



This week, Jeremy taught on the importance of belonging. Church membership is more than just your name on a roll. It is belonging.

It has been said that we live in one of the most divided times in history since the Civil War. We need fellowship but struggle to find it.

Where do you find your primary support as a Christian? With family members? With a small group? With co-workers? With Christian friends outside your church?

In your experience, what are the greatest obstacles to meaningful Christian fellowship? People are too busy? People don't see each other often enough outside of church? People don't see it as that important?

Into the Word:

Read Ephesians 2:11–22

Humans prefer being with people like themselves, in what are called affinity groups. We're more comfortable around others from the same nation, culture, and social and economic group. We're more relaxed and less on guard when we socialize with those who share our value system and religion.

But our natural affinities are challenged and in fact broken down in the fellowship of the redeemed and the reconciled. Paul taught that Christ has made peace between these all groups. Through Christ, formerly hostile and distant peoples are being made one. The dividing wall of hostility has been destroyed by Christ's death. A new "building" is under construction, one people of God, who are the dwelling place for the Spirit of God.

Do you agree or disagree that part of God's re-creative work in the world is to break down walls of alienation and hostility between affinity groups—between nations, cultures, and language groups, between rich and poor, the educated and the less educated, men and women, young and old, black, white, and brown? Why or why not? Why should the fellowship among believers transcend natural, human divides?

It is often said that the most segregated hour of the week in the United States is Sunday morning when Christian churches are worshiping. Why is this? Is this a judgment on the Christian church? Should Christian congregations work toward being multi-ethnic and multi-racial? Or do we just need to accept that we will feel most comfortable worshiping with others like ourselves?

How does this apply to the political world? In this world of "Conservative vs Liberal", "Red vs Blue", how can the church cultivate a sense of fellowship among people that are bombarded with social media and ads that promote division and separatism?

Apply the Word

Ray Oldenburg has argued that a healthy society needs three elements: family, work, and a “third place” that is an open and inclusive social setting. The essential requirements of a third place are that it is neutral territory where rank is forgotten, it is frequented by a core of regular attenders who foster interpersonal exchange, and conversation is a central activity (*The Great Good Place*, Marlowe & Company, 1999). In our society, many people try to find this third place in bars or pubs. But the ideal place is the church.

How does Oldenburg’s description of a “third place” fit your understanding of the fellowship of believers? How does the church sometimes differ from Oldenburg’s description of a third place?

Christian fellowship is a gift of the Holy Spirit but it also involves effort on our part. How can we both receive this gift and do what needs to be done to allow Christian fellowship to flourish?

Christian fellowship takes time and effort. What are you willing to give up in your busy schedule to enrich Christian fellowship in your life and those Christians with whom you relate? How is God calling you personally to take Christian fellowship more seriously?