

“Our Vision,” Week 1

FOSTERING VITAL COMMUNITIES

Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:41-47 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

INTRO: Today we begin a 3-part sermon series on our vision at Main Street UMC:

A. Many of you know that we've had a Vision Team working to discern God's future for Main Street

And as a result of their work we've got a new vision statement and a new set of core values, and that's what I'll be talking about for the next three Sundays.

B. BUT FIRST: Let's talk about a statement we already had, that's actually more important than the Vision Statement.

- Look at [*your bulletin / the screen*] and look at our mission statement
 - This is why we exist
 - This is what we're doing

Please read that out loud with me:

Our Mission:

To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

And we didn't choose that. These are our marching orders from Jesus himself, based on Matthew 28:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”

C. So, the mission is what we're doing.

- The VISION is our dream for what's going to happen as we carry out the mission.

The mission is the same for every church:

-- *“Go therefore and make disciples”* – that's what Jesus said

The mission is the same, for every church, in every place, in every time:

- But our vision is the unique way that God is calling *this* church to carry out the mission in *this* place, at *this* time

D. So how did we discern that?

1- Well, first, the church council appointed a vision team, made up of:

Main Street UMC VISION TEAM:

Michelle Blevins

Chuck Dagenhart

Lauren Elmore

Marc Engle

Wade Hampton

Vicki Horner

Alan Lee

Becky Lewis

Anna Marie Price

Brad Rogers

Chadwick Stamper

Sarah Whicker

2- And then, the Vision Team used a two-handed process:

- On one hand, they got a grip on **who we are** as a church:
 - They did a survey, they did focus groups
 - And they figured out this church's gifts, strengths, passions
- On the other hand, they got a grip on the needs of the world around us:
 - They did demographic studies
 - They talked to community leaders
 - And they figured out what's happening out there and how it impacts the church

And then, they brought their hands together in prayer

- And they looked for the intersections between who we are and the needs of the world

And they learned A LOT – which they're still processing!

- But here's how they summed it up in a statement

Our Vision

Fostering vital communities through love and life-changing experiences

Look at [your bulletin/the screen], and read that out loud with me...

Today we're going to focus on the first three words of that statement:

“Fostering vital communities”

LET'S PRAY

I. [Craig Groeschel]

A. That story is a symptom of something that's happening in our society that is hurting all of us:

- Electronically, in terms of computers and cell phones, we're more connected than we've ever been
- But when it comes to face-to-face relationships, we are more isolated than ever

1- We can connect instantly through our phones, through our computers

- We can put something on Facebook, and 500 people will see it

But studies are showing that our face-to-face relationships are deteriorating

- We are losing the ability to truly communicate
- We can't seem to understand each other on a deep level
- Our relationship skills are going down, not up

I heard a story on the radio just this week about that said that researchers have found that the more people use social media like Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest – the more isolated they feel

- We're more connected than ever
- But we're more isolated than we've ever been

2- And you see the evidence of this in society:

- We volunteer less
- We give less
- We join service organizations less
- We go to church less
- We have guests over for dinner less
- We get married less
- We have fewer children
- We have fewer close friends

Studies show that for most Americans, our circle of close friends is getting smaller

And those same studies show that our level our levels of happiness have gone down

- And depression and suicide have gone way up

3- We're more connected than ever; but we're more isolated than we've ever been

And this trend towards isolation is literally killing us:

- Studies of elderly people showed that those without adequate social interaction were twice as likely to die early.
- Social isolation impairs immune function and boosts inflammation, which can lead to arthritis, type II diabetes, and heart disease.
- The increased mortality risk [from loneliness] is comparable to that of smoking and twice as dangerous as obesity.

4- *We need relationships!*

It's a life-or-death deal:

- A study of 3,000 women with breast cancer found that those with a large network of friends were four times more likely to survive as women with fewer social connections.
- A study that monitored nearly 17,000 utility workers revealed the degree of their social interactions was a predictor who would still be alive by the end of the decade.
- A study involving almost 3,000 Americans found that people with close friendships are far less likely to die young.
- And another study found that fifty-year-old men with active friendships are less likely to have heart attacks than solitary men.

