

**ALL NATIONS IS A CHURCH THAT VALUES COMMUNITY**  
**Acts 2:42-47, 1 Cor 12:12-26**

For All Nations Presbyterian Church, 25 April 2021

**Introduction: the lure of privacy**

- Australians love privacy, having our own space.
  - I think this is one of the things that strikes many migrants and visitors from China and Singapore when they first arrive.
  - Everyone wants space. Preferably their own house with their own land.
  - And most Australians prefer to withdraw into their own houses, which tend to be comfortable, and do what they want to do.
  - They might choose to take part in activities or clubs when they want to, but often the commitment level to these groups is low.
  - In fact, almost every community group is reporting much lower levels of involvement over time compared to the past.
  - If you travel on the freeway in the mornings, you will see most people alone in their cars, in their own space.
  - If you catch public transport, there is very little talking and interaction, with most people on their device with headphones in.
  - The message is clear: stay away; I have no interest in engaging with you at all.
- Despite this intentional isolation and privacy, we know that community is something important.
  - We are promised community everywhere.
  - Schools are not made up of teachers and students and parents; they are made up, we are told, of a school community.
  - Over 55s villages promote themselves as a retirement community.
  - New housing estates promise a community where all the neighbours gather together in new playgrounds and over communal BBQs.
  - We are promised community, but it is hard to find.
  - Most people don't know their neighbours well and are not that engaged with others on a deep level.
- In this context, the Biblical model of church is jarring and distinctive.
  - We will be unpacking what the Bible says about the church today, focussing on the community aspect.
  - There are many places we could go, but for our purposes, we will use the end of Acts 2 as our base.
  - Why Acts 2? It is the first example of a Christian community in the NT.
  - And as we do this, we will see a great many useful things about what church can and should be like.

**TRANSITION** *Let's deal with the fundamental issue first:*

**1. There is no such thing as a Christian without a community (v41-42)**

- Have a look at Acts 2 with me. There is a real danger in only reading the section that we read this morning.
  - In our Bibles, there is a heading in between v41 and v42.
  - Mine says "the fellowship of the believers", but other versions will say something different.
  - Why is this a danger?
  - Firstly, because the heading was not there when Luke wrote Acts. It is not actually part of the Scripture at all.
    - It was added by a publisher later on.
  - But secondly and more importantly, it makes our brains think that we are dealing with an entirely new section.
  - But we are not.

- Seeing the connection between v41 and v42 is critical for us to understand what the Christian community is.
- So I want you to intentionally ignore that heading. We'll be seeing how v41 and v42 connect to one another.
  - What comes before the heading?
  - It is the account of what happened at Pentecost.
  - The disciples were speaking in tongues to the many people in Jerusalem for the festival from different countries.
  - Peter explained what this meant in a sermon that explained the gospel.
  - Many people responded and trusted in Jesus.
  - That climaxed in v41 with 3000 people being baptised and officially being part of the church.
- If this happened in modern Perth, what would happen next?
  - Everyone would chat for a while, then head home to their own houses.
  - Maybe turn up at church the following Sunday, but they would focus on their own faith.
  - Go look up some Bible teaching on the internet, pray as best you can, and then gather with other Christians when it is convenient.
  - That's not what happens in Acts 2.
- And here we see why it matters for us to ignore the heading; v42 flows straight on.
- They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.
  - They spent masses of time together.
  - Remember that previously most of these people didn't know one another.
  - Now they are sharing property, eating meals, and going to the temple together.
  - They are a community.
  - The word "all" comes up a lot here; v43 says awe came upon every soul, all who believed in v44; they are united.
- Well, you might say, that's Acts 2. That's a description of one point in history.
  - Just because it happened then doesn't mean it always happens that way.
  - Yes, that's true.
  - But this is a pattern we see over and over again.
  - People become Christians in the NT, and then they immediately form themselves into local communities.
  - We see it in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Thessalonica, everywhere.
  - These communities are known as the church.
- 'Church' is a word we use all the time but don't define as clearly as we should.
  - There is a big picture definition of the church.
  - It is all who trust in Jesus and their children in all places and all times.
  - So that means, if you trust in Jesus, you are by definition part of the church.
  - That is true.
- But I think church as a community is not just speaking of this worldwide community; it is more local than that.
  - A local community that knows one another, meets together, shares meals, learns together, and is united very deeply.
  - That's the picture in Acts 2, and when we see the examples of Ephesus and Philippi and everywhere else in the NT.
  - That is the norm; to be an active part of a local community of believers.
  - It is not enough to say you are part of some theoretical church; the norm is to be part of a real church where you know people and they know you.
  - I do have brothers and sisters in Christ in Namibia and Syria, but I don't personally know them or they me.
  - My church is this one, this community of people who I know and who know me.
- The church is a community, not like when you go to the cinema.
  - When you go to the cinema, you sit in the same room with lots of other people.
  - You are all there for the same reason, to see the same movie at the same time.

