

Stories: The Synergy of Life

Sermon 2-4-18

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Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Message:

As many of you know, I've been helping to coach 10 year old boys at West-Mont United soccer club over the past year. Fortunately, I've been with the same coach over the course of the year. When I first started helping with coaching, I had no idea what I was doing. I had been out of the youth soccer world for 13 or 14 years. I had forgotten what youth soccer was like. And it even changed a lot during those years that I've been removed from it. When I was in it as a teenager, I didn't have the wisdom to recognize its subculture. Today, it has become its own entity. In a way, it has become church for many. The social activities, programs and events that the church has traditionally offered the community, is no longer exclusive to the church. Soccer families hang out with soccer families not just at soccer games. As a team, my team has already held a swim party and a New Year's Eve party. During a soccer tournament in Lancaster in November, we took time to go play laser-tag as a team and have a pizza party. It was a team-bonding activity for parents and kids alike. There is a comradery and social element to the soccer team and club. The club holds annual events unrelated to soccer. For instance, they hold golf tournaments and wine festivals. I didn't realize that when I became a soccer coach with the club, that I wasn't just strictly coaching soccer, but I was getting invested in an entire community. A sub-community. Going into this, I didn't know how things were going to turn-out. I had multiple objectives. I wanted to get-to-know more people in our community. I wanted to explore if there

were opportunities for ministry. And of course, I had the grandiose idea of leading families to Christ. I was curious, what doors would God open for His kingdom by my involvement in coaching soccer? Now, I don't freely offer to people that I'm a pastor, but if they ask, I tell. I mainly withhold this information because I've found that many recoil once they find out I'm a pastor or they apologize every time they swear. I don't want people to feel like they have to walk-on-eggshells when their around me. But I do look for openings to minister. And they are few and far between. And they are usually small openings. For instance, Christine and I went out to eat one night last fall at Red Lobster in Pottstown. As soon as I walked in the door, one of the kids I coached came running up to me to say "Hi!" He was so excited to see his coach. So I took a moment to go greet his family who were all enjoying a nice dinner. Nothing earth-shattering happened in that moment, but I made a solid connection with this child and family. Another moment was when I was at a soccer tournament in Lancaster in late November. It was a torrential downpour rainy weekend and it was cold. It was miserable for many, but at the same time fun for the kids to slop around on the fields. Well...I found out at the first game that the head coaches truck broke down and he was going to need to get it towed to Pottstown. He got a ride from some parents of one the kids we coached. After the first game, I was yearning for something hot to drink and so I asked the head coach if he wanted anything to drink. He ended up coming with me. And as we were talking I offered to wait with him when he was ready to call for a tow for his truck and transport him to where he needed to be. Fast-forward to later in the day, I gave him a ride to the location where he needed to get a tow. And then another coach joined us as we waited because he was in-between games and such. And so we just started having small talk about our lives and they started to ask me questions about the church and what it was like to be a pastor. I didn't push any agenda, but I was just transparent about my faith and what I was about. They were curious. The one had a background in Catholicism, but was no longer practicing. The conversation didn't go very far, but it was a small opening to talk about Jesus, the church and faith. As I'm telling you all this, I'm sure you were hoping for something shocking and crazy would've happened, but the truth is that these are few and far between. Most of the time, ministry moments are a series of small openings that eventually lead to a big opening. I hope that my non-threatening approach will open these coach's hearts to Christ someday, but I have no idea what God is doing. I'm just trying to be faithful by getting out in the community and exposing my heart to the people of the community. In the hope that Christ's light will shine through and I will have an opportunity to share my story of faith in Jesus. But if I don't put myself in these non-Christian social circles, I don't have any chance of sharing my faith story.

