

**“Why We’re Better Together”**  
**Message #1 in the series, “Better Together”**  
**Acts 2:42-47**

**Pastor David Woolverton**

Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! It’s so good to be with you today. As we prepare for God’s word, would you join with me in prayer.

“Holy God we give you thanks for this your Word and for the power of your Word to give us life. Speak boldly into our lives, Lord. Open us up to your Word and open your Word up to us. Teach us, Heavenly Father, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, we pray in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Well, it’s good to be here as I said. My name is David Woolverton, I’m one of the pastors here at St. Paul’s Church. I have to confess something this morning -- I am not much of a handy-man. I am, however, someone who absolutely LOVES going to Home Depot. In fact, when I tell Kristine that I’m going to the Home Depot, she’ll say to me “Just remember why you’re there.” Because I’ll literally just go aisle by aisle. There’s something about being in Home Depot, or even Lowe’s, that if I even just breathe in the smells of saw dust I’ll actually become the handy-man that I’m not. Oh, if it were connected to genetics, then I did not inherit my Dad’s genes. My Dad can fix anything! My brother is like that as well. They inherited it, but me.... when they were handing out all the handy-man genes, I was there holding the door for everybody else. That’s just who I am.

Now, I do know my way around a tool box. In fact, I have a pretty nice tool collection now. Back when I first got married however, I didn’t have many tools. Back then, though, I actually discovered that you could improvise when necessary. If I had vice grips, vice grips could be used quite effectively as a hammer! Anybody out there like me? Let’s be serious, right? And in all honesty, a screwdriver is only a screwdriver when there’s a screw. When there’s no screw you could use a screwdriver for many other reasons. For example, it works great as an icepick. And of course, there is the hammer. Do you know that I have in my day used a hammer as a screwdriver? If I have a screw and there’s no screwdriver, what do I do? I treat that screw like a nail and I just pound away!

You know, the joy of not being a handy-man of sorts gives me the opportunity to be creative. Now, today 30 some odd years later, I’ve learned how to use tools. I’ve done many mission trips that have helped to school me in how to use tools. But I am by far, not my Dad or my brother when it comes to the ability to fix anything. But, what I did learn was a very important lesson and I’d like to share that lesson with you.

That lesson is this: you get the most out of something when you use it the way it was designed. Now isn’t that true for tools? Isn’t that true when it comes to so many things in life? When we’re using a tool the way it was supposed to be used, isn’t it most effective?

Today we’re beginning a new message series that we’re calling, “Better Together.” It’s all about the local church -- and you know we’re not talking about a building. We’re talking about the

people. For the local church, that's you and that's me, we're best when we're living out life together the way God designed us to live. In fact, there is an important truth that under-girds everything that we're about to learn in this 5-week sermon series. That is, as followers of Jesus, we were designed to do life together. And we are at our best when we're living out what we were designed to live. The church is at its best when we're all doing life together. We're better together.

As we look at life being better together, I want to draw you in to a very important passage of scripture. It's in the book of Acts -- chapter 2. This is actually at the very beginning of what is now known as The Church. This is the birthing of that movement of God's kingdom taking shape in the early group of believers that were followers of this resurrected King of Kings and Lord of Lords - Jesus. We're going to look together at these verses in Acts 2. I invite you to open your Bible or Bible App and follow along. If you're a note taker, I invite you to take some notes on what I'm going to share with you today and as we continue on in this journey over the next 5 weeks, let's ask God to open us up to be the Church that God designed us to be, because we are better together.

Let's jump in at Acts 2:42. While I read these verses, I'm going to pause periodically to share a little more of what's going on in the story. This is what it says: "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Let's just pause there. Let me put this into a context. So, Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he appeared to many of those disciples and he then he ascended into heaven. After he ascended, that's when the movement, the Spirit empowered movement of God's church, began and the disciples began sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and people started flocking to the Church, to this movement. What did they do when they got together? They "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, to fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer." That word "devoted" right here is a really important word. There's an implied focus and intentionality to that word. They were focused and intentional about how they spent their time together. This is what they were devoted to. This is what they were intentional about. They were intentional about listening and following the teaching of the apostles. The original apostles began to multiply the movement by teaching and equipping every other believer. So, the believers, as they gathered, they were listening and they were following in obedience to everything that those original eyewitnesses to Jesus were teaching them.