- But you have no intention of getting to know the others in the cinema other than anyone you went with.
- It never crosses your mind to do that. It would be weird to talk to others there you don't know.
- Church is not like that.
- We are all here today for the same reason, but I pray we want more out of this community than we do from the people in the cinema.
- In church, we care for the others in this room. We are deeply connected.
- We come not just for the event but for the people.
- A few weeks ago, we thought about the need for the Bible to correct our culture.
  - No culture is perfect.
  - And here is one example.
  - The broader culture in Perth values privacy and individualism.
  - The Bible consistently values community and connectionism.
  - Church is no optional extra for us.
  - You need the church, for all kinds of reasons we are about to unpack together.

**TRANSITION *Just being together is not enough:***

**2. A church community is devoted to the right things (v42-43)**

- The church is not the only community you could possibly join.
  - People gather together for all kinds of reasons.
  - Mother's groups, remote control car clubs, martial arts clubs, and chess associations are all communities of people.
  - They all give benefits to those who join.
  - But each of these is different to church.
- Note the big difference with church, which we see in Acts 2.
  - These are not all people exactly like one another with the same interests who gather together.
  - They just happened to hear the same sermon, and God changed their hearts to respond.
  - They may well not have chosen to be with the other people in this community.
  - Maybe they were wildly different; we know they came from various countries; remember the tongues?
- It's not just that this community is diverse; it matters what they do together.
- Let's return to Acts 2.
  - Look at v42 again.
  - We are told that they "devoted themselves" to four things.
    - That phrase "devoted themselves" has to do with perseverance, sticking with something.
    - These are things they were committed to and persisted with.
  - The first one is the apostle's teaching.
    - They gathered in the temple to hear the apostles tell them what Jesus commanded them to teach.
    - We don't have apostles anymore, but we have the Scriptures they wrote, which make up our NT.
  - The second thing is the fellowship; this is about community, about sharing.
    - They were committed to one another, the central theme of this sermon.
  - They were devoted to the breaking of bread, which most naturally is about the Lord's Supper, which probably happened over many meals.
  - And the last one is the prayers; being definite, "the" prayers, might mean the set times of prayer in the temple.
    - Though we also see many examples of other prayer times as a community as well.
- There were larger-scale meetings in the temple courts in v46.
  - And many, in fact daily, smaller group meetings in private houses as well.
  - And in each setting, they were excited about what God had done.
  - They were filled with awe, amazed at God's goodness to them and who God is.

- They had glad and generous hearts, as we read in v46.
- They were praising God, as v47 says.
- This was no drudgery; oh, I suppose I need to be with the church now.
- No, they were excited to be part of something incredible.
- As I mentioned, there are all kinds of clubs and social groups you can join.
- What do you think the football club talks about when they meet?
  - I would imagine they talk about football. It is what they have in common.
  - What about those in church, the Jesus club, if you like?
  - Well, football.
  - Most conversations we have are about our weeks, our work, and football, among other things.
  - We need to remember the joy at what Jesus has done for us and who God is.
  - We should be talking about this with one another.
  - It should be common for people to talk about the sermon, what they read in the Bible last week, and how they plan to serve Jesus.
  - Let's not become some generic social club; try this next time we meet together.
  - At morning tea, when we share meals, whatever it is, talk about the sermon.
  - Let's rejoice at being together as God's people, not just some random group of people.
- Some churches lose their way more fundamentally at this point when it comes to what the church should focus on and be devoted to.
  - Some churches become about social justice or political influence or something else.
  - We need to be about serving King Jesus.
  - We need to be devoted to teaching and love hearing God's word in different ways.
  - Sacraments, prayers, fellowship all belong at the front of what we do.
  - We could do many other things, but we would do well to take guidance from Acts 2 here on where our efforts should be spent.
- There are many ways you could structure a local church and its ministries well.
  - Any number of good ministries can be designed that focus on these four things.
  - But at the core is worship, meditation on the Scriptures, and joyfully being a family together.