When I look at our passage, I have to admit, I'm a little jealous of Peter. I'm jealous that when he preached, all of a sudden 3,000 people come to faith in Christ Jesus. I've never had that kind of experience. I wish that as I was preaching this Word this morning that even 100 people would come to faith in Christ Jesus, but for whatever reason God has not ordained that to be so. We'll explore this a little deeper in the next few weeks when we begin our Book of Acts series, but one of the things that Peter does is build off of God's mighty work. In Acts 2, you may all be familiar with Pentecost. A "violent wind" comes, touched by the Holy Spirit, and every person speaking in different languages. And somehow every ethnic group is able to understand each other in their native language. God comes unexpectedly and in a mighty way. And on the heels of God's mighty work of the Holy Spirit, Peter preaches. Peter seizes the moment and preaches the gospel. He responds to God's call. Now imagine what's going through Peter's head at this point. Jesus died, resurrected, spoke with Peter after His death telling him to feed His sheep, Jesus then ascends to heaven and then Pentecost happens. Is your head spinning yet? If I'm Peter, I'm thinking, "What in the world is going on?" If I'm Peter, I might be thinking, "This is crazy! Is this of God or of Satan?" This isn't akin to the Torah or the Old Testament scriptures. Peter knows the crazy stories of God parting the Red Sea and God raining down fire at the call of Elijah. He knows of the trumpet sounds as the Israelites walked around Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. He knows these crazy stories. But it's one thing to know these crazy stories in the past tense than to experience a crazy story in the present tense. I'm surprised that the text doesn't acknowledge Peter's thoughts of doubt. That this couldn't possibly be happening. And he could have sneered as the others did in thinking that these crazy people at Pentecost were drunk on wine. He could have denied once again of Jesus and His mighty work. And yet he doesn't. This is Peter's moment. This is the moment where Peter has to decide that he is going to believe what God is doing and he is going to claim it.

Let's pause for a moment from the scripture story, when we look at our own lives, I believe we have a series of moments. We have a series of moments where we choose to believe that God is at work or He isn't at work. Sometimes we dismiss these moments as crazy. Or these moments are so unexpected, like Pentecost, that we become paralyzed in our response. To the point of not responding at all to what God is doing. Or these moments call for a degree of vulnerability and transparency that it makes us so uncomfortable that we decide that it would be easier to not respond. Or maybe we are so uncomfortable with sharing our faith, so embarrassed by our faith, so embarrassed by some who misrepresent our faith, that we choose in those moments to deny that we believe at all. Of course it's easier to believe among those who also believe, but harder among those who do not. Or we decide that it's better to stay quiet than to claim

that in this moment God is at work. This is the temptation. That when those moments come to claim God's mighty work. To claim God's story, we deny His story.

In Peter's moment, he decides that God is mightily at work. He dispels to the others that these people speaking in different languages are not drunk. It is too early in the day to be drunk on wine. He then goes on to preach the gospel and tell the story of Jesus and His mighty work. In this one sermon, Peter claims that Pentecost is God's mighty work and goes on to tell further of Jesus' mighty work on the cross. And because he chose to respond to God's work faithfully, 3,000 people come to Christ. Who knows what God will do when we respond faithfully to those moments where God is mightily at work? It takes great wisdom and eyes to see God's Kingdom at work.

And then we see a community of believers begins to form. ⁴²“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Notice that it wasn't just Peter performing and responding to God's mighty work, the other apostles were also performing God's great work among the people. “...wonders and signs...” were occurring. This is no small stuff. ⁴⁴“All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” See, as people came to know Jesus Christ, it compelled them to be part of something bigger. They were so moved by the Spirit that they decided to give up their possessions and share them with others. In our culture, sharing with such generosity is counter to the capitalist/consumeristic way of American culture. Among the new believers in Acts, some may have had much and some may have had little, but when they came together, everyone had just enough.

