

“Why We Gather: Practicing Communion”  
Acts 2:42-47

In an effort to revive interest in baseball, Major League Baseball hosted a game in a newly constructed stadium in a little town in Iowa where the movie “Field of Dreams” was filmed. This movie, which was released in 1989, was on the surface about baseball, but the real message was about reconciliation and finding purpose in life. The storyline is about a man by the name of Ray Kinsella who had a patchy past of a wild lifestyle. We meet Ray when he and his wife decide to become corn farmers in Iowa. He wanted to settle down, but something strange happened to him. Through several mystical encounters, he hears a voice that tells him to build a baseball field in the middle of his corn field. At first, that sounded crazy to him. Yet, the voice and visions were so compelling that Ray followed through on this vision and ended up building the field and recruiting players. The field became all about unfinished dreams and connections. Ray was always haunted by how his relationship with his father was strained, specifically around baseball. They never reconciled. His father’s death left this unresolved pain in his life. But in the end, the building of the field and the mystical appearance of his father helped Ray to reconcile with his father and to let go of all resentment and bitterness to find a way forward. Here is the final scene of the movie: [https://youtu.be/IXjz-M\\_6eN8](https://youtu.be/IXjz-M_6eN8).

There are a lot of spiritual lessons in this movie, but the one I would like us to focus on is purpose. Purpose was not clear for Ray when he set out to build the field. But in the end, we see that the whole thing was about reconciliation with his father. The field became the conduit for this kind of transformation to happen. A lot of times in life we are not clear about our purpose for gathering with others and thus we miss the opportunity to have meaningful gatherings. When purpose becomes clear, all the other pieces fall into place.

Today I want to invite us to consider why we gather to worship each week. On the surface, it is simple: We gather because of our desire to worship God in community. But if we are to get deep into the power of our gatherings, it is so important for us to be intentional and specific about why we gather. We are used to focusing on the how to of our gatherings, i.e., the specifics of how we gather, but today during this sermon series, I want to invite us to consider the importance of focusing on our purpose for our gatherings. Sometimes by focusing on the specifics of worship we can lose track of why we are gathered. Our mission as a congregation is “transforming lives by sharing the love of God in our communities.” Therefore, our worship is about being intentional to share the love of God with one another each time we gather. That is how spiritual transformation happens. When the power of God’s love touches us, we are healed or are set on the path of healing. Each of us has a unique story of life and faith and our needs are unique and connected to our stories and experiences. Yet, we all share our common need for healing. Life has a way of wounding us along the way. The wounding takes many forms, but the pattern of brokenness is evident in many of our common struggles where we fight and compete with one another. That is why worshipping together can be so transformative and healing. Through the power of God’s love, the barriers that separate us are broken down and we can practice the kind of love that heals us and sets us free to love others.

This is what the early followers of Jesus discovered about the power of their worship gatherings. Even though gathering in the name of Jesus was not popular, even controversial, the author of the book of Acts was giving the readers a compelling summary description of the life of the early church to help them see the value in joining the church.

There are several summaries in Acts about the life of the early community. These summaries provide a general picture of the activities the new believers engaged in when they congregated under the leadership of the apostles. Our text, 2:42-47, the first major summary, follows the massive baptism that results from Peter's first speech at Pentecost. The summaries tell incomplete stories of how the early group of believers lived in community. Summaries provide snapshots; they are not designed to tell us all the details. We can't take this summary and make it the literal ideal for churches and disciples. What we can get from this scripture is a description of what a Christian community looks like when they are living in the Spirit of God and when transformation is at the heart of what they do. The early followers of Christ were so focused on the love of God that their lives were so transformed for the whole world to see their amazing change. Touched by the Holy Spirit (screen bullet points),

- They generously shared what property they possessed.
- They broke down the social barriers between economic classes, ethnic groups, and men and women.
- They shared bread together. The table of Christ became their spiritual practice and ritual where they visibly and intentionally practiced love for one another regardless of all the social barriers that separated them. The table of Christ brought them together.
- They prayed together and had deep spiritual friendship around an incredible message of good news of God's love!

It is interesting the table of Christ became so essential to all Christian gatherings. Community experience of divine love was the focus. Unfortunately, because of centuries of practice, layers of interpretation, and lack of focus on our purpose, this table of Christ has become a symbol of separation from others. I know that many times, when we gather with other Christians, we can share in every aspect of worship, except for communion. We sometimes even fight amongst ourselves about how and when to celebrate this feast of God's love. Sometimes Christians put barriers around the table allowing only those who are worthy to come and participate. Sometimes our barriers are unintentional because we forget to welcome all to the table. We may assume that others feel welcome. By going back to the purpose of our gatherings (screen), "transforming lives by sharing the love of God," we can refocus our methods to fulfil what we seek to do. We are invited today to remember that by coming together, we are practicing this radical kind of love and communion where love trumps all of our human conflicts and old divisions. We are united through the great force of the universe, and nothing can take that away from us.

What does it mean for us today to share the love of God in communion in community? What are some of the barriers and wounds God is seeking to heal through our coming

together? How is God transforming you through your coming to worship? (Share with others)

One of the challenges for us during this pandemic is connecting with others virtually and in person. Yet, the pandemic has helped us refocus on our purpose. We have found new ways to reconnect and to regather. Some are attending online, and some are able to join in person. We are doing weekly mailings to those who are homebound. We are sharing a lot more electronically and in the community. I know that one of the things I tried to be intentional about was to have worship be mostly live instead of recorded so that we may experience community instead of a passive experience of watching. Even though the way we do communion is different, we are able to share in this feast together because we know that through this ritual sacrament, there is a great act of love.

By going back to the purpose of our gatherings of experiencing the love of God together, we can refocus our methods and attitudes to fulfil what we seek to do. By coming together with all of our pain, struggles, joys, and diversity, we practice Christ's radical kind of love and communion where love trumps all of our human conflicts and divisions. We are united through the great force of the universe, and nothing can take that away from us. This kind of spirit of community is desperately needed in our world today as we face many challenges. It is easy to vilify others and to divide ourselves based on our fears, but the call to intentional community that is gathered around the Spirit of Love helps us to step outside of ourselves to see our common bonds and the potential for loving beyond our social barriers and limitations. Practicing communion is a ritual and a sacrament that brings us back to who we truly are, especially when we forget.

In her book, *Take This Bread*, Sara Miles reflects on communion and becoming a part of a Christian community at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church saying that it was all "terribly inconvenient," as she believes that "You don't get to practice Christianity by hanging out with people who are like you and believe what you believe. You have to rub up against strangers and people who frighten you and people you think are misguided, dangerous, or just plain wrong."

I pray that our coming to the table of Christ today will open us up to the touch of the Spirit so that we may be healed and be part of the healing of the world, transforming lives by sharing the love of God in our communities. Amen.