***TRANSITION It is to this being a family together that we now turn:***

<b>3. A church community involves radical sharing and connection (v44-47)</b>
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- The church in Acts 2 strikes us mainly because of how radical they were.
  - They were radical, unusual, for their time as well; this is not how people normally behave.
  - Look at v44-45.
  - They were together with all things in common.
  - This is not a group of casual acquaintances; these are acting as close friends and family would.
  - They share as they need to so that those with little have enough.
- V45 is not describing communism, by the way; this is not forced selling and redistribution.
  - This is as any had need, as the end of the verse says.
  - The rich gladly used their wealth to serve the poorer ones.
  - That shows care and concern.
  - They know the one in need enough to do this, and they see the human need above their own comfort and wealth.
  - Not many would do that, even today.
  - We think that that other person being poor is not my problem; I have my own problems.
  - Most wealthy people, as a rule, are not generous to the poor.
- This radical sharing happened in a society that didn't do a good job of caring for the poor.
  - The government generally didn't do it at all.
  - The church did. And it got more and more of a reputation for doing it.
- I think this point catches our attention because we need this, and we have lost this a bit.

- Our society is in the middle of a loneliness epidemic, with many people having no close friends or family.
  - Many feel they don't belong.
  - Many are migrants with families overseas.
  - Some are estranged from their families, even if they live nearby.
  - Many live alone.
  - Some suffer from mental illnesses or are socially awkward.
  - The church can and should be a real blessing, especially to those who struggle to fit in in other places.
  - If we are functioning the right way, everyone should be welcome.
  - And whoever comes to us will be looked after.
- I need to say something here to those who have been in church a long time.
    - You are probably comfortable coming to church; you have many in our church you know.
    - You can spend all your time meeting your friends; this is a comfortable place for you.
    - This is not enough. This is not a big enough vision for church.
    - I will be frank here.
    - I find that those who have been in the church for many years generally are less interested in welcoming visitors than people who have been here a shorter time.
    - We have lots of new people among us, even in the past few months.
    - Do you know their names? Have you eaten a meal with any of them?
    - Could you identify their kids and who belongs to which family?
    - The church community should be welcoming to all; we need to strive for this, helping everyone to be included.
- Our church has grown quite strongly in the past couple of years, which means the feel of our church community is different.
    - When you have 40 or 50 people, you can know everyone pretty well.
    - Now we need to make an effort to meet more people.
    - Knowing one another may not 'just happen'.
    - But we need to, copying Acts 2, provide practical help when needed.
      - And All Nations has a long history of doing this.
      - Many babies have been dressed and supplied by previous parents.
      - Many houses have been outfitted with furniture.
      - Many people have been helped to move house.
      - Many bills have been paid.
      - This is a great witness, and we need to strive to do this more as we grow and the needs also grow.
- And as we saw a week or two ago, our church community needs to cross cultural lines.
    - Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins.
    - He died for all who trust in Him; we are equally saved, equally citizens, equally part of God's family.
    - We are not ranked as we are in the world, with some being more important; we are to be a family here.
    - We are equal in God's sight; that person over there is someone Jesus loved enough he died for them.
    - We need to welcome them as Christ Jesus welcomed us.
    - If we do that, we will be unlike any community in our world, and it will be attractive to those who come to know us.

**TRANSITION** *That needs to be true: we should be standing out:*

<b>4. A church community should be a blessing both to its members and to others (v47)</b>
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- Can you imagine what it would have been like to be part of the church family in Acts 2?
  - People know you and love you.
  - You are with people who also love Jesus and are keen to learn and grow.
  - I pray you have had a taste of this at All Nations; we can always grow and be better at this, but that's what we want to be.

- Something we will be unpacking next week is how we should function with everyone serving one another, but you can see this illustrated in Acts 2 as well.
  - The apostles are key, sure, but they can't be in every house.
  - The apostles do signs and wonders and teach in the temple courts.
  - But the action happening in the community is not just from the leaders.
  - Ordinary people were selling possessions and giving the money away.
  - Some opened their houses and cooked.
  - Others committed to coming for daily worship.
  - They share bread; they prayed; they were all actively involved.
  - This is a picture of what we want to be.
  
- Church, at its best, offers those who come something they cannot find anywhere else.
  - People who are not only interested in your shared interest; they are interested in you.
  - People who know what it is like to be loved by Jesus and who want to love you as love was shown to them.
  - In fact, we have seen the attraction of a genuine Christian community in our denomination's church plant in Fremantle.
  - Fremantle is an odd place, with many alternative lifestyles celebrated.
  - Many people have stumbled into Fremantle Church and been welcomed and noticed the warmth they received.
  - They are not all believers yet, but they identify with the church as their community.
  - That's how it should be. We have community that others don't find anywhere else.
  
