Breaking Bread Together

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Introduction

Good morning. Welcome to all of you this great morning. We are resuming our sermon series entitled: “That we may be one … that the world may be won.” We are in the second part of that series looking at the best practices of Christian community. This past week I found this on my refrigerator and I remembered that we handed these out and had asked you to put in on your refrigerator. And every time you went into the frig to shoot an arrow prayer: “Lord make us one… here at the BARN … in the Farmington Valley … Your church in CT … Your church in this country .. Your church around the world.” Well I guess that’s longer than an arrow prayer. But you get the point. Just one of those at a time. But since we got back from vacation, I had forgotten – so maybe you have forgotten too. Put these guys near the handle. Let’s keep knocking on God’s door about this. There are a couple left in the back if you weren’t here that week.

Open your Bibles or your Bibles in your phones – I still can’t believe I said that) to Act chapter 2 verse 42 – on page 772 in the pew Bibles.

Let’s Pray

This is the first picture and one of the most detailed pictures of the practices of the early church;

Devoted themselves to:
  Apostles teaching
  Fellowship
  Prayers
  Breaking of bread
Devoted – The Greek dictionary of the New Testament defines this word as "to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of difficulty. It also carries with it the idea of strength that prevails and endurance.

I think we have a good understanding of what it might look like to devote oneself to the Apostles teaching, to fellowship and to prayers – but what does it look like for the church to devote themselves to the breaking of bread. Luke is painting a picture for us of what was most important to the early church: Not service. Not preaching. Not witnessing. Not justice. Not worship All good things. – He’s describing the best practices of Christian community – and one of the things was breaking bread together. Let’s look at three reasons why breaking bread was so important to the early church.

Modeling Jesus

Of course, in its simplest meaning, breaking bread means the sharing of a meal. The breaking of the bread symbolized taking what is mine and dividing it and sharing it with you. So the title of the sermon has a redundancy in it. Breaking Bread is Breaking Bread Together. The phrase has its roots in Jewish tradition well before the time of Jesus and also meant sharing a meal. For the early church, however the Jewish practice took on new meaning because they had seen Jesus model this “breaking of bread” for them. In the New Testament Jesus is at the very center of the breaking of bread. When Jesus fed the 4000 and the 5000; He broke the bread.; when Jesus participated in the last supper, He broke bread; and when He ate with those on the road to Emmaus, He broke bread. In fact it was when He broke the bread that their eyes were opened. That gives us a hint that although the breaking of bread had Jewish roots, Jesus embodied it with special significance. So for the early church, when they were breaking bread it was a constant reminder of being with Jesus.

The Role Eating Plays in the entire Redemptive story

The second reason I believe the early church did this is that they recognized the role that eating played in God’s history with man. The Bible is one story that tells everything we need to know about God’s interactions with man. And this story is intended to make us want to get to know Him. The early church knew this story well and the role that eating played in that story. Before I prepared for this sermon, I had not seen this before so follow me as we trace this through.

• What do you think was the first command that God gave to man?

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1 Luke 24:30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.
The Bible has two accounts of the creation of man – one in Genesis 1 and one in Genesis 2 – turn with me to Genesis 1. In both accounts, the first words that God speaks to man, God is talking to His new creation about food and eating.

In Gen 1:29, God tells them what they can eat:

“I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”

He doesn’t tell them about relationships or love or raising children or worship – He tells them about eating food. I find that a curious priority for God.

In Genesis 2:16 the God’s first words to His new creations are

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

Notice two things about this – God’s first command is: You are free. Not “Thou shalt not.” But you are free. I learned this first from John Rankin who taught us that the Hebrew idiom here literally means: “In feasting you will feast “ His translation is that God is giving man an unlimited menu of choices.

Eating continues to play a role as the story unfolds at the critical junctures in God’s interaction with man.

- First prohibition involved eating / not stealing or lying or cursing
- First sin involved eating
- In the Exodus from Egypt, one of the most significant events in the history of the children of Israel, God directs the children of Israel to have a meal – the Passover meal. It wasn’t necessary but God included eating a meal together as part of preparing them to leave.
- Many of the feasts and the festivals that God ordains involve eating
- Even tithing involves eating – Turn with me to Deuteronomy 14:22

Deuteronomy 14:22 Tithes

22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. 24 But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the Lord your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the Lord will choose to put his Name is so far away), 25 then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. 26 Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice.

