

**Meeting Together**  
**Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:19-25**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's that time of year... summer vacation is wrapping up and everyone is transitioning back into their regular routine.

The kids go back to school and your daily routine goes back to making sure that homework is finished, lunches are packed, and that everyone is out the door on time in the morning to get to where they need to be.

And in the evenings the kids need a ride to their Scouts or Girl Guides program, their music lessons or dance class, and you have make sure they get to their soccer, football, or hockey practice, and you wouldn't be a very good parent if you didn't make it out to a few of their games on the weekend as well.

So we're all getting back to the busy season right now – and even if your situation doesn't deal with school and after school programs, it still affects you as you interact with others who do.

Colleagues are less available for meetings, friends become too busy to get together for coffee – and the morning drive to work gets considerably busier and more congested between 8-9am!

This is the time of year when it feels like everything and everyone demands our time and commitment and engagement - all at the same time.

And while there is a certain amount of comfortable familiarity that getting back into the busy fall routine brings – often times it just feels overwhelming.

And when we feel overwhelmed it becomes easy to start to let go of things which might seem redundant, or not as important, or perhaps don't demand our time and attention as insistently the way other things do.

And brothers and sisters, as Valleyview resumes its ministries which are meant to help you and your children grow and make measurable progress as disciples of Jesus Christ...

I recognize and understand, and also feel, that it can all be a little overwhelming and the last thing I want is for us to experience Sunday worship, a Youth activity, Prayer Ministry or a Christ Care meeting as just another obligation to fit into our busy fall schedule.

And so there are two things that I want to offer as encouragement for us in regards to this...

First, as the scripture passage from Hebrews 10:25 says, let's not give up meeting together. Even though we have busy schedules and it can feel overwhelming – don't let meeting with other Christians for worship, or ministry or fellowship slide by the wayside. It's too important.

Secondly, I want to reassure you that as we organize our ministries and meetings at Valleyview we recognize God has blessed us with many opportunities to use our gifts and enjoy His creation, so we don't want to unnecessarily increase the amount of meetings needed to help you grow as Christ's disciples.

Now in terms of growing in discipleship, many of you know we use the Natural Church Development survey to help us determine what areas of discipleship we need to be working on.

And this year's survey revealed that our lowest area was in Loving Relationships – now don't panic! This doesn't mean we are an unfriendly church – we are very friendly!

In fact if you look at our results for the Loving Relationship questions you'll see that the question regarding people having bitterness towards each other is in the 84<sup>th</sup> health percentile!

However, when it comes to us telling others they are doing a good job at things – our health percentile is only 42. Not terrible but it can certainly get healthier...

And two other areas; being able to rely on our friends at church, and the leaders of various ministries showing concern for peoples personal issues are just below average in terms of health. Not terrible but definitely something we can grow in.

Now I don't want to go through all of the NCD results with you this morning, I'm just offering you a glimpse of what the survey identified as below average in terms of church health that we need to work on.

And I'm doing this because I would like you to see how our Christ Care small groups program is actually the best way to address and work on all of these areas and help Valleyview become even healthier than it already.

Not only do the four elements of Christ Care cover all these issues through Biblical Training, Prayer and Worship, Care and fellowship and Serving Others, but through implementing these four aspects into existing ministries and groups we eliminate the need for people to add yet another meeting into their already busy schedules.

Now I'm sure you appreciate that consideration, and having seen which areas our survey results have identified you can probably agree that the four foci of Christ Care does indeed address them, and this is a good thing.

But brothers and sisters that in and of itself will probably not be enough to convince you of the importance of actually meeting together to study, pray, worship and serve others apart from Sunday morning worship.

The truth is that while we are all busy - swamped with good things – we can always somehow make time and find time for the things that we are passionate about and are important to us.

So with that in mind, I want to look at our two scripture passages this morning to see how they inform us about what is actually at the heart of Christ Care groups and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit would help us to become passionate about that so that we can find the time to be a part of a group and grow in our discipleship.