- With a church community, you get what you put in.
  - Let me give you a tip for a great way to feel like you belong.
  - Go to a homegroup.
  - I know that doesn't sound so radical, but it makes a big difference.
  - If your only experience of church is a large Sunday gathering, people don't have a chance to get to know you well.
  - If you meet with a smaller group regularly, people will know you, and you will know them.
  - Morning tea is intimidating for many; a smaller group helps with going deeper and knowing one another better.
  
- In v47, we read that the early church found favour with all the people.
  - This group was doing genuine good for society.
  - It was being noticed.
  - And many were becoming believers.
  - Sure, this is the work of the Lord; v47 makes that very clear.
  - But where do others hear the gospel and see it lived out? The church.
  
- We must have a community, but not just be focussed on ourselves.
  - We need to be impacting our local communities through the church too.
  - That may be through church ministries like English classes.
  - Maybe through inviting people in some way to church or Bible study or meals.
  - Maybe through getting your Christian and non-Christian friends eating together.
  - We have a lot to offer the world around us.
  - When they see the love such different people show for one another, they cannot help but ask why this is.
  - And this gives us an opportunity to speak about Jesus.

**TRANSITION** *I also need to say something implied here that we need to be clear on:*

<b>5. Commitment to a local church community should be normal</b>
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- I know 'commitment' is a bit of a dirty word for some people.
  - We like phone contracts that don't tie us in.
  - We like gym memberships that we can leave after a month.
  - Commitment is something many are moving away from.

- Many people view the church as a changeable commodity too.
  - Some go so far as deciding week to week which church to visit.
  - Some go to a church for a while, then make a change and go to another one.
  - Many come to church some weeks but not all the time; it depends on what else is happening.
- Now, I do have a vested interest here, of course, but I think a commitment to the local church is incredibly important.
  - By that, I mean a commitment to come often and get involved.
  - And also to remain at the one church for a long time, not to mix and match, or move unless you have a very good reason to.
- Why does this matter? Can't I find good Bible teaching in other churches?
  - Yes you can. Or on the internet.
  - But the church is more than the service you get on a Sunday.
  - It is a family.
  - You don't easily decide to move out from your physical family into the house of another family.
  - You need a good reason, and it should be an odd thing, not the normal thing to do.
- But there is a deeper reason for commitment to a local church community.
  - Think about the Acts 2 community.
  - For them to love one another, to support and grow and be accountable to each other, they need to know one another.
  - Some people don't get involved enough in church for people to know you well.
  - And then they complain that they don't feel like they belong.
- There will come a time when things get hard for you at church.
  - We are sinful people.
  - Acts 2 is not the whole picture; Ananias and Sapphira happened only a few chapters later on.
  - You will get into conflict with someone.
  - You will be angry, possibly even at me, at something that is preached.
  - Perhaps you will disagree with a decision the elders make.
  - The knee-jerk reaction at that moment is to leave the church.
  - Many do that in churches; it has happened here before.
  - But it is then, at that exact point, that you need to stay for your own good.
  - You need to work through that issue with me, the elders, or the one who offended you.
  - And in doing so, everyone grows.
  - Long term, being in a church that knows and loves you will keep you accountable.
  - Many of you have experienced the many phone calls and texts you received from people if you miss church!
  - If you are part of the family, you are missed when you are not here.
  - You have pastors and elders who visit you and know you, and ask you personal things.
- In our world obsessed with privacy, we need community.
  - We need it more than ever.

<b>Concluding challenge: how do you think about the others in church?</b>
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- We are not in a cinema.
  - We are not on a bus.
- At cinemas and on buses, we are heading the same way but have no interaction with the others around us.
- We are a community.
  - Loving one another, knowing one another, with every person valuable to us.
  - People will frustrate you.
  - Even Christian people. I am sure I frustrate you sometimes too!
  - Yet we are a gift to each other.

- The local church has the capacity to be of massive benefit to all of us, and a great reflection of the work Jesus has done.
- Church is not an event you go to.
  - It is not a presentation on a Sunday.
  - It is not a physical location.
  - It is the community, the people.
  - You are the church when you gather with others at home or one to one or in some group.
  - We need each other.
  - God has given us to one another.
  - Let's make sure we act like the united community God made us.
  - We need to welcome everyone.
  - We need to look to share meals and have real conversations with everyone, not just our friends and people like us.
  - And as we do this, as we devote ourselves to Scripture, to the fellowship, to sacraments and prayer, we will grow together.
  - Let's do all we can to make this local church community a beacon to a world that values privacy.
  - We have something special because of what Jesus has done.
  - Let's not just speak about Jesus; let's show what he has done in how we love one another.