

Introduction to the Brethren #4
“Together”
WRCoB 8.29.21

There is an African proverb that says

1

If you want to go quickly, go alone.

But if you want to go far, go together.

Today, we finish our sermon series on the Brethren.

The emphasis is the last word in our tagline

2

Continuing the work of Jesus

Peacefully

Simply

Together.

The Brethren originated out of

An illegally conducted Bible study.

They had gathered secretly in a home to read the Bible

To pray and discern God’s call on their life

As a group of believers

This occurred during the religious movement

Known as pietism in the late 1600s, early 1700s.

Many of the pietist reformers left the institutional church

Believing that an inward relationship with Jesus Christ

Combined with highly ethical behavior

Was sufficient for the Christian life.

However, the Brethren didn't agree.

They were convinced of the necessity
Of an intentionally, gathered group of believers
Living out what it meant to follow Jesus.

They adopted the Anabaptist vision of church
Wherein all members devoted their lives to Jesus
And to one another.

Taken from the Brethren Encyclopedia

3

For the Brethren the church was not a building, a meeting, or an institution, but community (Gemeinschaft), [and] fellowship (Koinonia). Relationships with others were to be marked by love, unity, reconciliation, and mutual aid.

The very name Brethren connotes a deeper relationship
Than just a group of people gathered.

We still use terms like brother and sister
To express the family-like relationship we strive for.

Our ordinance of Love Feast
The washing of feet
The shared meal
And the bread and cup

Symbolize this tight-knit relationship.

The laying on of hands shows the deep connection and love
We feel towards one another.

The spirit of community makes our yearly gatherings
At district and Annual Conferences so special.

If you've never been to a conference
Put it on your bucket list.

The Spirit of community is keenly experienced
In the praying, singing, worshiping gathering.

It is the Brethren's way
It is the way of Jesus.

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Jesus knew the importance of community when he said

4

**Matthew 18:20 NRSV For where two or three are
gathered in my name, I am there among them.**

At the heart of Christian community is the spirit of Jesus.

It is the spirit that binds us together
In common purpose and meaning.

Though we come from different places and ethnicities
Our commonality is found in our confession
That Jesus is way, the truth and the life

That Christ is our salvation.
That Jesus is Lord.

Reading the Book of Acts you can see how the early church
Exemplified Christian community.

They were devoted to one another.

5 Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . .

They were compassionate.

6

⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

They gathered frequently.

7

⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at homes and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.

And they grew.

8

⁴⁷ And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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The community of faith is vital for our well-being.
And for the building of God's kingdom.

We are, whether we like it or not
Whether we want the imagery
Of riding off alone in the sunset
As our inspiration

We are made for community.
It is in our DNA.

The years 2020 and 2021

With the ongoing pandemic

The divisive atmosphere we live within

And the seclusion of virtual reality

We have developed social fragmentation

We feel depressed

We feel isolated

We lack feelings of belonging

Similar to what Kurt Vonnegut described back in 1974

9

What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured. – Kurt Vonnegut

Our society is paying a price for this lack of community

Emily Esfahani Smith writes in *The Atlantic*

10

We volunteer less. We entertain guests at our homes less often. We are getting married less. We are having fewer children. And we have fewer and fewer close friends with whom we'd share the intimate details of our lives.

11

We are denying our social nature, and paying a price for it. Over the same period of time that social isolation has increased, our levels of happiness have gone down, while rates of suicide and depression have multiplied.

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Brethren know community is a central need

To the human experience.

As Christians, we know by being a part of a community
We become part of something greater than ourselves.

We become part of a movement
Followers in the way of Jesus.

We become empowered by the Spirit of Jesus
When we gather in his name.

We become Brethren
A peculiar people
A community of faith
A part of God's beloved people.

As the Apostle Paul said in our morning's Scripture Lesson

12

**Ephesians 2:19 you are no longer strangers and aliens,
but you are citizens with the saints and also members of
the household of God.**

Jesus is the one that calls us into community.

And it is meant to be our primary identifier.

It is not

I am David Whitten.

I am a member of the Church of the Brethren.

It is rather

I am David Whitten

And I'm Brethren.

Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled *The Pastor*.

In it, he describes his wife's understanding
Of what it means to be a pastor's wife.

If we change the words pastor's wife to *Brethren*
It describes very well who we.

13

Being [Brethren] is a vocation, a way of life. It means participation in an intricate web of hospitality, living at the intersection of human need and God's grace, inhabiting a community where men and women who don't fit are welcomed, where neglected children are noticed, where the stories of Jesus are told, and people who have no stories find that they do have stories, stories that are part of the Jesus story.

14

Being [Brethren] places us strategically yet unobtrusively at a heavily trafficked intersection between heaven and earth.

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Being Brethren does not only identify our religion
It describes who we are as a people.

We don't go to church.
We are the church.

One of the things I kept reminding myself
While in the pandemic lockdown was just very thing.

Though we could not meet in person
Something so vitally important our faith

We were still connected in the Spirit
Still devoted to the cause of the church
Still committed to one another.

15 In Christian community, Brethren find

- Support
- Influence
- Sharing
- Reinforcement
- Connection
- Learning/Resources
- Passion

In community, through the Spirit

We become empowered for the work of the church.

The author of Ecclesiastes agrees.

16

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil, ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help . . . ¹²and though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

~~

Continuing the work of Jesus

Peacefully, Simply and Together

We may not be a big church

But we are a significant presence.

There is a reason you and I are here.

Because . . . I am the church

You are the church

We are the church together!

It is the church that carries the message
Of peace, love and grace
To the world sorely lacking these qualities..

It is the whole of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
That binds us together.

When we gather
We become more than Christian individuals
We become the church.

This is our calling
And this is our call.

17

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Church of the Brethren is a church
Committed to the ways of Jesus
Continuing the work Jesus started.

We strive to live at peace with everyone
By first finding peace within.

We live simply so that our focus can be on others
Rather than on ourselves.

And we live together in the community of faith
Built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

In closing, I use a clipping from a newsletter

Published by the Oakland (CA) Church of the Brethren

I am not sure where the quote originates from
I have seen it elsewhere.

But it speaks to me in summation
Of who I believe we are as Brethren.

18

In a big world

the small church has remained intimate.

In a fast world

the small church has been steady.

In an expensive world

the small church has remained plain.

In a complex world

the small church has remained simple.

In a rational world

the small church has kept feeling.

In a mobile world

the small church has been an anchor.

In an anonymous world

the small church calls us by name.

Source: From the newsletter of the Oakland (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

And so, my sisters and my brothers

19 *If you want to go quickly, go alone.*

But if you want to go far, go together.