



Rooted and Ready:
“SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER”

Acts 2:42-47

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In an old *Peanuts* comic strip, Lucy is talking to Charlie Brown and says, “I’m intrigued by this view you have on the purpose of life, Charlie Brown... You say we’re put here on earth to make others happy?”

“That’s right,” says Charlie Brown.

After thinking about it for a moment, Lucy turns back to him and asks, “What are others put here for?”

I’ll let you all sit with your answers to Lucy’s question for a minute.

“What’s our purpose?” That’s a question many people ask for which there are plenty of answers. It’s also a good question for us to ponder as a church from time to time.

At Birmingham and Berkley First, we have a well-defined purpose statement. We are clear that we are here “To gather, nurture, and equip disciples of Jesus Christ for ministry and mission in the world.” This is why we exist. Everything we do is centered on this primary task. It’s based on The United Methodist Church’s mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

For the past several weeks in this *Rooted and Ready* series, we’ve talked about how we live this task out through our core values. Today, we turn our attention to our last core value in the series, “Support One Another.” While I wouldn’t say with Charlie Brown that we’re here “to make others happy,” I’m not really sure that our purpose is solely based on whether someone is always satisfied as a consumer of life. I do think, however, that Charlie Brown is getting at something when he recognizes that our purpose is to connect with someone or something beyond ourselves. Perhaps our lesson from Acts this morning can shed some light on the understanding of our purpose as a church.

The lesson begins right after Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. It was that moment that God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to Peter and the apostles. At Pentecost, a group of scared disciples

became apostles who were suddenly empowered by the Spirit of God and sent out to proclaim the Gospel, making disciples and transforming the world.

Luke, the author of Acts, tells us that in these early days, the people of this new movement “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”¹ The verses that follow explain each one of these commitments in more detail.

The apostles were those who were closest to Jesus’ ministry. As others looked on in awe, the signs and wonders bore witness to their close relationship with Jesus who also performed signs and wonders. Following the apostles’ teaching would keep them nearer to the teachings of Jesus.

Disciples in the early church were dedicated to fellowship with one another. The word used here in Greek is *koinonia*. For the early church, this was more than just catching up at coffee hour or a regular potluck. The term brings up a sense of dedication to the community itself. In fact, Luke describes their dedication to one another in a sense of *koinonia* in more detail, saying that “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”²

They were so dedicated to the community, to one another and to their fellowship, that they sold everything they had and shared with one another as any had need. In their deep love and care for one another, they refused to see anyone having to struggle unnecessarily. Think of how profound this witness was in a day when widows and orphans were left to fend for themselves with no identity and no help. This newly-founded community loved one another deeply; they supported one another, so that no one was left on their own without access to what was needed to survive. Dedicated to one another, they made certain that no one had to live without the necessities of life.

The commitment to community continued as “they spent much time together” in temple worship, breaking bread with one another, and praising God together.³ Do you see the common thread? In study, in prayer, in worship, in eating, in meeting needs, and in being together, they “supported one another.” Why? It was a living witness of what they had come to experience first in Jesus Christ. They lived out the life of Jesus who came to offer his life in love for humanity. The early disciples understood that they offered their lives in love for one another, remembering Jesus’ love for them.

When I was about ten years old, I attended Peace United Methodist Church which was located in East Detroit, Michigan (now Eastpointe, Michigan). I was with my great-grandmother who had invited me to join her that Sunday when she had come from Pennsylvania for a visit with our family. I had gone to church with other friends from time to time, but I never really kept going to church at that point in my life. After worship that week, however, the pastor’s wife invited me to stay for Sunday School. From that moment on, I didn’t stop attending.

The people of Peace Church didn’t stop their invitations at Sunday School. Choir members watched a young boy sit in the third pew from the front, directly in front of the pulpit each and every Sunday. So they invited me to join the choir. When the youth group noticed that there were no other kids in sixth grade, they invited me to jump up a grade and join them. Junior high and

senior high students spent time welcoming me even though I didn't really understand the issues that they were experiencing at their age.