5- *We need relationships!*

But today relationships are breaking down:

- Marriages are falling apart
- Families are breaking apart
- Cities and neighborhoods are rife with violence and division
- Our country is tearing itself apart
 - We're more connected than ever
 - But we're more isolated than we've ever been

B. Here's the Good News:

WE AT MAIN STREET CAN BUCK THAT TREND:

- We can reverse the trend towards isolation
- And move people towards vital relationships

1- OUR VISION is to make disciples of Jesus Christ in such a way that we foster vital communities

- Vital communities where people come together
 - And truly communicate with each other
 - Understand each other
 - And form relationships with each other
- Vital communities where people are connected face-to-face
 - And isolation becomes a thing of the past

2-Now, listen to this: in our Vision Statement, when we say, “Communities,” do we mean...

- *Towns*, like Kernersville?
- *Churches*, like ours—our website says, “We are a Christ-centered community where disciples are made...”?
- *Small groups*, like Disciple Bible studies, where people form a community as they study and pray together?
- *Communities based on common interests and needs*, like the business community, the arts community, the recovery community, the MS community?

THE ANSWER IS YES. We mean all those things!

We want to “foster” vital communities of every type and description:

- We want to help Kernersville be a community that’s just and fair,
 - where the hungry are fed,
 - where the schools are healthy and vibrant
 - where everyone has equal opportunity

- We want to foster communities based on interest and need,
 - by loaning them space,
 - by helping them succeed,
 - by encouraging our members to participate

- We want to develop communities within the church—
 - small groups where people form deep relationships

- Most of all, we want to continue making Main Street United Methodist Church a Christ-centered community that makes disciples

C. And we believe that as we make disciples of Jesus Christ in this time and place, we will *foster vital communities* where people can...

- Know and be known
- Love and be loved
- Serve and be served
- Celebrate and be celebrated

Those are 4 of the most basic longings of the human heart

- And those are the 4 marks of vital community

Let me say that again: A vital community is a group where people can...

- Know and be known
- Love and be loved
- Serve and be served
- Celebrate and be celebrated

II. In today's Scripture we see a beautiful model of a vital community

- Please open your Bible back up and look at Acts 2:41-47

A. It starts with Peter doing what Jesus said—he goes out into the world and makes disciples

- He stands up in Jerusalem in the middle of a big festival (sort of like Spring Folly)
- And he preaches a powerful sermon

1- And look at what happens in v. 41:

⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

- So, Peter has made disciples, like Jesus said
- He's baptized them like Jesus said

And as soon as he does that, what happens?

THEY FORM A VITAL COMMUNITY:

Verse 42:

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

B. And look at the things that happen in this vital community:

1-Number one: God is at work among them – v. 43

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

2-Number two: each other's needs – v. 44

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

3-Number three: they spend time together, building relationships – v. 46:

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

4-And number four: Because this was such a vital community, people wanted to be a part of it! –v. 47

- ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

III. The bad news is that the trend in our society is towards isolation and away from community

A. The good news is that we can buck that trend

- Not only by being a vital community as a church
- But also by *fostering vital communities* of every type and description

B. And listen— God is all about community:

Some theologians have said that all God has ever been doing is forming a community:

- Starting in the Garden of Eden when God looked at Adam and said, “It is not good for this human being to be alone.”
- And then continuing with Abraham and Sarah, who became the ancestors of God’s people
- And then the nation of Israel
- And then the church

And finally the community of people who will live together forever in heaven

C. God is all about community

- In fact, GOD IS a community:

- Father, Son, Holy Spirit –
- 1 God, three persons, existing together forever *in community*

CONCLUSION: Today we celebrate the Sacrament that shows how much God wants community:

A. Did you realize that the word, “communion” comes from the same root word as community?

1- it means oneness –

2- the death and resurrection of Christ is what makes us one –

3- as we come to the table, we put all our differences aside –

4- whatever else we are, when we come to communion, we’re all just hungry sinners

B. As long as we stay focused on Christ,

we as a church will be a vital community.

And as long as we follow Christ in mission,

we as a church will *foster vital communities*.

LET’S PRAY.