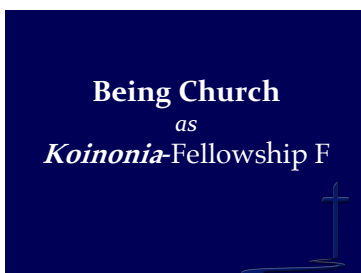


Koinonia-Fellowship F

September 2021

Introduction



Our series continues on what it means to be 'devoted to the fellowship' or 'koinonia-Fellowship' as we have been referring to it.

Through the messages there are two particular strands we have been developing:

1. The in-between or 'among us' space is where we bless or defile the work of the Holy Spirit who draws us together into the life of Christ. Jesus prays for his followers to be unified and promises the Holy Spirit to progress and bless that while we have the power to either bless and advance that or, defile the space and damage the spiritual fellowship. The result of what we bring to the interpersonal space or 'K-F-Z' (*koinonia-fellowship zone*) is either the sweet presence of the Dove or the raucous atmosphere of Pigeons with piles of guano droppings.
2. Secondly we have been developing an appreciation of Holy Communion as a celebration and affirmation of this *koinonia-Fellowship* as established in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have been trying to rescue HC from being a private act of piety or devotion to reclaim it as the powerful Jesus-instituted corporate moment he intended it to be. One big implication of this is recovering The Peace in its purpose to cleanse and heal the *koinonia-Fellowship* so that Christ is honoured in Holy Communion and the Dove of the Holy Spirit is happy to indwell it.

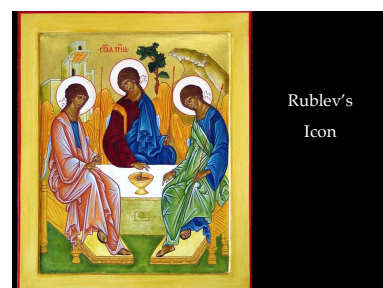
Today's Topic,

How to grow as a church devoted to *koinonia-fellowship*?

How do you welcome, weave and link people into spiritual fellowship?

From God's perspective:

How to grow the fellowship of the Holy Trinity?



Last week Barbara reflected on the Apostle James' teaching about favouritism. The implication for us here is that you do not grow a spiritual fellowship by just adding or admitting 'People-like-us' or PLUs and by passing people who are different or not what you prefer.

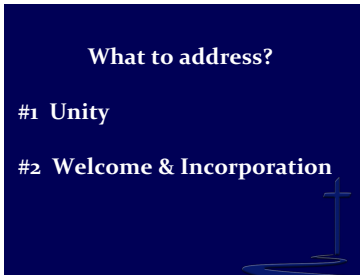
You can grow a church or a homegroup that way but then that is something other than a spiritual fellowship. It's not that hard to grow a church as a club addressing shared interests and needs of the members.

The Holy Trinity would laugh at this homogenous approach? How many Fathers, Sons or Holy Spirit types are available to take up their invitation and join. No, God's invitation goes to the unlikely others, us. So it must be with us.

To keep it practical, let's focus on church, our common shared experience and what we are about.

Q: How do we grow church as *koinonia*-Fellowship? Not club, village, service centre etc etc.

A:

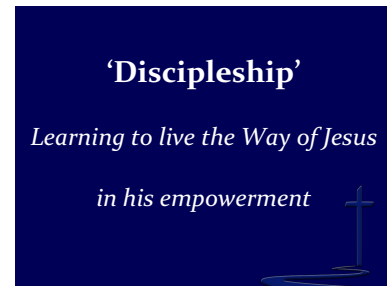


#1 Unity -- Preserve the unity of the Holy Spirit.¹
Don't break what God has built! Simple?

#2 Welcome and Incorporate of those who the Lord sends.

After many years of learning and reflecting I have come to think that Welcome and Incorporation can be -and should be- covered by Discipleship as Jesus meant and modelled it. Discipleship is really so simple but again, church culture has long lost understanding on this Way of the Master.

