you exercise (or do anything for that matter) with others, don't you find you do better than when you are by yourself? That support often pushes you to go a little harder, or a little longer.

I imagine it was the same for the start of the early church. When we read the beginning of the book of Acts it's this flurry of activity. The resurrected Jesus appears to the apostles and gives them instructions. Then there is the Pentecost where they are filled with the Holy Spirit and the church explodes – from a handful of followers to over 3000! Then we get to the passage we've been studying for the last several weeks (read it)

Acts 2:42-47

“And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved/rescued.” After this burst of adrenaline, and the church flying out of the blocks, they now have to settle into a rhythm that will enable them to thrive, to flourish.

Isn't that like us today? 7 years ago The Cornerstone Centre was so anticipated by those of us who were around before it was built. People in the community were wondering what this building would be. Those who knew were excited along with us. Then, praise the LORD, we opened. We jumped out of the gate, a flurry of activity, celebrations, and interactions... a frantic pace... and now, all these years later, after 2 of the toughest years many of us have ever faced, we seem to be in a new beginning of sorts. We take a breath, we realize that if we are going to make it, we need to pace ourselves. We need to make sure that we have the resources in place not just to exist, but to thrive. To flourish. And why? Because like the early church, we are on that same mission. We trust that the Lord will add to our number those who are being saved. Those who are being rescued. Isn't that why we're here? Isn't that what society needs? Isn't that what you and I need?

My name is Kevin and I'm your friendly neighbourhood youth pastor here at Cornerstone. Today, we continue our series called, “Flourish – Marks of Thriving Faith Community.”

For the past few weeks, we've been looking at this passage to see how we can learn from the early church

and how we can be part of a thriving church. We looked at the essential marks of a thriving faith community.

Today's topic is **Unified Servanthood**

Before we jump into today's topic, one thing that strikes me about the early church is that they lived as a SINGLE FAMILY. Cornerstone has 5E's as a part of our Discipleship Pathway and the very first one is Establish Identity in Jesus. Part of that is we believe that you are a beloved child of God. We also believe that you are a member of God's family (song? We are family?)

For the early church, those who followed Jesus knew their unity was a sign to the world – they were called to live as a single family. They shared their resources because of this. As the church lived together in the power of the Spirit, the community life together showed the rest of the world that God really was among them establishing his reign of love and peace (Allen Wakabayashi – Kingdom Come).

We're not just a community of people who witness. We are a witnessing community. We witness as a whole.

MAIN POINT - WE'RE NOT JUST CALLED TO SERVE. WE'RE CALLED TO SERVE TOGETHER.

In the NIV it says that "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts..." Pastor and author John Ortberg talks about how the origin of the word *sincere* may have come from a story about the Ancient Romans. They used to prize Greek sculptures – but they were already a couple hundred years old and started to have cracks or gaps in them because some marble was missing. Vendors found that they could put wax in the sculptures to fill in the gaps and they would look great – for a season. The wax looked like real marble, but over time the wax would yellow and harden and reveal that the statue wasn't totally authentic. If they wanted to sell a statue and it was all marble they would mark it – "sine" the latin word for "without" and then "cera" the Latin word for "wax"

- Sine cera – without wax.

It was because of this spirit-filled, sincere, without wax authenticity, this life living as a single family that those on the outside were "filled with awe." Like Pastor Steve was talking about last week. They had table fellowship. All types of people sat at the table **together**. It was because of this "without wax" living that they were enjoying the favour of all people and the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

What does that look like? To live as a family, sincerely, without wax?

But of course, there will always be challenges.

Just like in your family at home, there will be people who see things differently from you, who maybe don't always appreciate you or who maybe just straight up annoy you. What do you do when people at church see things differently from you? Or don't always appreciate you? Or maybe straight up annoy you?

How do you live as a single family when your family doubles in size? Triples? Grows exponentially? For Cornerstone before this building was built, there were 300 people. I remember it. 200 adults and 100 children. Now, there's over 1000 people, between both services and those who watch online. It's incredible! And, it can be challenging.

It can be challenging serving together.

Just a few chapters after this amazing burst out of the gates for the early church, we see the adrenaline dump. We see a major problem arise. We see the cracks. It's to this story we look today to see what nuggets we can glean as we try to live as a single family that has grown exponentially. How can we live sincerely, without wax? How can we be unified in our servanthood?

Turn in your Bibles to Acts 6:1-7 (read it)

So, we ended with Acts 2:47 talking about how the Lord added to their number daily, and here we start off with, "In those days, when the number of disciples were increasing..."

It's a good thing! The church is growing!

So some quick background in this story is that the Hellenistic Jews came from all over and probably spoke a different language than the Hebraic Jews. Many people would come from all over to Jerusalem when they were old so that they would die and be buried in or close to Jerusalem. So when these old men died, their wives became widows and had no one to take care of them. Because they converted to Christianity, national welfare wasn't always available to them, and with no husband and having spent their resources to get to Jerusalem, they were in real need.

This was a real issue that could have divided the church. Just a few chapters ago we read that "all the believers were one in heart and mind" and "among them there were no needy persons." Now we see that they are **NOT** all one in heart and mind and that there **ARE** needy people among them.

This group went from 12 to around 20,000. Forgetting these widows wasn't done on purpose, it wasn't malicious. You could see how it could happen. But it was real and it was a problem.

IT HAPPENS TO EVERY CHURCH.

Just because it's not done on purpose, it doesn't mean it's not real, not a problem and doesn't affect people.