These verses are not taught very often in churches. But we shouldn’t be afraid of these verses. We first need to understand that there were multiple tithes in Old Testament –
multiple tenths of their income that they were to do things with – but that is a teaching for another day. Suffice it to say – God is instructing you to what … party – but only if you invite Him. Notice the phrase “eat … in the presence of the Lord your God.”

You have to love a God who tells you to set aside a tenth of your income to celebrate with Him and your family. Although part of the law that we no longer observe, we need to hear God’s heart on this.

Fast forward now to the New Testament and eating continues to play a significant role:

- Jesus was known as a glutton It was because he spent so much time eating and drinking with people.
- 20% of the gospel of Luke has stories and parables about food. 
- Jesus defines the most intimate kind of fellowship with His disciples as spending time eating with them. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” Rev 3:20
- We are told in the book of Revelation, that the culmination of history will end with a giant banquet – The Marriage supper of the Lamb.
- And we cannot forget that our Lord instituted a practice among His people that we carry on today – the Lord’s supper / the Eucharist / Communion – notice even in the name “communion” there is concept of community and fellowship between God and man. Both horizontal and vertical communion is supposed to take place during the Lord’s supper.

In fact all of the internal evidence in the scripture and the external evidence from archaeology and 1st and 2nd century documents tell us that for at least the first two centuries the Eucharist was a meal. For example, when Paul talks about the Lord’s Supper he talks about how some are going home hungry from church meetings where the Lord’s Supper is offered. Now if I didn’t have breakfast, I can guarantee that I will go away hungry after communion today. Early church documents describe it as the agape. The love feast. Celebrating communion in the early church was eating a meal together. Breaking bread together. We forget that the Lord’s Supper was a meal.

The answer is intrinsic in eating itself

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2 ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Matthew 11:19
   Feeding the 5000 9:10-17 Hospitality at Martha’s 10:38-42 Noon meal at Pharisees house 11:37-54 Sabbath dinner at Pharisee’s house14:1-24 Hospitality at Zacchaeus house 19:1-10; Passover Meal 22:7-38; Meal Road to Emmaes 24:13-35; Supper with the disciples 24:36-53
4 1 Corinthians 11:20-22
5 I am deeply indebted to the book Food and Faith for this section by Norman Wirzba. Norman opened my eyes to this concept of the intrinsic value of eating. Many of the 3-4 word phrases in this section are from that book. For example “Eating demonstrates that we cannot live alone.” I attempted to paraphrase but his turning of the phrase was excellent. Thanks Norman.
For the early church, Jesus institution of Communion – “do this in remembrance of me” was ringing in their ears. Do this – eat together / break bread remembering me.

The third reason is intrinsic in eating itself.

Food is a gift of love. As with all of creation, food does not have to be. Philosophers ask “Why is there something rather than nothing?” I ask “Why did God create us to need to eat?” Eating reminds us that we participate in a grace-saturated world, a blessed creation worthy of attention, care, and celebration. Did you ever think about why we call the prayer before a meal – “Grace” Our text today talks about how the early church “ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Eating is necessary to live, and in eating we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. All eating should point us back to our dependence upon God and His creation. Whenever we gather at the table, we demonstrate that we are not independent beings – but dependent upon God and His creation. Eating demonstrates that we cannot live alone.

Eating together should be an occasion in which we learn to become more attentive and present to the world and each other. Because eating is something we regularly do, it can be the training ground where people learn to articulate their fears and worries. With the help of each other we can practice the skills of conversation, reflection, and gratitude that contribute to human flourishing.

There is good sociological data that shows that healthy families eat together more regularly. “Teenagers who eat dinner four or more times per week with their families have higher academic performance compared with teenagers who eat with their families two or fewer times per week.” “Research shows that frequent family dinners (five or more a week), are associated with lower rates of smoking, drinking, and illegal drug use in pre-teens and teenagers when compared to families that eat together two or fewer times per week.” Only ½ of children between the ages of 5 and 11 eat 6 or more meals with their families each week. Less than a third of those over 12 eat 6 or more meals with their families each week. Some of my fondest memories of my family were of our evening meal together. Life in the 21st century is crowding out “eating together” both in our homes and in our churches.

To invite others to one’s table and share food with them is to communicate that life is not a possession but a gift. To share food is fundamentally to share life.

Application

So how can we apply this at The BARN? For several years there has been a growing sense with your elders, that we need to grow together as a community / that we are too isolated from one another / that we don’t know each other very well. And we have taken a number of initiatives in attempt to build more community at The BARN.

