

SERMON: "DEVOTED TO ... FELLOWSHIP"
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 133
NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 2:37-47

October 22, 2023

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

I was talking to one of the young people in our church after worship last week
She told me, 'I knew you were going to talk about college football today.'
She was right. You know me well. You know I love college football
You probably also know I love the beautiful game – soccer, futbol
Big Liverpool fan. So a soccer reference for you this week.

The game's biggest star, the world's biggest star, Lionel Messi, in a very big move
decided to come and play his football here in the US of A, for Inter Miami
It made big news, not just on the sports page, but in the headlines
That included some reporting (and commentary) on the story by people
who know very little about Messi or about soccer.

One feature included a TV host saying that Messi who is from Argentina
and who played most of his storied career in Spain, and just recently in Paris,
needs to learn English now that he is playing here. That same host compared
Messi to the last big world soccer star to move here about a dozen years ago
That big star, you may remember, was David Beckham.

He said Messi should follow Beckham's example and learn English
Problem (this TV host should have done his homework) is that
David Beckham is English. He didn't have to learn English after moving here
Frankly, neither does Messi. He lives in Miami

We continue our series on "Devoted" based on Acts 2:42

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

Thinking and praying about what it means, what it takes and what it looks like
to be devoted to fellowship, my first thought was "How does fellowship differ
from the breaking of bread?" So much good fellowship happens over a meal
Then I start thinking about what fellowship is, what makes for fellowship,
what is required for fellowship, not just recommended, but required

That's what made me think of that TV host's faux pas about language
Is a common language necessary for fellowship? Does a native
Spanish speaker need to learn English to play the worlds game in Miami?
Does an Englishman, like Beckham, need to learn our version of English?

TIME TOGETHER

To answer that question about what is required to have fellowship

I want to differentiate between a common language and a shared language.
A common language can be tricky. It might expect more uniformity or conformity than is necessary. It may be a bit too 'one size fits all.' And worse, it may insist on one group insisting that all other groups play by their rules.

A shared language, on the other hand, is just that – shared

If you've watched the beautiful game, you've seen players from many lands and languages play well together, understand each other well, work together well
They know enough about each other. They share

That, I think, is what fellowship is ... not commonality, but community

A blending together where the whole is stronger than the sum of its parts
just like a good team, a tight band, a harmonious choir.

So then, what does it look like to be devoted to fellowship?

Seeing that this is a stewardship sermon, you may ask, 'what is the 'ask?'
The ask is for your time ... for you to devote your time to our time together.
Listen again to what this passage is telling us about fellowship
These are the verses that follow our verse about being 'devoted'

Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

There is a real focus here on togetherness – 'all who believed were together' and 'as they spent much time together.' And on top of that there are the references (twice) about things happening "day by day" – day by day they spent time together, ate together (more on the eating part next week)
Day by day the Lord added to their number.

Clearly, togetherness takes time, time together.

Think of that futbol team practicing (and just hanging out together)
Think of that band or choir rehearsing, catching up with each other, sharing stories
Think of what church is. It is the people spending much time together.
It is not just coming to the Sunday matinee, catching the show, being a spectator.

This is a congregation, a community. It is not an audience

Being together – intentionally, regularly is a key ingredient in being a church
We need each other. We need to spend much time together

WHAT FELLOWSHIP LOOKS LIKE

I've told you before I enjoy finding pictures to put on the screen and bulletin cover
Sometimes I find an image that seems just right. That happens from time to time.
Most of the time, however, I find a whole lot of what my brothers call 'cheese.'

I typed into the search engine "time together.' And the cheese fest began
Lots of pictures of couples, maybe a picnic or a park bench
Lots of pictures of families that look like the pictures in the frame when you buy it
Show image – Family

Wasn't what I was looking for, not exactly Acts, chapter 2.
I scrolled down the page. It got cheesier. Found lots of images
of people standing in a circle with their hands together in the middle.
It's like they are getting ready to break the huddle.
Show image - Cheese

Real togetherness isn't that staged or photogenic. Neither cheesy nor 'say cheese'
I kept looking. I found pictures with coffee mugs. Now we are getting real
Didn't see any with sweet tea or Dr. Pepper. Decided to stop searching
Something was clearly wrong with the algorithm

Found one image I like. Found it by typing in the word 'fellowship.'
Found the coffee pictures this way. Found more shiny happy people pictures
I kept looking. This is the one I like the most. Looks more like a support group.
Show image – Fellowship

I think that is a far better image for fellowship, more honest
Fellowship includes moments worth a picture, smiles for the camera
It includes family game nights and people in a circle
But it is more than that too. It is a circle of people leaning on each other,
Supporting each other. It may involve tears and even arguments

Fellowship, very much, includes forbearance ... bearing with one another
I trust you have some experience with forbearance, from both sides
Someone showing you some patience and some mercy
You doing the same for them, maybe even at the same time
Their apologies interrupted by your apologies

That is the kind of fellowship the church is here to share
Not because we are so good at it ... but because we know we need it
We are here sharing with one another not so much a common language
But a common need. We need those arms around us. We need each other.

We need and have received God's grace. That is what we share
It is not ours to offer. It is ours to share.

SUMMARY

You've heard me mention my parents as positive examples quite often
I have lots of stories because they provided so many good examples
It is easy to say good things about them because they were such good people
I could say much the same about my grandparents too

That is with the exception of my dad's dad. He was kind to his grandchildren.
But not so kind to other people. He was stubborn. He could be mean even.

I remember in his last months he had a man there at the house to care for him
My grandmother would prepare lunch for them, but they ate in separate rooms
My grandad, in the dining room. His caregiver, a black man, in the kitchen.
I remember thinking that wasn't right. It was my grandad's racist version
of what he considered to be right. And it was wrong

He died of a heart attack at age 69. My dad later recounted to me
his dad's last words, "an accurate reflection of the man," my dad said
I apologize for the language. Again, an accurate reflection of the man.

He was having chest pain and instead of calling an ambulance,
he decided to drive to the hospital. Full disclosure – I did the same thing
at age 49 when I had chest pain followed by angioplasty and a stent.
So, hear me when I tell you this. If I'm using his example as a
not so good one, I am including my own stubborn self in with him.

His last words when my grandmother offered to help him to the car.
He pushed her arm away and said, 'No. Dammit. I'll do it myself.'

My grandfather was wrong. There are some things we can do ourselves
And there are some that we cannot, should not and need not
some where we very much need the support of another's arm.

We need each other. We need the fellowship we call church.