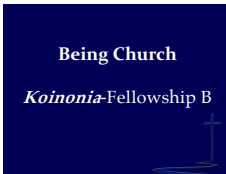


## Fellowship - Part B

August 2021



As Barbara and I have sought God's direction on what to work on at this time we believe we need to work on being church as a fellowship. We started 2 weeks ago. If you missed that first teaching the text and audio are on the Church website as *Koinonia-Fellowship A*

Let's run a brief recap from 2 weeks ago:



“In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ.

Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy.

Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution.

Next it moved to Europe (*sic*) where it became a culture,

and, finally, it moved to (North) America - where it became an enterprise.”<sup>1</sup>



That story shows how far we have drifted from what Jesus wanted.

We talked about the way the word ‘fellowship’ has been confused in Church culture with social time and reclaimed it's biblical meaning by using the term *Koinonia-Fellowship* to differentiate it.

*Koinonia-fellowship* is the bond among those that sincerely hold Jesus as Lord and live in his Spirit.

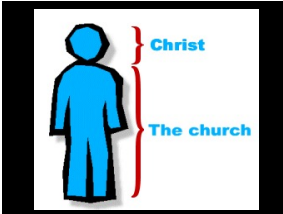
*Koinonia-Fellowship*  
=  
a shared  
participation, association  
or communion.

We looked at a number of metaphors to understand what this looked like. Here are just two from scripture:

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Richard C. Halverson (1916-1995), chaplain to the U.S. Senate, was credited in 1984 for this speech before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.



Jesus described his relationship with his followers as being like branches on the vine. Jesus calls us to abide in him. When we abide in him as the vine we as branches share a common life or *koinonia*-fellowship drawn from the vine. The result is Jesus-like fruit. – an organic image



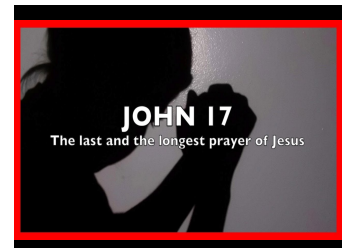
Paul describes this mode of being Church as like a human body having diverse members -such as organs and limbs- sharing and nurturing the same common life as governed by the head. This shared life is *koinonia*-fellowship which is only possible in unity. Disunity disrupts any sharing of common life. Think of the impact of amputation or a tourniquet?

We noted that this is what Jesus earnestly prayed for.

I suggested that the unity he prayed for as established in Him through his death and resurrection -later described as *koinonia*-fellowship- was of the greatest importance. Jesus depends on it.

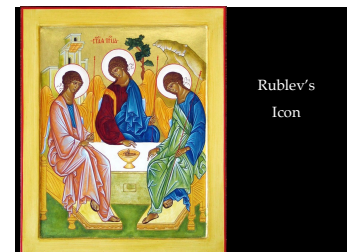
This is what informs the Church's first 4 priorities of core business as described in Acts 2:42.

<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the *koinonia*-fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.



Lastly, we looked at an icon popularly known as 'Rublev's Icon'.

Many value it as a depiction of the open *Koinonia*-Fellowship of the Trinity. They are spiritually united around a common table yet open to we who approach them. This is a picture of God's shared inner life which Jesus prayed for us to participate in so that the world recognized Jesus was sent from God because his people evidenced the *koinonia*-fellowship of God.



### **This Week's New Material:**

To get deeper into *koinonia*-fellowship I want to get us thinking about some basic assumptions we hold, because they may not be the assumptions operating in the Bible?

So a basic question about space, God and us:

**Q1:** Where does this building suggest God would be if he were to choose a spot to be?

**A1:** Discuss: the 'sanctuary', the east, the nave, or ?

**Q2:** God has often been thought of as being transcendent or imminent - high above or close and intimate. What does this building suggest? Transcendent or imminent? How has that been arranged? What do our songs and prayers suggest?

**A2:** As built the building presumes transcendence – God is more majestic than cuddly, enthroned above than available below.

**Q3:** Before I ask what you prefer, What did Jesus advocate, model and teach?

**A3:** Look at the clues: His Prayer - 'Heavenly Abba Father', Stories of the Kingdom where God hugs and kisses, Saying about heaven rejoicing and the empathy and emotion Jesus displayed as God's Son of the one and same being.

So back to what you prefer re transcendence and immanence:

It might be a result of how you were raised,

It might be a function of your personality,

It might be cultural?

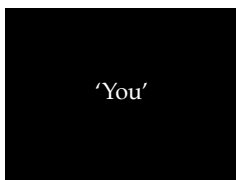
So two questions floating so far:

**Q4:** Where might God want to be in this space?

**Q5:** How close would you like God to be to you?

These are pre-sets that determine how we understand and be church?