So I want to ask you to identify something that you are already extremely passionate about... and think about some event that would make you over-the-top, like a kid at Christmas, crazy excited!

Maybe it is Christmas and all the parties and celebrations that go along with it?

Or maybe it would be getting tickets for the final Stanley Cup playoff game with a meet and greet the players afterwards?

Or what if you had front row seats to see your favorite band along with a backstage pass? Or the chance to have dinner date with your favorite author, or attend a movie premier with your favorite actor or actress?

These are things which you are passionate about and you would find and make time to attend.

And what if you were able to attend this amazing opportunity as part of a small, select group of people or with some of your closest friends?

It wouldn't be too far off to think that after the event you would get together and reminisce about it and talk about it...

Because while other people might be amazed at your experience when you tell them about it, there is something deeper and more meaningful about getting together and being with those who shared that experience with you.

Does this make sense to you?

Good, because that means you can relate to what was happening with the group of people – those early believers – which we read about in our Acts 2 scripture passage today.

All of these people had just experienced the out pouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

They heard Peter explain that Jesus Christ as the promised messiah, indict them for their role in his crucifixion, offer them hope in proclaiming His resurrection and victory over death, and they believed the message that they could be forgiven of their sins in Jesus name and receive the Holy Spirit!

What an amazing event to be part of and experience!

And for as much as they went around telling others about this amazing experience – how could they not... they wanted and needed to gather together with others who had experienced it as well.

*So vs. 46 says "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together..."*

So we see it was a priority to meet and eat together on a regular basis, not because it was one more thing they needed to do – but because they had this amazing shared experience of the Holy Spirit bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ.

And they needed to express their joy and happiness for what God had done to them – so it was natural for them to gather together in the temple to worship and praise God, together!

And they wanted to understand better this life changing work of the Holy Spirit and what it meant for their lives. So we read in vs. 42 *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..."*

And this devotion to study and meeting together meant that many of these people, who had originally travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover Celebrations, were staying longer than what they had planned and prepared for. They were running out of money and food and supplies.

However those who were from Jerusalem sold property to be able to freely give and support those who shared their experience – the experience of their sins being freely forgiven and the Holy Spirit being freely poured out upon them.

This is why they freely gave to anyone within their "community," who had a need.

And so it becomes even more obvious that their meeting together, studying together and even supporting each other was not something that done out of obligation – but very much flowed out of the amazing experience and new beliefs which vs. 44 says formed the basis for their being together as a group.

Now, we've all had experiences where we were part of a group and we felt like we just didn't belong... There wasn't an experience of common unity, community or as vs 44 describes it, of *"having everything in common."*

Maybe you were the only person of your race or culture in your workplace or at a social function... maybe you were the only kid in your class who grew up without a TV in the house...

Maybe you are the only Oilers fan watching your team play the Flames at the local sports bar...

Friends, the lack of a shared experience or values and beliefs can prevent us from really feeling like we belong to a group.

And Pentecost was such an amazing and unique event for these early Christians to experience that one might think this community was going to stay a bit exclusive, one of those situations where you kind of had to be there to really get it.

But what we see happening in Acts 2 is that as these early Christians met together, studying, worshipping, eating and fellowshiping and serving each other – other people joined!

How is that possible? These people hadn't been at Pentecost, they hadn't experienced the same event which the original group of believers had.

But that didn't matter, because when the early Christians gathered together and learned, worshipped, prayed, ate in each other's home and gave to people in need it the Holy Spirit was moving and working in their midst and it was like they were experiencing Pentecost all over again!

Other people, who were checking them out, who were curious about what was going on, were able to share in these meeting experiences formed by the initial experience and so they joined- because now they had also experienced what it was all about!

So vs. 47 says *“The Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved!”*

So when we meet together and share and pray and worship and do things together that are based on the work of Jesus Christ, those who are visiting or checking things out can experience the Holy Spirit revealing Jesus Christ to them as well – just as those who experienced the first Pentecost did.

This is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is still poured out today.