I wonder what it was like for the apostles. They studied under Jesus for so many years and learned so much over that time. They witnessed signs and wonders. They witnessed miracles. They soaked-in incredible teaching. And they saw the death, resurrection and ascension. These new believers were never going to know these experiences. They could tell of these experiences and of Jesus mighty work while He was on earth, but these new believers were never going to know, first hand, such experiences. And even as you look back at the gospels, the apostles really stumbled through casting out demons and sharing the good news of Jesus. But now in Acts, it seems as if they could do no wrong. They know what needs to be done and what they must do and they respond accordingly. They not only believe in Jesus, but they own their story and calling. So these experienced

and wise apostles, what do they do with these new believers? They don't like them. They don't have the same experiences. They're not going to entirely understand what they went through to get where they are. These apostles could act high and mighty and proud of all that they know and experienced with Jesus. They could snub their noses at these new believers. They could demand respect in an authoritarian way. That the apostles could do no wrong. And they were not to be questioned. While these new believers respected their experience and knowledge, there is no indication that the apostles acted with such arrogant and prideful behavior. Instead, ⁴⁴"All who believed were together and had all things in common;" The text doesn't distinguish between new and seasoned believers. It just says they were "...together and had all things in common." They were one. They were unified. And because of the synergy established between the apostles and the new believers, the gospel continued to spread. "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." Daily, people were being saved. Not every once-and-a-while. Daily.

I really appreciate the words of Biblical scholar Robert Wall, "A fellowship of believers shares more than common beliefs and core values; they display a profound regard for one another's spiritual and physical well-being as a community of friends." Profound regard. One of the critiques of small church is that people are too invasive. That they try to know everyone's business. And I could see how if you have something to hide or something you don't want people to see, that this would feel intrusive. But I believe we live in a culture that craves for intimacy. As much as we desire independence, we also desire intimacy. We seek it out in things like Facebook, but we find out over time that Facebook only provides a false sense of intimacy. There is a movement in the church where many people are moving away from attending mega-churches. Mega-churches have their place in the bigger Church. So I'm not trying to merely critique mega-churches or to toot our own horn. But many are leaving mega-churches because they can't provide the intimacy that maturing believers need and desire. It's hard to care for the spiritual and physical well-being of each other when you don't know each other.

Do you see how this is all interconnected? Sharing your story isn't just about witnessing. Sharing your story isn't just about creating bonds of friendship with other believers. Sharing your story isn't just about discipling new believers. Sharing your story is about all the above. It's about responding to those God moments by sharing what God has given you. He's given you a story to share with those who do not yet believe in Jesus Christ. It might not be a tract and you might not have a litany of scriptures in your back pocket, but you always have a story that God has built into the fabric of your life. Sharing your story is about creating a community of believers that has a profound regard for one another. That it is

willing to share all that they have with those who believe. This is a pervading theme throughout the book of Acts as you will discover in the coming weeks. Sharing your story is about helping new believers mature in the faith. To have a deeper understanding of faith in Jesus Christ. If you are willing to share your story, a beautiful synergy of life is created. New and seasoned believers come together. People of all languages come together. The young and the elderly compliment one another. People of all gifts and talents support one another. The life we all desire, is right here and it's out there. It's a combination of continuing the fellowship that we have and getting involved in communities that aren't explicitly Christian. Because if we don't rub shoulders in non-Christian social circles, there cannot be 3,000 people who could come to Christ in one sermon. There cannot be even 100 people coming to Christ. If we continue to hide within our beautiful fellowship, then we abuse and misuse God's story in our life. God wants to bring life to Providence Church. God wants to move in mighty ways just as he did at Pentecost. Just as he did as Peter preached. But will we respond to the moment? Will we respond to God's story? Will we respond to the Kingdom story? We can ignore it. We can hide from it. But we will miss out on the wonderful life, the adventure and the gift of life that Jesus Christ wants to give to all of us. That day by day the Lord would add to our number those who were being saved. Not for our glory, but for God's glory. Own your story. It matters. Share your story. It matters. Respond to God's invitation to His story. It matters. May we experience God's mighty work as we share our story. Christ's story in us. Amen.