6 http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2012_01_01_FS_SharedMeals.pdf
As part of that your leaders are committed to the role that breaking bread together can play in building community and have made the following statement:

The Session of The BARN, seeing the biblical model of the early church’s devotion to breaking bread together, makes one of its community building goals for 2013-2014, to become a church where the breaking of bread together becomes a regular practice with its members and attenders.

So as a means to kick start this, over the next 3 months, we are going to try a Breaking Bread Experiment at The BARN. Here is how it works:

For anyone who is interested in participating in this experiment, we will take your name and contact information and randomly pair men with men and women with women. You will be contacted via phone or email as to who you have been randomly paired and with their contact information. Then, over the next 3 months, it will be both your responsibility to get together for a time to break bread together. OBJECTION!

Bob: Andrew, is that you?
Andrew: Yes it’s me.
Bob: Where are you?
Andrew: That’s not important. What’s important is that I have some objections to what you’re proposing. First of all, you’re talking about breaking bread – what about all the folks who are gluten free? Have you thought about that?
Bob: No, but “breaking bread” is more symbolic of sharing food together.
Andrew: Uh huh. Ok, go on.
Anyway, it is completely your choice as to how you do this. Remember God’s first words – “You are free” We are offering you a menu of choices. We all don’t have the gift of hospitality – and that is just fine. It can be as simple as a muffin or as elaborate as a dinner at home / a bag lunch on a walk / or a breakfast at Harvest Cafe. OBJECTION!
Andrew: Harvest Café? Elaborate dinner at home? This is starting to sound like it’s going to cost me money.
Bob: No, it doesn’t have to be expensive. That’s just the point; it’ll be up to each of us to decide what we want to do. Also, we can be creative in how we do this. But if it is really a hardship, there are $15 dollar gift cards from Fitzgeralds that you can ask for from the office. In addition if you want you can turn your two-some into a four-some.
Andrew: And Bob that’s another thing. What if I’m matched up with someone who doesn’t care for my kind.
Bob: You’re kind?
Andrew: Yes. I mean the extremely tall. Some people find us…off-putting.
Bob: We’re just asking you to break bread – not go dancing.
Andrew: Alright. I figured I’d pose these objections up front. Get it all out in the open.
Bob: Do you have any other objections?
Andrew: Well, since you asked – in addition to being tall, I am a bit of an introvert. I’m not so sure I want to be paired up with a person I don’t know. What if I have nothing to say?
Bob: We extraverts need to get to know you introverts so just let us do all the talking. No actually, it is a good point, that the goal of this is to establish community which includes dialogs not monologues. Let’s pray that we all become good listeners. Wait a minute! You’re an introvert?
Andrew: Isn’t it obvious?
Bob: Well not exactly.
Andrew: Ok. I appreciate the clarifications. I suppose I will let you get on with your sermon which, by the way, has been going very well so far.
Bob: Bye Andrew.
Where was I? Right. If you decide to participate, you’ll be randomly paired with someone else and we ask that sometime in the next three months you break bread. If this time is a good experience and you are comfortable with doing this - take a picture and send it to sermonplanning@cpcbarn.org. We’ll post it on our Breaking Bread Experiment Page on the web site.

If you don't want to participate, feel free to opt out. For those who are in high school and younger, Dan has a different plan for you that you will hear about later. But let me say this – why not try random breaking bread at your lunch hour. What would happen if you ate with a group that you don't even know? If anyone is uncomfortable with doing this please don’t feel any pressure to do this the way we have outlined it. The goal is to get together and break bread. Maybe you can apply this word another way. And then please tell us how you did it.

If the experiment is successful and we see it accomplishing it's purpose we may try it again in the future with a new draw. You will be paired with a new person and have a chance to meet someone else in the congregation.

So in your bulletin you should have a signup sheet. To participate in this you just need to fill this out and hand it to an usher when you come up for communion. If you want to think about it, you have until this Thursday to email us and tell us you are all in. If you don’t have email, just call the office. Okay Julie is going to play a little and I’ll give you a minute or so to fill out this form if you want to participate. Does everyone have a form and a pencil or pen who want to participate. There are pencils in the most of the pews in front of you.

The very early church is described in the book of Acts – and doesn't the title tell us everything. It’s not a book of principles or teachings. It’s a book that records the Actions of the Early church. Devoting themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, fellowship, prayer and breaking bread.

Let's Pray