

Theoacademy

Form Your Faith. Anytime. Anywhere.

Lesson 5: Blessed to be a Blessing

Theocademy

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Getting Started

Before watching the video, consider the following questions.

- Does this church have a mission statement? If so, what is it?
- The 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire* tells the (true) story of Eric Liddell, a Scottish missionary who won the gold in the 400 meter dash at the 1924 Olympics. One of Liddell's lines during the movie is telling: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure." Where and when do you feel God taking pleasure in your life?

During the Video

As you watch the video, think about the following questions (continued on the next page).

- Why are we as Christians called "the body of Christ?"
- Why is community so important for Christians to develop and maintain?
- What might keep us from forming the bonds of community with our sisters and brothers at church?
- What are we supposed to do with the blessings that God has given us?
- What is "mission?" What might it look like?

Koinonia: The Tie that Binds

In 1972, a Presbyterian pastor and music director in Port Jervis, New York published a song called “We Are the Church.” Over the years it made its way across countless denominations (often through children’s ministries), and its first verse proclaims a clear message about who we are as the Body of Christ:

*The Church is not a building;
The Church is not a steeple;
The Church is not a resting place;
The Church is a people!*

If we start from the earliest days of Christianity and trace the history of our faith through the next 2,000 years, we learn an important lesson: “Church” isn’t something we go to. Church is something we **are**. As beautiful as our sanctuary may be, as cozy as our fellowship hall is, they’re merely tools to help us achieve the purposes to which God has called us: loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

As the video said, our faith is built through relationships, both with God and with others. So what might that look like? We need search no further than the second chapter of Acts to find a beautiful model of believers living in **koinonia**, the deep, long-lasting bond that’s formed when people commit to establishing and maintaining personal relationships with one another:

Acts 2:41-47 So those who welcomed [Peter’s Pentecost] message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

- Let's look at this passage through the same lens that we've been using throughout this series: God's *shalom*. Where do you see *shalom* being restored in this passage?

God and Humans	
Humans and World	
Humans and Other Humans	

- How are *shalom* and *koinonia* linked here? What does that say about the nature of our Christian faith?

- In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹ states,

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.... Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians! (p. 20)

In what way(s) have you personally experienced Christ's presence in and through the community of believers?

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in Germany during the time of the Second World War. Because of his vocal opposition to the Nazi regime and its policies he was imprisoned in various German concentration camps for a year and a half, and was executed two weeks before Allied forces liberated the camp he was then in. In addition to *Life Together*, his work *The Cost of Discipleship* is widely considered to be a classic of Christian theology.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

The gift of community is one of God's greatest blessings. But God doesn't give us community just so that we can have community. In other words, if our community doesn't have some sort of bigger purpose, we'll lose sight of the reason we got together in the first place. Our relationships will crumble, and our faith will stagnate. Instead, God calls us as the Body of Christ to join in Christ's mission.

So, what's this "whole Gospel" that's being mentioned here? Everything that we've talked about over the past five sessions. The grace that God freely offers, the brokenness we experience because of our sin, the freedom Christ has purchased for us, the new life that God gives us, the community of faith that sustains us, and the *shalom*-restoring work to which the Holy Spirit calls and empowers us. And the best part is, we don't just get to tell the story – we get to live it out, each and every day. Which means, if you stop to think about it, that this "Christian" thing doesn't end when you walk out the front doors of the church at noon on Sunday. Our whole lives can (and do) stand as a powerful witness to God's love and grace.

- Martin Luther, one of the great figures of the Protestant Reformation, argued strongly against the idea that clergy were somehow "more holy" or more capable of ushering in God's kingdom than other members of the church. As members of the Presbyterian Church, we have historically agreed with that argument. With that in mind, how might you take advantage of your "everyday experiences" – your job, your social circles, etc. – to help usher in God's *shalom*?

- Think back to those places where you "feel God's pleasure." How can you use those experiences and abilities to help others feel God's pleasure?

- Look back at the list of "grace opportunities" that you came up with as you walked around the church during the first session. Where can you see yourself getting plugged in, so that the grace that you've received can be shared with others?

For Further Study

Book of Order

- **F-1.0301:** The Church is the body of Christ. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28): The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life. The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation. The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down. The Church is to be a community of witness, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.
- **F-1.3034:** The great ends of the Church are: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.
- **G-1.0101:** The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context. The triune God gives to the congregation all the gifts of the gospel necessary to being the Church. The congregation is the basic form of the church, but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church. Thus congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church. Through the congregation God’s people carry out the ministries of proclamation, sharing the Sacraments, and living in covenant life with God and each other. In the life of the congregation, individual believers are equipped for the ministry of witness to the love and grace of God in and for the world. The congregation reaches out to people, communities, and the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to gather for worship, to offer care and nurture to God’s children, to speak for social justice and righteousness, to bear witness to the truth and to the reign of God that is coming into the world.
- **G-1.0304:** Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission. A faithful member bears witness to God’s love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ’s Church. Such involvement includes: proclaiming the good news in word and deed, taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation, lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support, studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life, supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents, demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church, responding to God’s activity in the world through service to others, living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life, working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment, participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one’s membership, and considering ways in which one’s participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.