So on our way to open the scriptures we once again run into a problem with the English language and with Western Culture.



The language problem is around the word 'You' or second person pronouns. 'You' can be singular and individual or plural relating to more than one on to millions.

To my ears English is struggling with this and I know of two adaptations:

- a) The term 'guys' as in 'You guys' has slipped in as a workable way of addressing more than one, from a couple to a multitude.<sup>2</sup>
- b) Then there is a Kiwi term I like spelt: 'Ewes'.

Meanwhile the Koine Greek of the New Testament has no problem with this as it has singular 'you' and plural 'you'. So from the Greek we can be clear if we are being addressed as individuals or as a group.

Then there is a cultural problem that shapes the way we think, at least we Westerners. I can illustrate it well as contrasted between Maori and Pakeha.

Classical Maori culture says: Because the *Iwi* or the *Whanau* is, I am. My life draws from there. From that flows the great interest in *Tipuna* and *Whakapapa*.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile the typical Westerner assumes that they are individual and as individuals join to form families, clubs, churches, companies and nations. In all these the individual can opt in or opt out.

These are two ways of thinking and shape how we view and live *koinonia*-fellowship.

They determine whether we value individual freedom or corporate unity as having priority.

So let me ask,

**Q6:** How do you think you view being church?

Are we a gathering of individuals making up a congregation

or,

Are you and I children of Mother Church by which we have been baptized into Christ?

<sup>2</sup> What very few people realise is that 'Guys' comes from Yiddish version of the Hebrew word *Goy* meaning 'Gentile'. I suspect this came into English via New York which routed a number of terms from other languages into international English.

<sup>3</sup> *Tipuna* are ancestors and *Whakapapa* is genealogy

**A6:** The East goes one way on this and the West goes another.

So let's now read some scriptures that speak to our questions behind *koinonia*-fellowship. Where does God want to be and does that relate to individuals or gathered groups?

Let's start with Deuteronomy 23:14 talking about sanitation and cleanliness it goes on to say why cleanliness is necessary:

<sup>14</sup> Because **the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp**, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

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Deuteronomy 23:14

**Q** So where is God?

**A** In the midst of their camp – not above,, not in each individual but ‘among’.

Now to Jesus in Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered in my name, **there am I among them.**"

Matthew 18:20

<sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, **there am I among them.**"

Helpfully the plural nature of this is clear in English but let's check on location:

**Q** Where is the ‘among’? Is that within each person or the space between them?

**A** ‘among’ in the shared space

Next to where the Kingdom of God operates, Luke 17.21:

<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ **for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.**"

nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Luke 17:21

The ‘you’ here is plural.

**Q** Where is the Kingdom of God located among Jesus’ followers?

**A** ‘in the midst’ in the shared space – between people.

What is happening to transcendence?

Then in his final word before ascending Jesus ends his great commission saying:

<sup>28</sup> teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:20

<sup>28</sup> teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age."

‘You’ here is again plural, speaking to all those there and to us. We may take individual comfort from this but need to realise, this is Jesus talking to his church and making his promise to her.

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, **Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”**

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John 20:26

So Jesus standing among them speaks again in the plural to say, “Peace be with you.”<sup>4</sup> He wanted them to hear this as a group and be a *koinonia*-fellowship in his peace.

Is that surprising given the prayer he prayed a few days before? “Father may they be one so that the world may recognise me as coming from you.”

This is bringing it into Church where my last scripture is set.

Paul is setting out some principles of order for services of worship and wanting them to think about the guest or person who wanders in: (1Corinthians 14:24-25)

<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, <sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and **declare that God is really among you.**

... an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25

Yes, the ‘you’ is clearly plural.

Is that sort of outcome not what Jesus was praying for where the outsider could see the in life of the church in such order and beauty that they are convinced and convicted that God is among them, in that place? “See how these Christians love on another?”

### Application

**Q7** So from all this, what is the space we need to have in mind for where God wants to be?

**A7** It is between us, among us, our shared social and interpersonal space.



This is where God manifests the reality of *koinonia*-fellowship in his church. This is where the presence of God is nurtured and where it is snuffed out.

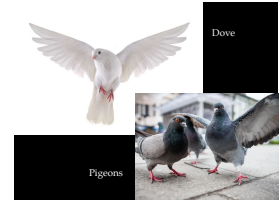
When that space is clean and open -filled with love- the Holy Spirit inhabits, Jesus stands among us, God is present in his sanctuary and the world may see a witness.

Wrong to think that one can be holy and spirit-filled in isolation while not attending to the shared life of the church at whatever level in *koinonia*-fellowship.

