

## All Around the Altar Talk - Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### Introducing the Theme

Good morning! It's great to see everyone at our All Around the Altar service, after such a long time. I hope that our memories of all those lockdowns are beginning to fade a bit as we enjoy a bit more normality again.

So, I have a really difficult question for you. This isn't a question about meeting for our Sunday service, it's a very general question about your family, friends, school, work, whatever:

**“Did you miss not being able to get together with people during the lockdowns”?**

(Raise your hand....) Most of us will say yes, I think! It was incredibly difficult!

But if I were to ask you, **why did you miss seeing people**, I wonder what answers you might give?

After all, most of us will have been able to call each other on the phone, or text or message each other, or better still, skype, facetime, zoom. So, why would you miss seeing people when you could still keep in contact in all those wonderful ways?

I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to turn to the person next to you, or the people around you, to chat together about:

**Why did you miss seeing people in the lockdown? What were the things you missed about not being able to get together?**

Possible answers?

Hugging  
eating together,  
chatting  
playing games together in groups  
physical presence is so important  
watching a film together  
sharing stories,  
listening ear when struggling  
Christmas, holidays

Human beings are made for being together, we're social creatures (even if we enjoy being by ourselves as well). Online stuff, phone calls etc were a great help during the lockdown but nothing can replace that physical human contact.

Over the past 18 months, our All Around the Altar service has continued with the wonderful assistance of Bruce and Steve, who've put all our recorded films together, and thanks to all the wonderful people who contributed films of themselves lighting candles, leading prayers and readings, etc. We are so thankful for technology for helping us to continue being able to worship.

But there's nothing like being able to be meet together again, in person, worshipping again here in the building, in person.

So, another question for you:

**What it is about being back together that makes you feel glad, happy?  
Why's it good to be here again?**

e.g.

Singing - singing at home not the same as worshipping together!

Chatting with each other

Seeing each other

Praying together

This morning, we're going to think about what it is about worshipping together that is so important. What is it about meeting together that is so special for God's people?

First, we're going to listen to our bible reading from Acts 2:42-47. It describes what church looked like for the first Christians, in the days and weeks just after Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

## **BIBLE READING**

### **Acts 2:42-47 The Fellowship of the Believers**

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the

temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

## **TALK**

Our reading is a description of what people experienced when they met together as the church just a few weeks after Jesus had risen and ascended to heaven, and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.

Those first few weeks and months must have been an amazing and exciting time as more and more people came to faith and joined this new community of believers. There were extraordinary things happening, with signs and wonders, miracles, and many people becoming Christians as they heard the disciples preach the gospel.

**TOGETHER - used three times in the description of the church. What stands out is that being together, worshipping together, learning together, sharing together was absolutely at the heart of the Christians' lives. COMMUNITY.**

There are many things that they probably did at home on their own like praising God, praying, reading the bible but the New Testament actually tells us very little about what Christians did as individuals - it's almost always about the life of the church as a community of people coming together. And there's just a few things that I want to help us draw from this picture of the church for why Being together as God's people is so important today too!

### **1) They came together to praise God and to learn together.**

Vision for our All Around the Altar services is:

“learning with and from each other no matter our differences in age or other things, focusing on spiritual growth with Christ at the very centre.”

Each one of us, on our own, can read pray, and read our bible and worship God at home. And that's really important.

But God's plan is for us to also learn together, from each other because we *all* have something to share (not just the preacher!). Because we all have our unique experience of God and what God has been teaching us to share with others.

It's a bit like a pearl necklace.

**(PICTURE)** One pearl on a string is great, but it's much better when it's joined by lots of other pearls!

**(PICTURE)** String of pearls

We all have our own pearl of wisdom about God to share with others. And there are times too when we don't feel very close to God and don't have a lot to share; in those times we need other people's pearls to help remind us that God is still at work. We need to hear the stories of the bible but also each other's stories to encourage us!

More of in the future??

**2) We heard how:** *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need*

As they met together, the Christians saw God do amazing things. But they were also inspired to help each other and care for each other in very practical ways. They helped each other in their different needs.

I need someone to read the bible verse: Hebrews 10:24

### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another*

As we meet together, God wants us to spur / encourage one another, not just in *believing* but in what we *do* to show God's love through the things we do.

### **Different versions:**

And let us consider how to *stir up one another* to love and good deeds.

**(ACTION OF STIRRING)**

and may we consider one another to *provoke* to love and to good works

**(CHALLENGE)**

Let us think of ways to *motivate one another* to acts of love and good works.

God's plan is that together we motivate / inspire one another to do good things, acts of love and kindness, and that together we can start imagining what we might do that helps serve the people living in our local community, along our street, our neighbours.

### **Something to chat with a partner about:**

What one good thing could you do for someone this week to show the love of God - at school, with friends, family - may be a word, an action....

If it helps, chat with each other about the types of things that people do that make you feel better about your day....that might help you as you think about what you might be able to do this week for someone else...

**Prayer: Lord, please help me to take whatever opportunity you give me to do something good for someone this week, to show them your love. Amen.**

**3. We heard how:** *They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

It was as the Christians shared together in worship that other people noticed them and started wanting to join them.

There's something really powerful about our life together as the church, that we can't achieve on our own as Christians.

I have an ornament with me this morning, a statue called Family. Two parents and a child – their arms flow into one another, to emphasise that they're one, united in love.

### **I wonder if the statue reminds you of something else?**

It reminds me of the Trinity: God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three, yet One, their love for one another flowing from one to another without any interruption.

As Christians on our own, of course, we can show God's love to other people. But actually, God's big plan is that it's our togetherness, the way we love one another as a community of Christians that can reflect most powerfully what He is like: that when people look at us and how we relate to each other, that they

actually see a reflection of God himself - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the perfect community of love, the Three in One.

Jesus's prayer for all Christians:

**John 17:22**

*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Jesus didn't pray that the church would be able to do loads of amazing miracles to show the world that God had sent him. He prayed that we would be united in love, so that people would believe God had sent him. come to believe in him I think that's why so many joined the early church - because they saw the love and the togetherness of the believers.

So, what is it that is so important about us meeting together as God's people? Why does it matter?

It's God's plan for us! Learning and sharing our faith together; spurring each other on to do good deeds, and reflecting what our God is like because of our love for one.

