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Becoming Together - IV
Eating Together
Acts 2:42-47
March 12, 2017, Jeff Germo

This is sermon number four in our series called *Becoming Together*, based on Acts 2:42-47. Today we are going to focus on the third thing Luke says the early church devoted themselves to, eating together. This one is the most fun out of the four. To me, it seems like a strange thing to be devoted to. I can see devoting ourselves to the Apostles' teaching as important. I can understand how fellowship would be something we should be devoted to, and certainly to prayer. Somehow, this one does not seem quite as important as the others. It seems utilitarian. To me, eating is something I do because if I don't do it I won't last long. I need to eat to live. That is a fact of life for all of us. We are all the same that way.

Maybe that's one of the reasons eating together is so important. When we eat together we sit down at the same level, eye to eye. We all need food to survive. There is something about eating together that brings down walls. When we eat together we are reminded that we are equals. There is no hierarchy at the table.

I have many memories growing up of our family going to someone's home after church for lunch, or them coming over to our place. There were seven kids in our family so it took a pretty big commitment to invite us over. And we never ate and ran. It was usually an all day event. We would start with lunch. It would usually be a big deal; a roast beef, ham or turkey with all the fixings, and then a selection of desserts after we had loosened our belts and visited for a while in the living room.

After dessert the kids would play together and eventually, either our host or my parents, depending on if we were at our place or someone else's, would say, "Well, it's nearly supper time. We might as well eat some leftovers." And we would all gather around again and eat together. Eating together was very important to the culture I grew up in.

When you read the Gospels you see Jesus spending quite a bit of time eating and drinking with others. He ate with all kinds of people. He spent so much time eating and drinking with people that the Pharisees and teachers of the law accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard. But, he did it because it was at those meals where the walls came down, the masks came off, and hearts were open, so real ministry could happen.

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When we eat together walls come down and bridges are built.

Let's read our passage once again. And once more, so we understand the context, let's set the scene. Jesus had been crucified. Three days later he rose from the dead. He then spent forty days with his disciples teaching them what it means to live with him in his Kingdom. After this he told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them in power so they would be enabled to be his witnesses. Once telling them this, Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud while they watched.

While they were waiting in a room in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit fell on them and they all began to speak in different languages that were unknown to them. The noise of 120 of them praising God at the same time in different languages created such a scene that a huge crowd gathered around them and asked them what was going on and how it was possible that they were speaking foreign languages.

That gave Peter the opportunity, newly empowered by the Holy Spirit, to explain through the Old Testament Scriptures, how Jesus was the Messiah they had all been waiting for, and that they had crucified him. They were cut to the core by this revelation, and asked what they should do. Peter told

them they needed to repent, which means to turn from rebellion against God and trust that Jesus is the Messiah who could save them. Three thousand of them believed and were baptized on that one day.

We will pick it up from there.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

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⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

So, these first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to four things.

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1. The Apostles Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Eating Together
4. Prayer

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The passage says that all of these first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to sharing meals, including the Lord's Supper. It says they met with each other in their homes and “**shared their meals with great joy and generosity.**”

In the original Greek it doesn't say they shared the “Lord's Supper” together. It simply says they broke bread together, in verse 42, and in verse 46 it says every day they met in the Temple and ate together and received their food with glad and humble hearts. The implication is that they likely shared the Lord's Supper together, since Jesus told them to continue doing so to remember his death, and sometimes, “to break bread” means to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The main point however was that they wanted to be together. They were happy to eat together, sharing their food and enjoying each others' company and fellowshiping around the mission of Jesus.

This is exactly what I saw happen last Sunday here at CRBC. We met together and enjoyed each others' company. We had so many people we had to set up more tables and chairs. My hope is that we are going to add to that number today. It was such a beautiful thing I saw. People were working together, bringing food to share, setting up tables and chairs, enjoying the different kinds of food. I heard lots of laughter. A few people asked me how they could become members. It was an exciting day.

Many people were mixing with people they didn't normally mix with. And I know for some of us this takes some courage. It really does for me and I know some of you can relate.