Discipleship is the process of being intentionally orientated to Jesus to learn about living as he calls, models and empowers. It's about Him and His Way.

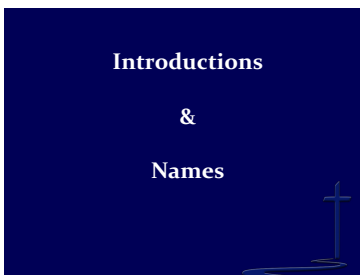


To illustrate it negatively: Discipleship is not about being nice and friendly so people want to stay, join, become regular givers and join the Vestry.²

Q2: Did it just get complicated and removed from what you know about church?

A2: Let's break it down

For now I'll assume a church context although that need not be so.



Welcome and Incorporate Step 1 is about intentionally establishing the what I term the 'K-F-Z' or, *Koinonia*-Fellowship-Zone. That's the space we have talked about where *koinonia*-fellowship happens among people.

It involves being me being a missionary - Going out to love and serve the Lord - by closing the distance to say -in my case: "Hi, I'm Francis." I say this looking at the person and meeting their eyes while smiling. Then I wait and something happens.

Doing this establishes three things:

- A. Firstly, in taking this initiative it shows a grace of acceptance. There is no one I can think of whom I would not approach in this way.
- B. Secondly, I am making myself available. I have the attitude of a servant open to what comes.
- C. Thirdly, I am planting the seed of relationship.

¹ Ephesians 4:3, ...make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

² That is a serious -if not standard- growth model that used to half work.

This is creating the KFZ for God to work.

To a fearful or selfish person doing this is high risk precisely because anything could happen and it could be inconvenient or worse. Faith in God's service takes us beyond those fears.

Q3: So why do this? *Do we have to? Where is the escape clause?*

A3: This is God's way and how God reached out to humanity.

Q4: When was that?

A4: Moses at the burning bush about 1400 BC.

Until that point people had given names and titles to what they imagined and experienced God to be. He was 'God Almighty', 'God Most High', 'God of the Mountains', etc. or 'God of the Ancestors - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'.

On the day of the burning bush Moses had the presence of mind to ask the God he met for a name. He needed to report to his people from someone specific. *An unidentified voice heard from within a burning bush might not have been adequate or convincing?*

God Most High graciously stepped up in this new relationship and gave his name as *Yahweh* which means something like, "I am who I am." or, "I will be whom I will be."

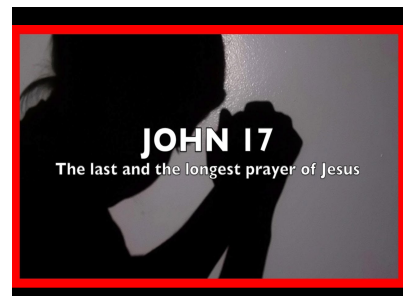
Two incredible things were provided here that would bring Moses and his people into relationship with this God of the burning bush:

- A. God defined himself in his own terms. This is who I AM. I AM who I AM and I WILL BE as I choose TO BE. Thus totally non-contingent.
- B. Secondly, God provided a name by which he was pleased to be addressed. This may be related to a business card or getting a girl's phone number at a 1970s disco - as I remember! Relating and business were now possible.

This is why the Jewish People still revere the name of God by referring to God as '*Ha Shem*' / The Name. The provision of the name *YHWH* is such grace of divine condescension that it is fenced with this secondary term '*Ha Shem*' by which everyone understands we are referring to God as met by Moses and others since then – whose name is too holy to pronounce.

The glory of God's name is seen when this is realised or manifested in some way, God being God. God as Holy-Other.

In studying *koinonia*-fellowship I repeatedly refer to Jesus' prayer for unity from John 17. Four times in that prayer Jesus, talks about having the Name of his Holy Father and the role that name played in protecting his followers and showing his love.³



³ See John 17 verses,6,11,12 & 26.

So back to us at St Matt's. Taking the initiative to give your name to someone comes in that God initiated tradition. This is how God upgraded the relationship and provides the model. It becomes personal.

