

The Church in Action sermon series
We're All in This Together – Acts 2:42-47
June 21, 2026
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We have a special group of people joining us for worship this Sunday. In fact, they are here every Sunday, but you probably don't notice them, even though there are about 100 of them. They are different age ranges and have been at Crestwood for varying lengths of time. At least one is a charter member and others are joining us for the very first time. I know some of them, but most of them I don't. In fact, I may never meet them. They are our online worshipping community.

Wait...community? If they're not here and we can't see them, are they still a part of our community? The dictionary defines a community as "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals." I would say that, by virtue of their logging onto this service, that fits. So, based on that definition, we're a community. But let me say again: I have no idea who most of these folks are!! Is that a criteria for community these days? Or has our online-driven virtual world changed so much in the last few years that we need to redefine what a community is?

We're continuing our sermon series on the book of Acts today. In the last few weeks, we've watched Jesus float up to Heaven and the disciples receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which is the green flag for them to start their work of spreading the gospel. In today's passage, the author gives us a glimpse of what that early movement looked like, how they were building common unity among the believers.

But finding community in our divided world is a challenge, even in the church. Almost every church can tell the story about a rift in the congregation's history, when Pastor So-and-So decided the church should use Hawaiian bread instead of an Italian loaf for communion, and before you know it half the congregation left to start the Italian Loaf Christian Church up the road. Thankfully, Crestwood doesn't have such a chapter in its history, but we are in the minority.

The church's propensity for divisiveness is completely antithetical to what we read in today's passage. This snapshot of the early church doesn't tell us about sternly worded emails to the pastor or contentious board meetings. Instead, it's a picture of harmony, as early Christians devoted themselves to being the people God called them to be. They learned together, fellowshiped together, shared stuff together, broke bread together, prayed together, praised God together and grew together. Those early believers really knew how to be church, didn't they?

But don't be fooled, folks. This was a church, after all, so there's no way everyone got along. What Acts 2 doesn't tell you is that the first time the early church held a board meeting, there was a huge argument over what color carpeting to put in the sanctuary, and before you know it Apostle So-and-So moved half the congregation to the next village to start his own flock. Paul, writing about his disagreement with Peter, says, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face." Can't you just see Peter and Paul finger-pointing and chest-bumping in the church parking lot? "Thou deservest a good smiting!" Can we admit that the church doesn't always do community well?

At least it stopped there, right? Well, for a while it did. Once Christianity became the state religion, the church didn't get a lot of opposition. Nothing promotes loyalty like burning your enemies at the stake. Then Martin Luther came along and challenged the church on its

carpet color and 94 other things, and the Protestant Reformation was born. And then all Hades broke loose! As soon as people were able to interpret scripture for themselves, they found out just how much there was to disagree about. They started reading the Bible together - "In the beginning" - and someone asked, "When was the beginning? What was before the beginning? Was there a God before the beginning?" and it went downhill from there. And that was only the first three words! It was a long way from the Acts 2 church.

When you look at all of the disagreements down through church history, many of them center on one fundamental question, and it's the same question that is used to define our communities today: who's in and who's out? That was at the core of the disagreement between Paul and Peter. How much should non-Jewish converts to Jesus observe the Jewish laws about dietary restrictions and circumcision? Who's in and who's out? This question was at the core of many of Martin Luther's charges against the Catholic church, and it is at the core of some of our biggest religious arguments today.

The problem is the Bible's not real clear on this. Are divorced people in or out? Are uncircumcised Gentiles in or out? Are members of the LGBTQ+ community in or out? Are sinners and tax collectors in or out? You could make valid arguments on both sides of the issue based on scripture, and that's not helpful. I had someone come up to me after Bible study on Thursday and his basic question as, "Why isn't God more clear in the Bible about the important stuff?" I'm right there with you, brother. We want clarity for so many reasons, including so we know where to draw the lines. In our communities, we want to know who's in and who's out.

Wouldn't it be easier if Jesus gave us some guidance on this? How else are you supposed to define your community if you don't know who to exclude? Instead, Jesus says really frustratingly vague things like, "Love your enemies" and "Blessed are the peacemakers" and then leaves us to work out the details in community with each other. We're not always so good at that. Spend only a few minutes on social media and you'll find plenty of people who hate and exclude. And you'll probably find some people you want to hate and exclude.

Maybe we're going about this all wrong. Maybe we're using the wrong criteria to define who's in and who's out of our community. I've told you all before about how ranchers in Australia control their flocks. Because the size of land they own is so huge, building fences is too impractical and costly, and there would be no way to monitor them. So instead of building a fence, they dig down into the earth and build a well, providing precious water in the dusty Outback. Animals won't stray too far from their water source, so instead of fencing in the borders, the ranchers draw their flocks to the center.

Rather than building fences, maybe we should be digging wells. Instead of guarding our boundaries, maybe we should be inviting people into the center. Instead of trying to decide who's in and who's out of our communities, maybe we should set a table, extend an invitation, and see who shows up. The early church didn't draw lines; they shared what they had with each other, and everyone was invited to the fellowship picnics, and everyone was invited to Sunday School, and everyone was invited to the table.

That may be the one thing we've continued to get right as Disciples of Christ. Everyone is welcome at the table. No criteria. No entrance exams. No determination of spiritual fitness. It's a "y'all come" invitation, a lavish extension of radical hospitality where everyone is in and no one is out, like Edwin Markham's poem, "He drew a circle that shut me out —Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in." Christ has drawn a circle and we are all within it.

The table, which is at the center of our worship space, is our well, drawing people to the center of our faith, which is Jesus Christ. The only people Jesus was hesitant to invite in – the religious leaders – were those who thought they knew where to draw the boundary on God’s behalf. To those who wanted to exclude others, Jesus said that prostitutes would enter the kingdom of Heaven before they did. Ouch.

That doesn’t mean we have to agree with everyone who comes into our circle. In fact, I think our community is made stronger by the diversity of beliefs contained within it. The beauty of who we are – or at least who we are striving to be – is that there is room for every voice here. We don’t have to all believe the same things or vote the same way to be part of this family. We are included by virtue of the one who drew the circle, the one whose love, like a circle, has no beginning and no end, our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the Opening of the Obama Presidential Center this past week, an occasion that drew people from diverse spectrum of our country, a video introducing the center said, “The story of the South Side of Chicago a story of possibility We can come together and create the change we seek. ‘We.’ It’s the single most powerful word in a democracy: ‘We the people.’ We shall overcome. All things are possible. Yes we can. ‘We’ includes everyone.” As Acts says “All the believers were together.”

Online, you can block someone you don’t want to be in community with. Wouldn’t it be great if people walked around with “Block” buttons on their forehead so that anytime they say something you disagree with you can just hit that button? But that’s not the case. Instead, we are called to live in community with everyone, communities in which God invites everyone in. That person who thinks differently than you? In. That person who forwards you every single email with pictures of cute kittens? In. That person whose political perspective is both wrong and obnoxious? In. That jerk on Facebook? In. That person who roots for a rival sports team? Sigh. In.

We may have strong opinions about who we believe should be in and who should be out. And that’s OK. We’re human, so we’re not going to like everybody. In fact, there’s probably one person – maybe more than one – who thinks YOU shouldn’t be in the circle. How about that for a kick in the rear? It’s a good thing God’s drawing the circle and not them, isn’t it? Because when God draws the circle, there’s room. Room for me. Room for you. Room for everyone. Everyone. How big are the circles we draw? Is there room for everyone? This world has enough people who want to build fences; may God give us the grace to be people who dig wells.