

SERMON: "Welcome Back: *The Family of Faith.*"

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, October 3, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

[My mother:special-reserved for special occasions – those when her 3children/9grandchildren (Birds in the nest)/all gathered together around a table to enjoy a meal she has prepared:"I'm so glad that you are all here!" Know what?/So am I! I'm glad that you are here/there – choose to join your voice/prayers with ours this morning.]

You've picked a good Sunday – the day on which we are celebrating Communion, and observing World Communion Sunday; the day on which Christians all around the world will gather with to celebrate the meal at the centre of our faith. Think of it: around the world – regardless of how/where, Christians will come from east/west, north/south to gather at the Table of Christ to partake in a common meal – a meal that not only unites every Christian with Christ, but also unite each of us to each other. This week 2.7 billion Christians will be invited to/be "*come*"/*Welcomed*" be-with God at His Table so that they/we might be nourished/sustained/built up into a community/to be the Church – the Body of Christ in/to the world.

[But, we're not just taking part in some symbolic act we are taking part in a family meal! Why? Because it's what families do.Families come together – they gather/celebrate good times/mark/observe the sadder moments:come together to know each other to tell 'the story'/witness to the past/share in the present/hope for the future; they come together to care for/look after/console/build up – and to forgive one another; they come together to share/help one another/pick each other up; and – always – they come together at the table/gave thanks/ate/enjoyed each other's' company. This is what families do. But it takes work. Building a good family/maintaining any healthy relationship – all takes work:always has/will – don't just happen.require intentional effort/commitment/participation – and a lot of grace! Same can be said about being the family of faith!]

If there's one thing that the Acts 2 Church did – according to the reading we just heard – they spent time together:they lived/worshiped/ate together/shared everything in common/helped each other out: and did so willingly/joyfully. It is God's will for His Church – for this Church – to be a strong/healthy family, and for us to do the necessary work to ensure its health. To do this we must be authentic to who we were created to be/where we are/we must truly reflect Christ's compassionate nature by living out our love for our neighbour/we must live sacrificially by completely trusting God in all that we say/do as individuals/community/family of faith. But before we can do any of this, we must make a simple/essential choice to be a part of God's family of faith.

Why is this important? Well, simply put, Church is not a place you merely go to – it's not something you attend;Church is a family you belong to. While it's true you can't pick your biological family – we must choose to belong to the God's/family of faith. Last week we witnessed the three new Elders stand before you/community, make a profession of faith/choosing to put their faith into action/live out their/the responsibilities of belonging to God's family/Body of Christ. Entering God's family of faith requires we make a choice; living up to our choice takes commitment – and participation. Read the Bible:nowhere does it

refer to worship as solitary act – whenever worship is mentioned it is always a communal activity.

The Acts 2/1st Century Church – was not just the Body of Christ, it was the embodiment of who/what Jesus was/would do. It was a community based on the belief that Jesus was the Risen Son of God whose teachings called for a radically different way of relating to/be-ing with one another. It was a community that expressed their love for God by loving their neighbours in ways that erased all boundaries, that all eliminated barriers, and that treated each other as they had been treated by God. It was a community that was transformed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. And, as God blessed it, it became a community that, in turn, transformed the world! This is the power of community: when we come together to know God and to be known by one another something wonderful happens – something God-blessed and empowered happens! *This is why I'm so glad that you are all here!*

Friends, now, as we turn toward the Table and the meal that offers us the love of God and the promise of being transformed by grace – let us respond to God's invitation to meet Him here/accept – and welcome – one another. It is at the Table where we are each invited/up and into Communion with God through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. It is at the Table – “family table”/and all that it means – that we are truly the Body of Christ/Church/Family of faith. Amen.