

“WIRELESS: III – FACEBOOK”

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Acts 2:42-47

Mark 2:1-12

In the winter of 2004, in snowy Boston, five college friends came up with an idea. They were students at Harvard and they designed a new computer program – a program that would connect people to each other in a kind of social network. It sounded like a good idea when they came up with it, and they were anxious to see how it would work on the Harvard campus. That was all it was designed to do – to be a social network for Harvard students.

Well, no sooner had it been started up than it caught on like wild fire! The students loved posting what they were doing, and sending greetings to their friends, and asking for information from others. Before they knew what was happening, Facebook’s designers watched as it literally leapt off of the Harvard campus into cyberspace, and before long, became the biggest social network in the world. By last September, just eight and a half years after it started, Facebook had over one billion active users! One billion! I’m one of them.

Facebook isn’t for everybody. Some people, in fact, really don’t like it because well, sometimes people disclose too much on Facebook. But, I think, if you keep it in perspective, and know what you should and shouldn’t post, Facebook is a good way to communicate with a lot of people, and a great way to keep up with friends and family. I keep up with friends from long ago on Facebook – friends that I swore I would always write to or call, but never got around to doing it. Now, I keep up with them on Facebook.

What the Facebook designers intended, and what has become reality, is that Facebook creates community. In fact, Facebook users create their own community – they choose who will be their “friend” on Facebook – that is, who will receive their posts and vice-versa. It’s all about community.

And that is the metaphor for today’s sermon – community. Remember that the first sermon in this series was about Twitter, and I used the metaphor of “getting to the heart of the matter” and when it comes to faith, the heart of the matter is Jesus. Last week, the sermon started with WIFI, and the metaphor was connection – and for us, as Christians, the best way we connect to God is through

prayer. Today, with Facebook, the metaphor is community, and clearly, when it comes to community, the word of the day is “church.” The church is a community of people gathered together because of their common love for Jesus Christ, and a desire to carry His love into the world.

It has been that way from the very beginning. Actually, we heard about the very beginning of the church in this morning’s Epistle lesson that Bethany read to us. It was just after the Day of Pentecost – after the Spirit descended, and Peter preached to the crowd, 3000 people confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior and the church was born. It was an incredible moment – and what was all the more incredible according to one author I read this week – is that, rather than go on their way back into the world, rather than scatter to all corners, those new disciples stayed together in community.

And in that community, they worshiped, they learned, they loved, they cared for one another, they served each other and they served the world. Or as Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts wrote – they “devoted” themselves to these things. They became a community of faith – the early church.

And, I want to suggest to you this morning, that to this day, the church, the community of faith is devoted as well. It’s what makes us a community.

First, above all else, we are devoted to the Lord. We are who we are, we are the church, because God created, and still creates; because God, out of indescribable love for humanity, sent His only begotten Son into the world to save us; and because God lives and dwells among us in the Holy Spirit. We are here, before all else, because we love the Lord, and we want to, no, we need to, intentionally offer Him our praise and thanksgiving. And we come here, and praise Him together with others who love Him like we do. There’s incredible power and joy in worshiping and praising God together – it’s one of the things that glues us together as a community. We come here to know Jesus, as we say in our mission statement – to know Him, and praise Him – with our brothers and sisters in faith.

And as we offer our praise, amazingly, we find we receive so much in return. So many people have told me over the years, how much worship means to them – how, if they are not able to come to worship, their week doesn’t start out right, they’re just off center somehow.

One man named Andrew Martin wrote in a blog that I read this week, that when he comes out of church he has a sense of serenity in his soul. He even says that whenever he gets out of sorts, or seems restless, his wife will say to him, “For heaven’s sake Andrew, go to church! Now!” (On-line, “The Independent,” 9/12/13, Andrew Martin)

Maybe you know how he feels – that peace or serenity that fills your soul. Or maybe you have come out of church knowing an answer to a problem, or with a surer sense of what you should do with your life. Or maybe you just plain feel better and uplifted from having devoted yourself, even if just for one hour, to worshipping God, along with the rest of the community here.

So, first the community of faith, the church, devotes itself to the Lord. Secondly, the church, the community of faith, devotes itself to one another. That, I know, means the world to so many of you, and to me. You know, I come in this room early before every service every Sunday, and I delight in watching you greet one another. You love each other, and care about each other – I see it, as I watch you greet one another with hugs and kisses, and handshakes, or ribbing each other, or checking on one another. I see you, as one person so beautifully put it, “being Jesus to one another.”

When we say in our mission statement that we are a place where we come to be known by Jesus – one of the ways we do that, indeed, is through each other. Hopefully, more often than thought, we’re here for each other to love each other, and support each other, and work together with each other. It’s a place where we need never be alone, where, like “Cheers,” hopefully, everybody knows our name.

That’s so important, you know. When I invite you to sign the attendance register every week, and then take a look at it the second time it comes by you, I don’t do that to hear myself speak – I do that so that you know each other’s names. That’s so important.