A way to visualise this is in relation to doves because the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> εἰρήνη ὑμῶν

The thing to appreciate is that while pigeons are bolshy messy birds that push in where not wanted and leave mess everywhere, doves are quiet, sensitive and careful. To have a dove land at your table or picnic says that it's a place of peace and safety. Pigeons don't seem to care which is why they are less than popular in cities.

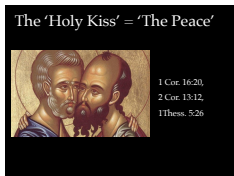


If we want to welcome the Holy Spirit we need to cultivate that safe interpersonal space between us and among us. He wants to inhabit our relationships and draw us into his.

So let's make this concrete and point it to communion which is all about *koinonia*-fellowship in Jesus Christ. In fact communion is about offering ourselves to receive Christ among us.

That is why we rearranged the seats a while ago so we could work with Jesus in being together, open and available for him to dwell and flow among us. When we celebrate and value our *koinonia*-fellowship in Him, He is so pleased to be there.

So to end this session let's look at one helpful practice.



The early church developed a way of caring for and affirming the *koinonia*-fellowship before sharing communion. We read about it in scripture as 'The holy kiss'.<sup>5</sup>

For some reason Western Christians let this slip until the 1970s when the Charismatic Movement of that time saw this remembered and recovered it. That was a work of the Spirit. We know it now as 'The Peace' which typically involves a hand shake with a greeting.



But even something ancient recovered may be suspect in church. When then Bishop of Christchurch - Allan Pyatt- introduced The Peace to Mid-Canterbury in the 1980s it was dubbed, 'The bishop's scrum' - far too physical for some!

But we may understand this treasure better because it enables us to affirm and even repair the thing Jesus most seeks – unity in his body among those abiding in him.

Our main act of preparation for many centuries has been the confession. That is the legacy of monks drawing on their daily prayer routines to address personal sin. But let me suggest to you, Jesus is more concerned with unity of his body than with the guilt of personal sin in the members.<sup>6</sup>

So how do we do The Peace well?

A few tips in covid time at Covid level 1



- 1) It's the eyes that matter. Eye contact is spiritual openness and peace  
What is wrong in this picture?
- 2) Handshake or hug is good, but only at Covid Level 1.

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1Thess. 5:26, also referred to in 2 John 10

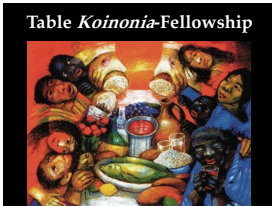
<sup>6</sup> You may want to debate that?

3) The Greeting is “The Peace of Christ” or “Peace of the Lord.” Or *Shalom*



What this does is bless the other and the space between you as holy and available for God to indwell – think of the dove?  
It may even heal or restore a relationship?

This is where God wants to be, among us and within us.



This is about getting us into the condition where Jesus can be present within and among his people.  
We need to nurture that carefully and as fellow stakeholders in *koinonia*-fellowship.  
That is our real preparation for Communion.

Then we receive the Lord in bread and wine as a shared meal.  
As with any shared meal we all stay until everyone has eaten and we only leave when everyone leaves<sup>7</sup>

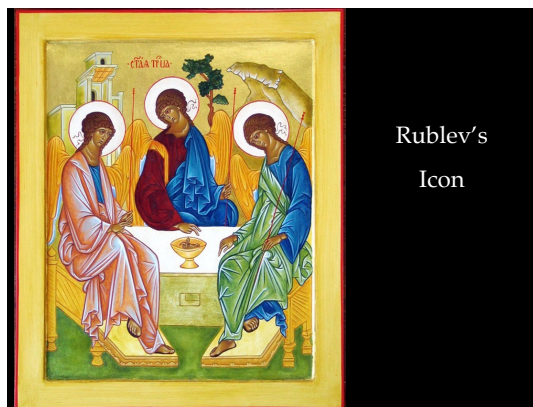
Communion is not meant to be individualised servings of fast food to grab and run.

## Conclusion

How does all this sound to you?

Does this open a way to devote ourselves to the Fellowship and the breaking of the break as core business

Is this pleasing to God?



<sup>7</sup> An anthropologist showed a game to the children of an African tribe. He placed a basket of delicious fruits near a tree trunk and told them: “The first child to reach the tree will get the basket.” When he gave them the start signal, he was surprised that they were walking together, holding hands until they reached the tree and shared the fruit! When he asked them why you did that when every one of you could get the basket only for him! They answered with astonishment: “*Ubuntu*”. “That is, how can one of us be happy while the rest are miserable?” *Ubuntu* in their civilization means: (I am because we are). That tribe knows the secret of happiness sharing life together.