Because of the many times my family moved around when I was a kid, my narrative is that I do not belong in any group. I believe I am on the outside. On the outside is the most comfortable place for me to be. It is comfortable *and* uncomfortable at the same time. It's *comfortable* because it's natural. It's *uncomfortable* because I really do want to be on the inside. My heart belief, however, is that I do not belong, and so if I am going to do the thing I really long for I have to go against everything in me that says

I do not belong anywhere. Consequently, Sunday mornings are uncomfortable for me, and the potlucks are completely out of my comfort zone. I have to fight my natural impulses that tell me it would be better for me to just escape and go home and curl up on the couch and watch one of the basketball games we have recorded.

However, I know what I *need* is real, authentic fellowship, so I do what does not come naturally because the mission of Jesus is at stake. I know there are many of you here who similarly have some social anxiety and you do not want to do the thing you know you should do. It is uncomfortable. I would encourage you to join me in practicing eating together with our brothers and sisters in Christ around the mission of Jesus.

Last Wednesday at Power House, which is a mid-week family ministry that Leora, Callista and Zach lead, they had a family Carnival that they publicized through social media. Normally they have about one hundred people on Wednesdays. This last Wednesday they had about double that. Many from the community who normally do not attend church came to share in the activities and eat together. It was so thrilling to hear the report of what happened.

In every culture, eating together is important. It was important in Jesus' time as well. The most famous meal in the Bible, and maybe of all time, was the last meal Jesus had with his disciples. In that culture they didn't sit on chairs around a table when they ate.

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Luke 22:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

That is the ESV. The NLT says, "***They sat down together at the table.***" The Greek word used here simply means to assume the posture of eating, which was to lean down. That was their posture back then when they ate together. They would lay on one side, resting on their left arm and eating with their right.

They reclined. They got down low. They really were eye-to-eye, much more than we are when we sit at a table on chairs. It was intimate. And here in Luke 22, Jesus would have his last meal with his disciples where he would share, once more, the news that he would very soon be arrested and then crucified.

There are many times in the Gospels that tell of Jesus having meals with different groups of people. Here's another one in Mark.

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Mark 2:13–17 (NLT)

¹³ Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him. ¹⁵ Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.)

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¹⁶ But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?" ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

The sight of Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and "sinners" was abhorrent to the Jews and especially to these very religious Pharisees and teachers of the law. Religious Jews in that day would

not eat with Gentiles. And they wouldn't eat with the tax collectors because they were seen as the lowest form of scum. They were Jews working for the Roman government collecting taxes from their own people and extorting extra to line their own pockets. In the eyes of the Jews back then there was nobody lower than a tax collector.

So, here Jesus is, with his disciples, modelling this reprehensible behaviour. It becomes even more clear how abhorrent it would have looked to them when you realize that verse 15 literally says that they were *reclining to eat* with people the Pharisees and teachers of the law thought of as scum.

They were eye to eye. Vulnerable. As if they were equals. They were welcoming, open and authentic. There is something about eating together that brings down walls. It builds bridges so a real heart connection can happen and thus opens the door to true fellowship.

In every culture it seems to be the same. When I go to Israel and stay with my friends in the Golan Heights, right on the Syrian border, I stay with them for a couple days and the only thing we do is sit or, actually, recline on the floor, on cushions with tea and food and we talk. It seemed a little strange to me at first that we never really did anything, but sit and recline, drink tea and eat and talk. But it was very intimate.

The first time I stayed with them for three days, and on the day I left, we all hugged at the door and the Mahmod said, "Thank you for sitting with us." It was very important to them. We were different religions. They are Druze, which is a mix of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and a bit of reincarnation thrown in. Walls were broken down. Bridges were built and I was able to tell them the story of Jesus. When I told him that Jesus was God in human form and that he came to rescue us so we could have a relationship with God he was silent for a few seconds. Then he translated it for his family and smiled, and said, "Thank you. That is very wonderful."

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That is what eating together does. **It tears down walls and builds bridges.**

The Psalmist in chapter 23 says,

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Psalm 23:5 (NLT)

⁵ You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

Eating together tears down walls and builds bridges. Isn't that great?

Eating together is so important that when we get to heaven we are all going to gather at a spectacular banquet and share a meal with each other and with Jesus.

Isaiah prophecies about this banquet hundreds of years before Jesus.