Every group of Christians that tries to practice true community, unified servanthood will sooner or later encounter problems in the very areas of their strength. The cause of the problem was the increase in followers!!! They were a multicultural church where all levels of society were represented – the church was a microcosm of society – the way it should be. And yet...

The Hellenistic (Greek) Jews complained. This is not a pleasant word. This is like the complaining that the Israelites did against Moses in the desert. It's a real issue and the church could be in trouble (they said they wished they were back in slavery!!!)

They were saying that their most vulnerable people were being overlooked.

Notice what happens. The apostles take quick action. They don't point fingers. **They listen** and since it affects the whole body, they call the whole body together.

I remember one time I had a meeting and I was nervous about it. I asked Kerri to pray and she did. She also said, “nothing can go wrong if you just listen.”

Nothing can go wrong if you just listen.

When the early church was smaller, it was easier to deal with all the issues themselves. Now the apostles are realizing that the church is too big. It needs a new system and help from the body within the system.

Look at verse 2b, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.”

They want to keep the main thing the main thing. The apostles want to pray and focus on the word of God. That’s not to say that that’s all they are going to do. That’s not to say that meeting physical needs is less important. But they wanted their leaders to have the space to focus on their primary calling.

In the next verse, they select 7 people **from the group of people who were offended**. You can see from their names that they are Hellenistic (Greek) Jews. Very strategic. Representation matters.

You came to us. We listened. We heard you and we’re going to make this right by making sure you are a part of the solution.

This frees the apostles to pray and to continue the ministry of the word.

The whole community agrees with this proposal, the apostles lay hands on them and bless them and then look at verse 7, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Even church leaders are becoming followers of Jesus

They are right back to where they started with the church being blessed and growing.

So, what does this have to do with unified servanthood?

I share this story because you can see in them a multicultural church coming together, growing and then responding to the needs that arise because of that growth. Together. As a family. Sincerely, without wax. There was a problem. The problem was brought up, and people stepped up to meet that need. Vulnerable people were being overlooked, and a solution was provided and executed quickly, freeing them to continue growing.

There were tensions - relationships are risky - but they took the risk. Family is worth the risk.

They didn’t just want to serve. They wanted to serve together. So they confronted each other when they had an issue. I’m sure it wasn’t easy to bring it up and I’m sure it wasn’t easy to hear. But they did it. And the whole community was blessed because of it.

Remember, we’re not just called to serve, we’re called to serve together.

Pray for us as leaders and pray for the unity of Cornerstone. It happened to the early church. It could happen to us.

No church is perfect. Cornerstone is no exception. We are trying to be sincere - without wax. Pray that we would not have any cracks or gaps and that if there are, that God would help us.

Pray for Andrew and Steve (and Lisa) as she joins the team - NO, LIKE ACTUALLY PRAY FOR THEM RIGHT NOW. Take 30 seconds and throw up a prayer for them.

Pray for the staff. We've been going through what you're going through for the last few years AND we also have the opportunity, the privilege, the responsibility of leading all of you as well. Pray for us as we pray for you.

One of our Core Values here at Cornerstone is unity in diversity, "We celebrate each person's uniqueness, while eagerly pursuing loving, harmonious relationships with each other."

It can be messy though.

Listen to this quote from a book I've been reading from a book called, "Messy Grace" "Jesus did not die on the cross to create a little country club where we have weekly gatherings, pat ourselves on the back for our good behaviour (while hiding our bad behaviour) and meet in clusters during the week but do nothing to reach out to the community. That's not the kind of church Jesus wants to build here on earth." - Caleb Kaltenbach

It's a good thing Jesus didn't decide that we were too messy to get involved with. In the same way, we need to be involved in the messiness of family life together.

WE'RE NOT JUST CALLED TO SERVE. WE'RE CALLED TO SERVE TOGETHER.

UNIFIED SERVANTHOOD

Cornerstone is an incredible church. I really believe that. I believe that we are special and uniquely responding to our calling in this time and space. But we are not perfect. Like the early church, our family has grown significantly. When you are successful, you can easily keep doing what you're doing.

Cornerstone has a history of rising to the challenge.

Just last week we celebrated how after making a call for 100 volunteers to serve the community in the funfair you all responded. Thank you!

It's exciting.

In all this excitement, as the adrenalin dump happens and we need to settle into a pace that will allow us to flourish.

That's where differences can pop up. Cracks can be exposed and the opportunity is in front of us.

What will you do?

If you are being missed - say something. It will be hard to say and hard to hear. But if we truly want to be family, we have to be unified.

We're not just called to serve, we're called to serve together.

We don't want to rest in our success. We want to continue to make space.

A book that I was reading had an interesting paragraph about disagreement. It was saying that society has lost the art of disagreement. We either violently oppose those we disagree with or blandly tolerate them. They suggest rational peaceful engagement - the goal is a better or more informed position in hopes of finding common ground.

It's possible to truly love someone and also disagree with them - even on important matters.

You know what's interesting about the passage we studied today? Something's missing. I wonder if any of the apostles disagreed with the decision to serve the widows of Grecian Jews. It doesn't say. And it doesn't matter. Because even if they had a different opinion, they still chose to love. They still chose to make space. They still chose to make sure everyone was served. And that's how they all came to agreement.

They worked it through - together.

My prayer is that we wouldn't just serve, we'd serve together.

My prayer is like the early church, the blessing of God would continue and increase.

Amen? Amen.

Let's pray.

Benediction

Romans 12:5

so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.