You know, I read once about a woman who was in nursing school telling about how, one day, in class, the professor gave them a pop quiz. As this woman went along, she knew absolutely every answer, she knew she was “A-cing” that bad boy, until she got to the last question – and it was this: “What is the name of the woman who cleans the school?” She was stumped. She actually thought it was some kind of joke by the professor. Sure, she had seen the cleaning woman around lots of times. She knew she was tall, dark haired, and in her 50’s, but she had no clue what her name was. So she handed in her quiz, leaving that line blank. Before the class ended, one of the other students asked the professor if the last question would count toward their grade. “Oh, absolutely,” she replied, and then continued – “In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care. Even if all you can do is smile and say hello.” The woman who told this story said that she never forgot that lesson, and she also learned that the cleaning woman’s name was Dorothy. (On-line, “We are the Church,” Jeff Strite)

In the church, this community, we’re here for each other, we know each other, and we continually seek to get to know those with whom we’re unfamiliar. That’s what community is all about.

We also support one another, and I just want to share one brief story that I think paints a picture of the community of faith. One fall, a young woman decided she was going to do something brave and daring. She was going to take a road trip all by herself in her old, beat-up Honda Civic. And better yet, the trip was going to be from Alberta in Canada, to the Yukon. If she had bothered to ask anyone about the wisdom of such a venture, they would have told her she was out of her mind, she was putting herself in incredible danger. But being young and adventurous, she didn't bother to ask – she just set out on the road.

On the first evening of her trip, she stopped at a little motel for the night, and when she woke up the next day, she was dismayed to see how foggy it was. Still, undeterred, she went to a local diner to have breakfast before she hit the road, and there struck up a conversation with two long-distance truckers. “Where you headed?” they asked. She told them where she was headed, and they were thunderstruck – no one in their right mind would drive on that road in these conditions with that car! They tried to talk her out of it, but to no avail.

So you know what they said to her? “Well then, we're going to hug you.” Which meant, one of them would drive his big rig in front of her, and the other would follow her car. That way she would safely pass over the mountains, surrounded by their trucks. (On-line, sermonillustrations.com, “Fellowship”)

At its best, the church, the community of faith is like that – we hug people, if you will, we surround them through all their experiences of life. We celebrate their good times, and we hug them - like those truckers - we walk them through the bad. The church, the community of faith, is not only devoted to God, but we're devoted to each other.

And finally, we're devoted to the world, to the people outside our doors – or as our mission statement says, “we make Jesus known to others” – in any way we can.

The great preacher Adam Hamilton put it this way: “To be the church is to be light for the world. It is to work for the healing of our world. It is to offer hope. It is to show the way. It is to model for the rest of the world what life is meant to be. Every church is called to look at the broken places in their community and their world. And to be Christ's presence, shining his light.” (Adam Hamilton, “What if Church was a Verb?”)

It's not enough for us just to be community in here – no, we're called to take the community that is rooted here and grows here, and live it out in the world. Otherwise, it's just all about us.

A pastor told a story once about a man came to a new member class in his church. When the pastor asked the new members to talk about what they'd like to do as they became members, one man said this: “I have a very busy schedule. I

can't be called on for any service, like committee work or teaching, or other such things. I just won't be available for special projects or to help with setting up chairs or things like that. I just want to sit through Sunday worship and then go on about my business." And wait til you hear what the pastor said to him. He said, "You know what? I think you've come to the wrong church. The church you're looking for is three blocks down the road, on the right." So the man got up, followed the directions of the pastor, and soon came upon an abandoned, boarded up, closed down church building. It was a dead church – gone out of business. (On-line, "Be the Church!" Scott Bayles)

To be the church, to be the community of Christ, means being devoted not only to the Lord, and to one another, but also to God's world and God's people outside our doors. We do that so well, in so many ways, but I pray that we will always be ready to do more, for so many people are hurting, and so many need to know the love and healing power of Jesus Christ in their lives.

So, I want to close with a very brief story that I actually read on Facebook a couple of weeks ago. It was posted by a friend of mine – a man named Demetrio Beach, who happens to be our Conference Lay Leader. In a very unique way, he took the community, the church, into the world early one morning.

Like I said, it was a couple of weeks ago, in the early morning hours, and Demetrio was on his way to work. He was running low on gas, and so he pulled into a gas station, stopped his car at one of the pumps and got it. Demetrio is a very friendly, gregarious guy – always up, at least that's the only way I've ever seen him. Anyway, that morning, he was up as well, and when he got out of his car to pump the gas, he was singing – he was singing "Spirit of the Living God."

All of a sudden, from the other side of the gas pump, a woman starts singing with him – "Spirit of the Living God" – and actually starts harmonizing. They both sang the whole song, which is not very long, if you remember – and then Demetrio stepped around the pump to see the woman, and she stood there with tears streaming down her face. She said to him, "You can't believe how much I needed that today." And Demetrio asked if there was something he would pray for her.

In that small, wonderful way, in an early morning encounter at a gas station, the church, the community of faith, came to a woman who was hurting.

Thank God for the church – the community of faith. Thank God for it – because through this community we can be devoted to God, to one another, and to the world – we can know Jesus, be known by Him, and make Him known to others. Thanks be to God!

Amen.