

# Sermon Text for October 22, 2017

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Exodus 16: 9-12, Acts 2: 43-47

## **“Too Close for Comfort”**

We had a great Yard Sale yesterday. We made over \$1,400 for the trip to Naples, Italy. While I was at the yard sale my girls were at Muddy Run on a walk with our dog, Ellie. Ellie managed to chase after a deer, the deer jumped into the water and Ellie got into a game of dunking that poor deer. The girls somehow were able to distract Ellie away from the deer and it swam off probably traumatized for the rest of her life. They were glad to see it swimming away, would hate to have that on your conscience. That was too close for comfort.

In our first reading for today we see that an entire nation, a grown one at that, complaining and whining like kids because they are hungry and thirsty. On the other side in Acts today we see a very young church, just a few hours and days old, and yet they take some very mature steps in order to ensure that they would grow in Christ. In the same way, our mission as a church is to help every believer grow in Christ in a balanced and mature way. When we watch our children maturing we expect them to mature in differing ways. Their bodies grow, but that is not enough is it? We also want to see them grow spiritually, intellectually, and socially. Each of these areas growing at an age appropriate rate. No good parent would be satisfied to have a 6 foot tall eighth grade basketball star who was flunking every class and constantly in detention for bad behavior.

The same is true for a Christian, it is not enough to have lots of Bible knowledge if you lie to your boss and mistreat your wife. What the early church understood and what we need to understand is that the maturity of a church can be measured by how we live in community. A church that loves being too close for comfort with each other is a sign of a mature Christian community. And today, we look at the foundational text for Christian community. These verses more than any other verses in the Bible give us a picture of what it was like to be a part of the earliest Christian Church.

## **READ**

This Sunday is Stewardship Sunday. What that means is that for this Sunday we speak about what Scripture tells us in regards to our financial responsibilities to the work of the kingdom of God. If you received my enews from this past week you read that I have always preached what Scripture calls a tithe. I believe that God calls us to give 10% of our income for the work of the kingdom through the church. I have always believed that you should never ask someone to do something you would never be willing or have done yourself, and this definitely falls within that category.

The Bronkema family has lived on the most meager of incomes and the most generous of incomes which we currently are faced here at this church. In all of these scenarios we have followed the Scriptural concept of the tithe. You need to know that God has provided miraculously to meet our needs when we least expected it. When our oldest, Rachel was born, you needed to have a car seat and show it to the people at the hospital before you could leave. We didn't have the \$37.42 that we needed for the car seat, until a week before Rachel was born and we received those funds from a Sunday School class in New Jersey where I had interned.

We have seen God provide in similar fashion in the churches where we have served. We didn't know how we were going to put roofs on our buildings until a hurricane came causing just enough damage to replace our roofs, but not enough to cause any structural damage. When we talk about stewardship, we talk about what God is able to do for us, not what we are able to do for the church. I think we have it all wrong. We shouldn't be thinking of what should I be giving to the church, we should be thinking what has God given to us, if not all of our material goods.

One of the greatest challenges that we face as a growing church is very similar to the one that the earliest church faced. People were too close for comfort and they didn't know and understand each other. How can we place people into programs and make sure that people are not just coming to church and stagnating, but are actually maturing in their walk with Christ? These 7 verses tells us how the first church did it, and maybe we can learn from them.

They did it by pursuing what I call the three G's that are laid out in this Scripture. The first G is that they gathered. Look at verses 44 and 46. They were together, they

continued to meet together, they ate together. This word in the Greek is koinonia and it describes not just gathering but it talks about people who want to constantly be close to each other. They looked for excuses in order to be together. They loved seeing each other in the square, they stopped and talked when they were watching their kids play soccer, at school they greeted each other while recognizing that they have a deep bond by the community of which they are a part, wherever they were it raised their hearts to see each other. The willingness and the deep desire for the saints to gather, is a sign of a mature community.

In the early church there was nothing solitary, nothing isolationist, nothing monastic about the early Church. Everything the Holy Spirit did in them and taught in them in those early days, he did in community.

