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*The Spirit at work in the Church – Going beyond chit chat  
Prayer & Fellowship (Sharing) Acts 2: 42-47*

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Amongst my earliest memories are 3 LP records for the wind-up gramophone in our family home: 1) Jimmy Shand & his band's Scottish Dance tunes 2) Gracie Fields singing *All the cows in the cowshed, all the ducks in the duckpond, they all make love but me*; and 3) Kathleen Ferrier, *Blow the wind southerly*, the tune of our previous hymn.

.....Here & now, going into Summer 2021, **how do we** harness power of the Holy Spirit? Like sailors, wanting to catch the power of the wind, we need to set & trim our sails. & basic first step of that is **prayer**. In book of Acts, prayer came first for Jesus' followers as waited for the promised outpouring of the Spirit; & sharing in prayer characterised the life of the early Church. Individually & together, prayer is still basic to making space for God to work in us and in our situation, to recognise God's provision & direction, comfort & wisdom. Not a matter of us making long speeches or having the right words but of opening ourselves to God's presence and power.

As a Parish Minister, part of my job was to get to listen & chat & get to know the people in my parish area in Wishaw. Over the years, I heard too many stories from individuals who told me they had been put off Christianity by the Church. Sometimes, it was just a glib excuse from those who had fallen away from the church but some- times it was grounded in reality of un-Christian hurtful & insensitive behaviour that had caused real hurt. It seems to have been very different for the first Christians. They attracted many: they had the favour of all the people & their numbers increased daily- although Acts chapters 5 & 6 indicate that there were still some tensions, frictions & problem people.

Even so, there are clearly things we can learn from them for our local church today. The 2<sup>nd</sup> key to their success seemed to lie in the Greek word, *koinonia*, translated as *fellowship* verse 42. *Fellowship* today has become something of a tame word, often meaning little more than Christians meeting for tea or coffee & cake & chat. **But what lies at the root of this word is sharing**. A sharing that came across in their sharing of possessions & money and in their sharing of meals including communion. It seems fair to assume that they shared their problems & needs with each other too, for how else could they have known who was in financial difficulty & needed support?

Real relationships that went beyond superficial friendships were a major factor in demonstrating the reality, love & transforming power of Christian faith. Over the past 15 months, some of us have discovered - & in some cases rediscovered - the value of phone calls, WhatsApp, Facetime & Zoom, church newsletters, old fashioned letters & cards, good neighbours & kindness from strangers. Now, we are starting to carefully & responsibly resume some previous traditional occasions for such fellowship: teas & coffee, cake & chat after church services, going out meet to friends; lunchtime community café at Allanton, etc.

As we go forward, let's dare to move our *fellowship* beyond chit chat, beyond just superficial niceties towards deeper relationships. Meaningful sharing is needed more than ever today, when so many people are longing for closer relationships, friendship, & a sense of belonging. & if we as Christians better understood each other's problems & struggles, how much easier would it be to be kind & understanding towards each other & to avoid the factions & disputes that can plague church life.

How attractive would our church be then?

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*What I do have, I give you. – Acts 4:1-16, esp. v. 6*

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Luke illustrated the *wonders & signs performed by the apostles* (Acts 2:43) by this one dramatic incident at the Temple. Peter & John were no magical miracle workers, but they had a genuine desire to relate to the kinds of people Jesus ministered to. This older man (4:22) had been crippled from birth & depended on others to carry him to the Temple gate, where he eked out a meagre existence from coins given by passing worshippers.

Peter & John did not throw him a few coins & then get on with the important task of attending the afternoon sacrifice & prayers. Theirs was a deep personal encounter. Each gave the other their full attention. The beggar was used to disappointment but this was different. Peter spoke the name of Jesus of Nazareth, reached down & personally held his hand as he told him to walk. There was an instantaneous response in his withered feet & ankles & as Peter helped him up, strength came. He jumped to his feet, walked, leapt & for the first time ever, was able to enter the Temple courts with the apostles, joyously praising God. Such uninhibited praise attracted much attention, which was intensified when the people realised who he was. They recognised God's action and were amazed.

When we are able again to move & circulate freely in our shopping streets, rail & bus stations, & neighbourhoods, how often do we - will we - relate to the kind of people Jesus did, as recorded in the gospels? Perhaps sometimes, we do not pretend we don't notice but do throw a few coins, or maybe buy the person a hot drink with a roll and sausage from a nearby Greggs, before moving on to more important tasks. Our consciences might be slightly appeased, but we really never care for those who need Christ's touch. In this incident, Peter offered this man the best gift possible, the healing power of Jesus, communicated by the Spirit through Peter's undivided attention & helping hand. Then the apostles accompanied that formerly paralysed man in offering God his heartfelt praise.

What situations of need may we become aware of, or otherwise meet or walk past in coming weeks? Let us pray for guidance as we focus on these individuals & offer encouragement, a helping hand or walk beside them. & a boldness like that Peter was given, for you and me as part of Christ's Church to point to Jesus & share His love.