

What is Community? April 2010

The Worship Study Team is researching and praying about the possibility to begin a second worship service at Yates Baptist Church. This team, appointed by the deacons in 2009 in fulfillment of the directives of Team 24/7 report adopted by the church in 2008, has been hard at work since January of this year. One of the keys questions they are addressing is what does it mean to have Christian community. There is the expressed concern that having two worship services would disrupt the sense of Christian community we currently have. The thinking goes, "Having one worship service for the church builds unity and community. We all have the same experience which builds community in the church."

One of the key biblical texts about the fundamental marks of the church comes from Acts 2:42-47. This is one of Luke's summary texts that gives vital information about the church in its infancy. Verse 44 reads, "All the believers were together and had everything in common." Let's look at this statement closely. "All the believers were together" certainly didn't mean that they lived together or spent all their time together. They had jobs and families they had to attend to. Prior to this passage we're informed that 3000 souls were saved on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). It would have been impossible for 3000 to worship together in the temple courts every day so they "broke bread in their homes" as a means to develop community with a smaller segment of the whole church (Acts 2:46). They were small clusters of Christians who met in each other's homes to build koinonia/fellowship. They did come together in larger clusters, no doubt, to "meet together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46), but it is unlikely that all 3000 could meet at the same time.

There were multiple elements to the community they established. **The first and foremost element was a "common confession of faith."** In Acts 2:41 we're informed that "those who accepted this message were baptized." This message was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who heard about Jesus being the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David, dying on the cross for the sins of all people, and being raised from the dead by his heavenly Father, and then professed him as Lord and Savior were baptized. They had a common confession. This created a common community. They were one people with one Lord who had experienced one baptism. This common confession was the cornerstone to their community.

Second, they had all things in common. This was physically expressed by "selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:41). Did all 3000 sell everything? Homes? Flocks? Clothing? Pots and Pans? This is unlikely. Remember this is a summary statement. What is likely is that the vast majority did sell many or most of their possessions to create a "pool of wealth" from which the church leaders could address the needs of the people. In other words they cared for one another's physical and material needs. The wealthy voluntarily offered their resources to the community for the common good.

The experience of the early church gives evidence that the early church's common community wasn't dependent upon one worship service under one roof on one day of the week. It was first and foremost grounded in a common confession of faith. Second, it was grounded in their sharing what they had and who they

were with one another. Their worship took place in the temple courts and their homes in smaller clusters. **Here's the point: We can continue to sustain and value community even if we have more than one worship service.** Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ as risen Lord will not change. Our commitment to share what we have and who we are can grow as we become more generous with our time and possessions for the sake of the larger community. Our worship directed to God enhances everything else. And if we create an environment that enables more people to worship God, confessing our one Lord, we will strengthen the Lord's church.

Pray that our church can submit to the power of the Holy Spirit to reach out to others in love for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.