What else did they devote themselves to? They devoted themselves to fellowship. Now fellowship is not just that they started gathering and eating and drinking together, although that was part of it. This was about sharing life together. They were doing life together. We'll learn a little bit more about what that looked like in just a few moments. They also devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Now, part of what that referred to was what we know as the sacrament of communion. But also, it meant literally sharing a meal together. They ate together and lived in this wonderful sphere of just doing life together - over coffee and donuts (or their equivalent) or over a full meal. They shared everything together. They also devoted themselves to prayer. Wherever there was need, wherever there was a need for forgiveness, wherever there was a need for hope, wherever there was a need for healing, wherever there was a need to confess, whatever

the need was, they surrounded one another and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings, to the fellowship, to sharing meals together and to prayer.

The story continues, because when they focused on doing life together, look what happens next - verse 43, "Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common." Alright, this is not by any means a political statement - it's not socialism, in fact it's the complete opposite. This is about not having any sense of political division or any kind of divisive forces that were separating them, they were united. They were not always unanimous, but they were united in what it meant to follow Jesus. Their unity surrounded them like a grand witness into the community. That word "everyone" was not just about those that were gathered as believers, that was EVERYBODY in the community saw the focus and the devotion and how it played out in how they treated one another in love.

"And many were filled with awe at the wonders and signs" - the wonders and signs that the apostles did was to further the witness of the good news of Jesus. "All the believers were together and they had everything in common."

It continues on in verse 45 and what we see is that the Church begins to testify by its unity out in the community: "They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." Do you see the love? Do you see the open-handed ness in their approach to life? "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." Look at this: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This is really important. As the believers, as those early believers in Jesus Christ shared life together, did life together, loved one another and lived out their faith together, they began to multiply and that love became invasive.

Friends, when has been the last time that the Church, not just our church, but the Church invaded communities with the testimony of love? Especially in this season of chaos that we live in, when has been the last time that we actually showed the world how much we love each other? How much we are protective of one another's reputations simply because they are our sisters and brothers? This is a powerful statement, and why is it important? It's because the witness of the early Church meant for us today, 2000 years later, is that we are better together. We're better together.

What makes us better together? I'd like to share with you 3 very important ways. First, "We are called." We're called to be together. We're called to do life together. How do I know that? Jesus modeled it. He showed us, he showed us what it looked like, he showed us what it felt like, he modeled it from the very beginning. I want to share with you just a few quick passages of scripture. He showed us by calling initially those disciples, Matthew chapter 4, we read in verse 18: "As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter and Andrew, his brother casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother

John, in the boat with their father Zebedee mending their nets and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.”

They were called. It didn't stop there, it continues in Matthew chapter 9 verse 9. “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booths and he said to him, “Follow me” and he got up and followed him.” Verse 10, “And as he sat at dinner in the house (this was Matthew's house), many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples.” Get a picture of this, this Jewish rabbi, this Jewish teacher calls a tax collector - someone who was hated, despised among all the Jews. This was a very bad man from the perspective of the community. Jesus calls him to follow, he starts following and Jesus goes to his house to eat. He's modeling what it looks like for us to live together in unity. Is Matthew a believer yet? We don't know, but he's seeing a picture of the heart of Jesus, the heart of God. Many tax collectors came and were sitting with him and his disciples. So, Matthew actually invited his friends. Is that a picture of our house? A picture of our church?

