

# LifeGroup Study

Date: April 30, 2023

Text: Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10

Theme: Reanimated...for genuine community

## Belong

When we think of community, the first thing that comes to mind is likely a group of people that have something in common. Webster's Dictionary defines the word community as "a group of people with a common characteristic or interest." People that are living in the same town or city are a community; a group of people with the same occupation are a community.

Jesus invites us into a deeper and broader sense of community, one that goes beyond linking people together by the certain characteristics they have in common and moves us deeply into a community that focuses on the relationships we have with him and each other. This week's text gives us a glimpse into the community Jesus had in mind for first century Christians and it's a community that continues to grow some 2000 years later. It's a community that is available to all and has its foundation in Jesus himself. A community that continues to look outward from itself in order to follow the commandments of Jesus to love each other and serve each other through the compassion and love that dwells within us.

**Prayer...** Heavenly Father, thank you for the community to which you invite us—a community bound together by Jesus and the Holy Spirit within us that ignites and moves us into the world to serve in your name. Guide us so that we may more deeply understand and become more engaged in your community. Amen.

## Believe

Read Acts 2:42-47. This text follows the description of Pentecost and Peter's explanation to the crowd of what was happening to Jesus' disciples. We see the result of the coming of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers and see that, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*" They also gave to everyone as they needed, met together daily in the temple courts, and ate together.

- *How do you think we can accomplish these things today?*
- *How do you think community is born out of these activities?*
- *What motivates us to look outside of our community?*
- *How does that bring us "glad and sincere hearts"?*

Read John 10:1-10. As the text begins Jesus uses an example from the everyday lives of his audience to teach about himself and help them and us understand him on a deeper level. In Jesus' day a sheepfold was usually a rock enclosure with a single opening where many sheep from different flocks would be protected at night by a single watchman at the opening. Each morning the shepherds would come to the watchman who would let them in to call to their flock. The flocks would know their shepherd's voice and come out of the sheepfold. Jesus

also explains that anyone who doesn't come to the watchman and enter through the gate is a thief and robber and that the sheep, not recognizing their voice, will not listen and, in fact, will run away.

- *Do you think of Jesus as the shepherd?*
- *How do we know Jesus' voice from other voices?*
- *Who do you think the thief or robber represents today?*

As the gate, Jesus lets us know that anyone who enters his sheepfold, or community, through him will be welcomed with open arms but also warns that there will be others who try to lure us away. Those people will be like thieves and are out to do us harm. Ultimately, Jesus welcomes all of us to come to him and join his community. As we enter through him we will join together with others who also recognize his voice, creating a community that allows us to realize the full life that comes from Jesus.

- *What does it mean to you that Jesus describes himself as the gate?*
- *How do we "enter" through Jesus and what are we entering?*
- *What does Jesus mean by verse 9?*
- *What comes to your mind when you hear Jesus' words, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"?*

In the Acts text, the description of the community of believers gives us a glimpse of abundant life: that having Jesus as the foundation moves us into relationship with him and each other, creating a community of people that has compassion and love at its core and realizes abundant life through the generous hearts that fuel the longing to move outward and serve those in need.

- *What do you think these texts teach us about community?*

## Become

As our personal relationship with Jesus grows, we are compelled into action. A desire grows within us to serve others through the love and compassion that God has placed on our hearts. As that desire grows we also start to notice others who are experiencing and doing similar things and we begin to realize we can join together to serve in a bigger way than we can individually. As more and more people join us we begin to experience a community of people brought together by the passions God has placed on our hearts. This community, bound together by Jesus, is focused not only on serving the people within but looks outward to the larger community and is motivated into action to support and serve those in all kinds of need. This is the genuine community Jesus had in mind for those who follow him, a community motivated from love, reaching out to others not for any internal satisfaction but for the sole purpose of serving people in need.

**Prayer...** Lord God, our desire is to not only be part of your community but to encourage and invite others through the love you have placed deep within us. We ask for your continued help in showing us how we can more deeply connect to the love you've placed within so that we may strengthen the bonds we share in your community. Bonds that will urge us to move outward with confidence and compassion so that we may follow Jesus' example and serve those in need. Amen.

# Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

Date: April 30, 2023

Text: Acts 2:42-47; John 10:1-10

Theme: Reanimated...for genuine community

## Day 1: Monday —Much Talk about Sheep

In our Gospel text, Jesus uses images that might be foreign to us. Is your picture of shepherds and sheep limited to Christmas scenes of men and their animals alone on star-lit Judean hillsides? This picture is valid, but so are others: imagine a shepherd leading his flock to a common sheep pen, with a watchman who guards the sheep; or visualize a lone shepherd lying across the gate of a sheepfold, serving as the only barrier between his sheep and danger. Now read John 10:1-10; notice the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. Can you apply this to your relationship with Jesus? Thank him for knowing you by name; pray you will listen to and obey his voice.

**Day 2: Tuesday —Jesus Said, “I Am...”** By what name does God reveal himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13- 15? Now ponder the titles Jesus uses in identifying himself in John 6:35a,48,51a; 8:12,58; 9:5; 10:7,9,11,14; 11:25-26; 14:6; and 15:1. Have you experienced Jesus in all these aspects? What does it mean to you that Jesus says, “I am the gate” (*John 10:7,9*)? Relate this to Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14 and John 14:6, Peter’s in Acts 4:12, and John’s in 1 John 5:12,20? Do you believe the testimony of Jesus, Peter, and John? [*Consider also meditating on John 10:11-18 and Jesus as the Good Shepherd.*] Bow before our God, the great I AM and before Jesus, who is God incarnate.

**Day 3: Wednesday —Abundant Life** What is Jesus’ promise in John 10:10? What does this mean for your life today and for eternity? Are you experiencing this full, abundant life? Christians should be the most joyful of all people! Do David’s words in Psalm 36:7-9 and Jesus’ words in John 15:9- 13 help us understand this blessed, joyful, purposeful, abundant life? Ponder Keith Green’s lyrics: “This is my commandment, that you love one another, that your joy may be full...that you serve one another...that you lay down your lives...” Is your greatest joy and sweetest purpose rooted in God’s love for you and the outflow of that love to others? Open your heart and life to Jesus in prayer.

## Day 4: Thursday—Reanimated for Genuine Community

Read Acts 2:5,14,36-38,41-47. At first glance our John (1-3) and Acts texts might not appear to have much in common. But consider that it is the people’s relationship with Jesus and the work of the Spirit that have reanimated, for genuine community, those about whom we read in Acts 2:42-47. Remember: Jesus is the gate, the way of salvation (*John 10:1-10; 14:6*), and that the Holy Spirit is the promised living water who births faith, nurtures growth, and creates community (*John 7:37-39; 14:25-27; 16:13-15; 17:25-26*). Did the community pictured in Acts 2:42-47 experience abundant life (*John 10:10*)? Make Paul’s prayer (*Ephesians 3:14-21*) yours.

**Day 5: Friday —Genuine Community** The community of which we read in Acts 2 was unique in some aspects; yet, the picture still provides a model for us today. Read Acts 2:5,41-47; special provision needed to be made for new converts who didn’t immediately return to their native lands (perhaps they lingered to be further instructed in the faith, so, later, they could go home equipped to share the Gospel). The communal living and sharing of property, necessary to provide for the new converts, is not evidenced in the New Testament after the early chapters of Acts. But note carefully all that is still relevant. Ask the Spirit to stir in you a desire for genuine community and ask what you can do to help create it.

## Day 6: Saturday—Characteristics of Community

As you read Acts 2:42-47, notice and/or record, characteristics of community. Which characteristics promoted spiritual growth and grounding in the truth? How do you see the power of the Spirit made manifest? What reflects the believers’ dependence on God? How is their love for each other lived out? Consider that the wonders and signs authenticate the truth of the testimony. Notice the fruit of the community’s life witness. In prayer, ask how you are to apply Acts 2:42-47; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; and Hebrews 10:23-25; 13:15-16.

## Day 7: Sunday —They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Over and over Jesus demonstrates love—for his followers, and for the crowds, who often sought his gifts but not relationship with him. And, repeatedly, Jesus reminds his followers that their love for each other will be a witness to the world (*John 13:34-35; 15:9-13,17; 17:25-26; 21:15-17*). With this in mind, read again John 10:1-10 and Acts 2:42-47. What is the Spirit teaching you through these texts? Pray as you read or sing Scholtes’ lyrics: “We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord...And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love...”



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”