The second G would be the earliest community also gave in abundance. These are some of my favorite verses because it points to an absolutely ideal, unrealistic picture of what the church could be like. Jesus Christ is our model and even though we know we cannot be perfect like he was perfect doesn't mean that we stop trying. Likewise, these verses paint for us a picture of a church that everyone has all things in common. If you are afraid of socialized medicine, that is nothing compared to this. This is a biblical picture of having all things in common. What a great ideal, what a great picture. They had everything in common, all things. It isn't very realistic is it?

I firmly believe that if people knew what they were giving for and how the kingdom of God is working then they would be willing to give more. Did you know that this year we will be giving over \$100,000 in mission? We have \$68,000 budgeted but we gave over \$80,000 in our budget last year. We gathered \$16,000 for storm relief not long ago. Before that we gathered \$10,000 for blanket Sunday, and then we gathered over \$9,000 for One Great Hour of Sharing. Extravagant generosity and mutual care was a core value of the early Christian community. That is the 2<sup>nd</sup> sign of a mature church that is too close for comfort to each other is that they give in abundance to care for each other.

You need to know that this upcoming year we are going to need you all to tithe. Our leadership is going through the budgeting process now and there is an optimism that is encouraging. It is an optimism that could bleed out into our budgeting as we trust that God has been faithful through our giving and that God will continue to be faithful. I had

a treasurer once tell me when I spoke about making a budget on faith: God doesn't pay the bills. That is true, but God does use people who are faithful and tithe to make mission matter.

The third G is growth. This does not necessarily mean in number, although here even that is mentioned. Let's look at a mature church here in Acts 2. They had to mature. The only way that was going to happen was in the community. That is exactly what these verses are about. The community, caring for its own spiritually, materially, emotionally, in every way possible. It is obvious that these Christians were growing in maturity every day. Look at the last sentence of these verses in chapter 2. And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

A church that is divided and only cares for itself and its grounds, and its own people will die. A church that is not afraid to be too close for comfort with each other, with those in the community, a church that is not afraid to rub elbows with the undesireables is a church that is mature and that will grow.

There is actually a 4<sup>th</sup> G, but I didn't include it in the sermon, that is grub. Did you notice that? Isn't it amazing that we always see them eating together. You see it is not a Bob thing, or a Presbyterian thing, it is a Christian truth, food, bread, and drink bring people together.

Today I am going to issue a challenge that comes straight from these verse here in Acts. This challenge is going to make us a more mature church. This year marks our 185<sup>th</sup> anniversary and our 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church of the Reformation. Our challenge is to gather. You will never be a mature follower of Jesus Christ if your only exposure to the church is on Sunday morning. You will not develop relationships in that amount of time, you will not learn to care for each other and to love each other. Besides, we want to be ready to care for you when hard times come. All of us will face illness and death and crisis at some time in our life. If you do not invest now in building relationships, it will be harder for your church family to care for you in those times.

Our second challenge is to give. I heard of a church this past week whose stewardship theme was the following...I'm not kidding: "I upped my pledge, Up yours!" I think the proof reader was asleep at the switch on that one. What I am talking about is

giving of your time serving and getting too close for comfort with the undesireables in our community. A Christian who is not serving is not maturing.

Finally our third challenge is to grow. A sign of a maturing church and a mature Christian is that we are not ashamed of the Gospel and not afraid to invite people to come and worship with us and be a part of a community that loves being too close for comfort. Reach one who desires and needs badly to get close to a caring community so that they can know that they are loved as well

All people, no matter who or what they are, no matter their background or disability, are invited to receive the gift of Jesus and to become more mature in Christ. For some reason, some people do not feel worthy to walk through these doors. Maybe it is shame or doubt, or past hurts that keep them away. Maybe it is some of us that keeps them away. But all it might take is someone to offer a little nudge, someone to roll them in, someone to help them overcome the obstacles, come through these doors and discover what it means to be a part of a mature community.

Wouldn't you love to be used by God in that way? This is a great church, your church is a great church. And by God's grace, we are becoming better. There are people out there who are desperate for love and acceptance and forgiveness and gladness and significance and community. And you might just be the one whom God will use to bring them in. Amen.