When even two or three of us meet together in Jesus name, brothers and sisters our Lord is present, we embody Him – just as He said we would. (Mat 18:20)

And this is why later on in the New Testament, we are taught that any group of Christians, who are gathering and meeting together, are members of the Body of Christ.

So if people can find and make time for the things they are passionate about and are important to them – it’s easy to see why Christians will make time to continue meeting together.

And yet the sad truth is that the passion and the importance of our experience and faith in Christ can fade.

It doesn’t die out completely – but the pressures and stresses of daily life, work, and family, the challenges of figuring out how to live as a Christian in a hostile environment can diminish our motivation to make time and take time to continue to be together and do things based on the gospel.

So going to Church, to Christ Care, to youth group becomes just one more thing to do in an already full schedule of important things and deadlines. And our culture no longer makes it easy for us to put aside time for meeting together with other believers.

Over time the initial experience of being saved and gratitude of our relationship with Christ can lose its vibrancy.

And we pull back from fully engaging in community, and we gradually drift into an orbit around the community.

We check in every so often, with less and less frequency, and eventually we drift off on another course altogether. If we've not experienced this personally, we've certainly seen it happen to others.

And friends, this also happened over the course of time to the group of Christians in Acts 2 and this is why Hebrews 10: 19-25, was written.

To speak to those in the Body of Christ who are in danger of drifting away, tempted to stop making and taking time to meet with other Christians for whatever reason.

The passage of scripture in Hebrews reminds of the gospel and what was accomplished, and the significance which that has for us, and the powerful impact that it made on us.

So, it's a good idea in the next couple weeks as we transition into the busy fall schedule to spend some time with these verses and explore them, meditate on them, and apply them to our day to day lives.

And as you explore these verses you see the writer of Hebrews goes into a detailed exposition of how Christ fulfilled the temple system, with its required intermediary priests and sacrifices, and enabled God's people to come close to the Father with-out any more barriers – something they had never experienced before.

And as you take time to meditate on these verses, I hope you gain some deeper and more personal insight on just how amazing it is to be able to approach the Almighty Creator of the Universe as casually and informally and confidently as we do – because of Jesus Christ...

And how this access is something which we can so easily take for granted...



And through that renewed appreciation of our access to God through Jesus Christ it will to remember and reminisce about the time when we first received our salvation through the Holy Spirit.

Much in the same way that reminiscing and remembering on a birthday or an anniversary can help you remember what was significant and special about the person whom you are celebrating and it renews your appreciation of them.

We need to remember the instances and examples from the past of how we have experienced Christ's salvation in our lives; his love, his forgiveness and his grace.

And through this remembering and reminiscing, I pray that the Holy Spirit would cause us to *"not give up meeting together..."*

Because remembering and reminiscing is better when it is shared with others is it not? That's why people have family reunions, high-school reunions, nursing school reunions...

And have you ever noticed that after such a reunion or celebration people are saying things like – *we have got to do this again sometime, call me, here's my email address, it was really good seeing you again!*

It works the same way for being the Body of Christ. When we remember how we have experienced Christ's love and forgiveness in our lives and we share this with those who have experienced it as well it re-unites us and spurs us on to make and take the time to continue to meet together.

And when we meet together, it not just about the past memories - as significant as they are, meeting together helps us live as Christians today.

There is a great deal of public pressure to renounce Jesus as the only way to God, but together... we can "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (vs. 23)

And as authentic Christianity is quickly becoming a minority in our society and we face ridicule, rejection and persecution, it is tempting to stop serving others and just leave them alone.

But together... we can *“consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...”* (vs. 24)

And as we noted at the beginning of this message – we are all busy with our lives and responsibilities and we can lose sight of the fact that Christ is alive, and is coming back for us to bring in the new Heaven and the new Earth!

But together... we can *“encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (vs. 25)

So, let us not stop meeting together... as some are in the habit of doing... instead let us make and take time to continue meeting together – so that it becomes our habit.

Amen.