It continues in verse 11, “When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when he heard this he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Folks, we are called. We're called out of the context of wherever we are - listen, wherever you are in life. Whatever your brokenness, whatever your past, whatever the situation that happened in your life that you don't want anybody else to see or know about. Whatever that context, Jesus is calling you and he's calling you to be a part of this movement.

Not only are we called, but, second, we are called to love. We're called to love.

So, I have a question for us -- “What is the biggest challenge of 2020?” Anxiety? Polarized politics? Racial Tension? Covid-19? For all of those a strong case could be made, right? That's our reality, 2020 has been a really hard year -- but what is the biggest challenge of 2020? Do you know what I think it is? I think it's - Isolation. I think it's the pain of feeling isolated. I think underneath all of the issues related to masks or no masks or the tension of race in America and in our globe right now, a lot of the different things that are happening in our anger and in our frustrations with each other, the quick tempers - a lot of the pain we have been feeling as we've been forced to self-quarantine. I think it all points to this one word - Isolation. I think we have a craving to want to belong. We want to belong. We want to be connected, we want to engage life, we want to do life together. Any kind of isolating we want, we want to have control over it right? We want to be able to determine when we're to be alone, but when it's enforced it's very painful. It expresses some of the deeper level pain that many of us have felt.

But as followers of Jesus, we have been called to love. I really believe that we are an “It's a Wonderful Life” people caught in a “Survivor” world. You know those stories, right? “It's a Wonderful Life,” it's coming up on Christmastime, we all like the George Baileys out there. George helps everybody -- until his whole life falls apart and he discovers by the end that everybody cares about him, everybody helps him. They do life together. But in our present reality, we end up finding ourselves in a world right now where it's more like “Survivor” -- that

tv show where you have to fend for yourself and the object is for you to be the only one left. I really think that we are an “It’s a Wonderful Life” people who are caught in a “Survivor” World. That’s unfortunate because relationships are the most important context for learning the love of God.

The Church was designed for relationships. We were made to do life together. Galatians 5:6 in The Message translation reads as follows: “If you are a follower of Christ Jesus... all that matters is your faith that makes you love others.”

In John 13:34, hours before Jesus’s arrest, he’s meeting with his closest friends in the upper room, he’s trying to prepare them for what is yet to come, and so he tells them this: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

In 1 Corinthians 14:1 - The Message also translates this verse as follows, “Go after a life of love as if your life depends on it, because it does.”

Are we able to hear that? We are called to love. We are called “one another one another.” Together we can:

Encourage one another

Pray for one another

Hold one another accountable

Serve alongside one another

Protect one another - from ourselves, from our enemies, from The Enemy

Celebrate with one another

Grieve with one another

It’s so important for us to capture this because together we can “one another one another!” We can’t one another by ourselves. We were not designed for isolation, we were designed to do life together. We’re better together.

Finally, we are called to love and do life together. Called to do love and life together. One of my favorite all-time verses in scripture is Ecclesiastes 4:12 - “A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back to back and conquer and three are even better for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”

Friends, we were designed to do life together. We are better together. We can choose to use a wrench as a hammer, we can choose to use a hammer as a screwdriver, but ultimately these tools were made for a purpose -- just like you and me and just like the Church. The Church of Jesus Christ, US - we’re better together.

I invite you to begin to ask yourself “How can God use me the way I was designed to be used?” “How can God create an avenue, a pathway of connecting me to His greater plan and purpose?” We are sisters and brothers in Christ -- so even in the midst of this pandemic we can discover the joy of doing life together.

Will you pray with me?

Lord God I thank you that you have called us, you have called us to be better together. Just like those early disciples who were together in that upper room, experiencing that joy of the new life that the Holy Spirit was breathing on them. Breathe on us Lord. Unite us in love, unite us in joy, unite us in purpose and unite us on mission and then send us out into the world. Equip us with your great gift of the love that is meant to be given away and as we share it Lord, let the world see Jesus in us. Thank you. Jesus, Thank you God, Thank you Spirit. It's in your name that I pray, Amen.