

“Who Do You Walk With?”

This morning, I would like to begin my sermon with a simple question. Which of the Sunday worship sequences do you find most interesting? Then what do you value most among them? Do you admit that God and the Bible place a great emphasis on the importance and value of fellowship? I'm hoping that when we hear the word "fellowship," we have some sort of intimate feeling.

Every tribe and every nation, every denomination, and every church have a different method of fellowshiping with one another. However, the Bible-based meaning of fellowship is the same. I want to share with you the Bible's teaching of fellowship today.

First of all, there are two different types of fellowship. One type of fellowship is the kind with your friends—the people with whom you just seem to click instantly and without any difficulty or awkwardness. You don't have to prepare when you meet them, and there's no pressure because the conversation is flowing and filled with laughter, sometimes even to the point of tears, and you just don't want to leave each other's company.

This type of fellowship is great. It's easy. However, depending on the context or nature of what you are doing, there is a chance that there was no effectiveness in that meeting. Because it was killing time. It's the kind of interaction in which you have an amazing time, and afterward, those people and the interactions you had with them are soon gone from your mind.

On the contrary, sometimes people need to prepare many things for the fellowship through time, energy, money, and even prayers. Concentration and so much effort need to be expended just to keep a smile on both your and the other person's faces. It can be so burdensome. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and just knew that, despite honest effort, neither of you was really connecting with the other?

However, those burdensome efforts can potentially bear good fruit.

It is because church is a great center where believers can not only have superficial conversations but also have conversations that really touch other people's hearts.

Let's look at the book of Ezekiel for today's scripture. The Israelites worshipped idols and defiled God's name. I know we can look at them in judgment and ask, "How could they worship false idols that way when God had done so much for them?" However, I want us to be wary of hypocrisy because we do the same. All of us know how easy it is and how seemingly natural it can feel to commit sin.

However, God wanted to restore the glory of his name. He said, "Come back to me; you will be my people, and I will be your God." God opened an easy path for Israel to serve their Lord. Why did God want to be their God? Why did God choose Israel as his chosen people? Because God wanted to have fellowship with them.

Therefore, our fellowship is the time of service when we participate in communicating with one another with a heart to be concerned with each other's souls. The ultimate goal of our fellowship is to achieve salvation. And the fellowship that occurs between God and human beings is shown in the time of fellowship between human beings with each other. That's why we call fellowship an extension of the worship service.

II. As I told you before, there is fellowship that can be burdensome and fellowship that is joyful. Sometimes, having fellowship with others based only on our own desires and strengths becomes troublesome. I know that sometimes when you interact with other people, listening to their problems or even just hearing them talk can be exhausting. Even listening to the words of your pastor and hearing him talk can be a source of stress, even though I like to agree with my kids that I am cute and that my corny jokes are funny occasionally.

I just want you to remember that fellowship is the time when we can practice what we've learned during the service in the quickest and closest setting! In fellowship time, Jesus says to us, "I want to touch the person through your hands." We need to hold that faith in our hearts. The greatest work of Jesus Christ was the crucifixion. How

could Jesus bear that impossible mission as a human being? It was through the power that came from fellowship with the Father.

Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer. His prayer was a time of fellowship with his father. How much time did Jesus spend fellowshiping with the Father? As much as he could! The Bible makes many references to Jesus going off alone to pray. In the gospel of John 14:11, Jesus confesses that he and God the Father are one. Through our fellowship with God, we can gain the strength to accomplish all that He has set out for us. Without fellowship with Him, we cannot nor should not do anything.

III. Wrightwood CUMC, of course, belongs to Jesus Christ. However, Jesus entrusts us with his church as a partnership. God is looking for those who would take on the responsibility as being the faithful stewards of his church to be different from the world and to have a different attitude toward fellowship because they have Jesus' blood in their hearts. They truly want those people whom they meet today to become the people of God's kingdom.

We read the gospel of Luke 10:25–28. This scripture is also in Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 22. Our loving God and neighbor are only different in order, but the weight of love is the same. As you love God, love yourself and your neighbor. As you love yourself and your neighbor, love your God. It can also be understood to say, "As you worship your God in your sanctuary through service, have genuine and sincere fellowship with your brothers and sisters."

The first and best way to welcome newcomers is to give them a warm smile and a handshake. It seems simple, right? However, sometimes our brains and our hearts don't always coincide, and we end up avoiding newcomers or giving a shy smile in passing. How can we get our hearts and minds in sync? Ask in the name of Jesus! If we love the other person's soul, the Holy Spirit will give us the courage and joy to reach out to them first.

Fellowship in the church does not end with the process or moment of confirming each other's safety according to individual tastes. Rather, this is when the family members of faith exchange each other's eyes, hearts, smiles, and handshakes, where the joy of salvation and the

vitality of resurrection are supplied. Because this is God's blessing promised to the community of Christ.

"Come home, come home, you who are weary Come home. Earnestly tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling o sinner come home." In this song, when you hear the word "home," what do you think about it? It is easy to think of heaven and the throne of the Lord. That's not wrong. But we have a place to go before we go to heaven, and that is in Jesus' arms.

In our lives today, there must be the joy and peace that Jesus gives. We can rest alone in the arms of Jesus, of course. But how can we forget the heart of Jesus, who always seeks the lost?

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I would like to introduce you to the confession of a certain nurse. "It was when I was on the night shift in the cancer ward. One day, around 5:00 AM, the call bell suddenly rang from a hospital room. I quickly ran to the hospital room. The person who rang the bell was the oldest inpatient on the ward.

When I hurriedly opened the curtains, the patient calmly held out an apple to me and said, "Nurse, could you peel this apple for me?" It made me feel bad that he asked me to barely peel an apple on a busy morning. Beside him, his wife, who took care of him, was fast asleep.

"You can ask your guardian for this," I retorted, and he said, "Sorry, please peel it down for me." I hurriedly cut the apple roughly, fearing that the other patients would wake up. But he again asked me to cut the apple into bite-sized pieces. I cut the apple into several pieces with an annoyed expression. Fearing what more he might ask of me, I hurried out of the room.

Shortly thereafter, the patient passed away. A few days after that, his wife came to see me emaciated and said to me, "I was awake at dawn the day you were peeling the apple. It was our wedding anniversary. "I have always loved apples. That day, my husband asked you to peel the apple because his hands were so weak. I wanted to protect the heart of my husband, who was trying to surprise me, so I lay there pretending not to know that you were busy. Thank you so much for helping him, so my husband could give me his last wedding anniversary gift and leave me."

I looked back and thought how indifferent and foolish I had been that morning in front of the heartbreaking love between the two! I was ashamed to look back at myself for a moment, but I was proud that a very valuable opportunity had been given to me."

Let us always remember: opportunities to love our neighbors come silently. So, it is necessary for us to cherish every moment that is given to us. And when we dream of giving others too much, maybe we are bluffing. It is a special grace of God that you are given the opportunity to accompany others even if you are forced to.

After this service, let's take time to say hello to at least 5 people before you leave the chapel! Amen.

Reflection and Apply for Today's Sermon:

- 1) When do you have fellowship with God during the day? Which method do you use? What does the Lord say to you then?
- 2) When and through what do you receive the warmth of church members on Sunday? How does it affect your spirituality?
- 3) Which of Wrightwood UMC's ministries do you think is a good example of practicing neighborly love? How would you like to join it?