When they didn't see me in church, someone called me to see if I was okay. If I needed a ride to church, they stopped by to take me, whether it was for choir, youth group, an administrative council meeting where I was the youth representative, or a Lenten potluck study. It was among those people that I heard my call to ministry as a response to the sense of love and care that so many had first shared with me.

Years later, when I graduated from high school and was headed off to Adrian College, I received a generous check from an older couple in the congregation that wanted to help pay for my tuition. In college, people would send cards from time to time with a gift at just the right time to help with books, tuition, or my room and board.

At the end of my second year of college, the little church that had supported me in my call to ministry was struggling to keep their doors open. The cost had become too much for the few families that were still there. Only after they found out that I would be able to continue as a candidate for ministry, did they finally decide to merge with another local church. Even still, they directed that some of the proceeds from the sale of the building be used to set up a scholarship fund for students who were answering their call to ministry. In seminary, cards and checks would still show up from time to time from members of the former Peace United Methodist Church, encouraging me and caring for me as I followed this call to ministry.

That small membership congregation, which I still call my home church family to this day, were there supporting me in love and lifting me up in prayer. On my first Sunday here in Birmingham, one of the former members of Peace United Methodist Church, who remembers the first days that I started attending a United Methodist church, joined us for worship along with my parents and some members of our merged congregation. To this day, those members still offer their love and support for me as I live out this calling.

In so many ways, the members of my home church lived out *koinonia* with their actions as well as their words. Their care for me through all my faith journey continues to this day. They first taught me that, in the body of Christ, we are called to support one another by caring for one another and sharing with one another from the abundance of life that God has given to us. Fellowship is about walking together in this faith journey to which God has called us.

At Birmingham and Berkley First, *koinonia*; fellowship; community defines our core value to "Support One Another." In all of life, we want people to know that you don't have to make your faith journey alone. Life can be hard; the path of faith is not always easy; but you are never alone. We are here to walk this journey with you. We support one another because it is the greatest way for us to express our love and care for one another.

This past week, over twenty counselors gave their time so that 79 choir campers might experience God's love and our loving commitment to one another. They supported our youngest members at a week of camp so that they might continue to grow in their faith journey. I know that some of the adults gave up all of their vacation this year spending time in choral ministries

in England and Lapeer, Michigan, this summer. That's similar to what the early church was doing when they gave up what they had and shared it with others who had need. And we are blessed to have the voices of our Choir Camp staff and campers as they lead us in worship this morning.

When members and constituents of our church find themselves in the hospital, they discover a wonderful team of clergy and lay visitors who check in on them throughout their stay to provide care, prayer and support. When families experience loss or other crises, there are teams of people who jump at the chance to bring meals and help in any way they can.

Not too long ago, I even heard different study groups brag about how when you need prayer, you want to be on their prayer list because they are committed to praying for you. I didn't realize that prayer could be a competition, but when I've needed prayer, I'm comforted to know there are people doing just that. Friends, this is what it means to care for our fellowship, for our community of faith, to support one another.

Supporting one another is our witness of love for one another. It is a witness to the world around us as well. While we may not exist to make everyone happy all the time, I do think that we exist for one another. The early church understood this concept well. At Birmingham and Berkley First, we embrace the idea that God intends this type of deep relationship for us as well as we live out our core value to support one another. As we support one another, we are rooted and ready to make disciples of Jesus Christ and see our world transformed.

As the early church committed themselves to support one another, Luke tells us that "Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."⁴ When we support one another and care for those around us, others see more clearly the love that God has for our world in Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, "God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family, that we are made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion."⁵ May we live out this dream that God has for us...together.

¹ Acts 2:42, NRSV.

² Acts 2:44-45, NRSV.

³ Acts 2:46-47, NRSV.

⁴ Acts 2:42, NRSV.

⁵ <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/298500>