From long experience, me saying, "Hi I'm Francis." provides a potential starting point for *koinonia*-fellowship because, it's all about relationship and getting personal.

Welcome and Include Step 2 is being intentional about setting focus



So you have introduced yourself and that has been reciprocated. Conversation starts and can be about anything, everything and nothing. Talking about the weather might be standard along with rugby results and things such as Lockdown.

We need to remember and understand that building *koinonia*-fellowship is about entering a shared life in God not updating the price of fish. It's about being on the Jesus team. If we are on mission we approach people and exchange names so that there is a space for the Dove to land and be active, not simply to huddle and be sociable.

Our role in that is to use the time and opportunity to get God, Jesus into the conversation. The best way I find for this is to relate my experience to God and acknowledge him, even if very lightly. Another way is to take a matter to prayer, there and then. The Holy Spirit seems to like that!

This can be informal discipling with sensitive development of *koinonia*-fellowship. This is what can happen in church and beyond.

In my faith and experience, when I take these steps, God works. He advances the relationship, discipleship progresses and the *koinonia*-fellowship grows in depth and width.

What this intentionality requires is that we build a bridge for the purpose of growing the *koinonia*-fellowship.

I don't have time to cover all implications of this and don't need to because we know enough to act on. But one question to ask is:

Q5: What might stop you?

A5: ???

This is all about acting out the Holy Trinity as our working Gospel model.

The God who is a sweet society in God-self sending Jesus to become human then inviting all who would come to join in that *koinonia*-fellowship in Jesus.

The shift this often calls for in our church experience is in embracing intentional relationships for the purpose of growing *koinonia*-fellowship and building the church.

Final application.

No screen

We happen to have a small prop or tool to aid us in this.

Q6: Any idea what that might be?

A6: Name badges.

(I say 'badges' instead of 'tags' because we have so many million sheep and cattle running around with tags while people wear badges.)

Name badges really help make the name link when reaching out. The person you approach can see your name, gains confidence and is more likely to remember. It certainly helps Barbara and I at Holy Communion even in our small church.

But I have been a pastor long enough to know that name badges are not always popular. I have heard the various objections!

So to save time on this and motivate us let's consider the objections to name badges in a diagnostic way. What might each objection mean if we are wanting to grow the church as a *koinonia*-fellowship?

So here's a bit of grit to digest?

When it comes to Name Badges some say, passively or actively:

- "I'm not wearing one of those just to keep the pastor happy or...." Or, "Just because the pastor asks, I am not bothering with that!"
 - That is the voice of a rebel. Rebels do not build *koinonia*-fellowship and are a liability to the church until they stop rebelling.
- The person who wants to keep their head down and not be noticed.
 - Either: Insecure and need to know God's assurance and freedom. God could say who he was and Jesus followed suit but many people find that difficult
 - Or, simply not available for relationship so not really with God's programme.
 - May relate the chilling story Jesus told of the person not dressed for the wedding banquet.⁴ This person was physically there but not actually running with the program until he was thrown out. He was there but not there.
- The person who comes to church to get and receive and positions themselves for that alone.
 - That's a consumerist or client mindset which Jesus call us out of to serve the other. A church full of consumers or clients is a pain in the neck, even if they might be big givers!
- The people who say, "I know everyone and everyone knows me so I don't need to wear a name badge."
 - When that is allowed in churches do not expect to grow and enjoy the adventure of receiving and growing new members in expanding *koinonia*-fellowship.
 - It suggests there is work to do in moving forward from a village of old mentality where you go to meet your mates to a place where God does new things.

So in the safety afforded by Zoom have I just electrified the fence on name badges?
There is no where to hide on this one.

But to be positive:

⁴Matthew 22:1-14

Name badges enable the wearer to be intentional, relationally present and available which is what we see in Rublev's Icon of God's internal relationality. These are the first steps in growing a church as a spiritual fellowship.

Can we do this?