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Isaiah 25:6 (NLT)

⁶ In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.

Doesn't that sound like something to look forward to?

Here's what the book of Revelation says. Revelation is the last book in the Bible and it talks about what is going to happen in the end times.

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Revelation 19:7–10 (NLT)

⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. ⁸ She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.” For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people.

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⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are true words that come from God.” ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said, “No, don’t worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers and sisters who testify about their faith in Jesus. Worship only God. For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.”

Jesus is represented as the Groom and we, the church, his body on earth, are his bride. One day we will be united together at a spectacular wedding feast that will be a spread like we have never before experienced. We will enjoy the most intimate, authentic fellowship we could ever imagine, with each other and with Jesus. This is what we have to look forward to in the end.

Every relationship will have will be filled with true peace, joy and love. We will never again have to wonder where we stand in any of our relationships. There will be no worry. We will have no fears of any kind because we will be with The One who is completely sovereign over everything. The true *shalom* that we all long for will be ours.

That is why we are in training right now. This time we have on earth, while we are waiting for Jesus is our training ground. We get to practice loving each other and eating together and enjoying one another now as a foreshadowing of what is to come.

Here’s what Paul said to his young protégé Timothy. Listen closely.

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1 Timothy 4:8–10 (NLT)

⁸ “Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.” ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it. ¹⁰ This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.

What are we supposed to be spending our time on while we are waiting for Christ’s return? Training in godliness. We get to practice all the fruits of the Spirit. We train in righteousness. And somehow, Paul says that has benefit, not only for this life, but for the life to come. I have no idea how all that works. I only know that is what Paul told his apprentice, Timothy.

We practice down here for what we are looking forward to when Jesus returns. He is inviting us to join him and allow him to train us bear more fruit.

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Revelation 3:20 (NLT)

²⁰ “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

Jesus is inviting us to eat together with him. He is inviting us to share intimacy with him. And as we said earlier, we, the church, are the Body of Christ on earth. That means when we eat together, we are

eating with Jesus. "***When two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them***" (Matthew 18:20). That is what fellowship is.

Here's the deal. Jesus is not inviting us to something we don't already want. He is inviting us to take steps towards each other for the thing our hearts already long for. We long for the kinds of relationships where we don't have to pretend. We long to be accepted just the way we are with all our faults and warts and imperfections. We also long for the kind of relationships where we would help each other, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in the likeness of Jesus so authentic relationships are possible, and so the Kingdom of God can be expanded through us.

That is what he is inviting us to.

²⁰ ***"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.***

Before the worship team leads us in the song, *Build Your Kingdom Here*, watch this video.
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Becoming Together - IV
Eating Together
Acts 2:42-47
Week of March 12, 2017

Objective of this study: To see how eating together is a part of God's plan to build fellowship.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Work (30-45 minutes)

This week have a potluck together. Spend the time around the table, unrushed, and enjoy each others' company.

Practice these conversation tips:

1. Listen first.
2. If someone brings up a topic, don't first say how their story relates to you. Ask a question to draw them out. Listen carefully. Don't be thinking about what you want to say next.
3. Don't dominate the airspace. Make sure nobody is left out of the conversation unless they want to be.
4. Don't interrupt. Listen.
5. Don't give advice. Ask questions. And listen to the answers.
6. And don't forget to listen. I mean really listen.

POSSIBLE Conversation Topics

7. What are some family memories you have about eating together?
8. Describe some cultural experiences you have had around eating together.
9. Cilantro?
10. Tell me about the family you grew up with?
11. How would you describe your personality? Introvert/Extrovert - Fight/Flight - Goal oriented/People oriented -
12. **Don't forget to listen! And ask more questions.**
13. What is the most transformation thing that has happened in your life this year?
14. How have you seen God work in your life recently?
15. How have you grown in the last year?
16. Which fruit of the Spirit do you see yourself growing in the most lately? How has that growth taken place?
17. How has God been teaching you to trust him?
18. Are there unbelieving people in your life that Jesus is loving through you? How can your group pray for you in that regard?
19. What is the thing that weighs most heavily on your heart these days? How are you tempted to worry?
20. What insecurities do you have that you are trying to overcome?

21.