

Knowing and Belonging

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[0:00] Good morning. Well, that's good now, isn't it? It's great to be here. I didn't introduce myself earlier. I'm Andy. If you don't know what any men are called in church, just call them Andy. It's a reasonable statistical chance that you'll get it right. I want to talk today for a few minutes about knowing and belonging. Knowing and belonging. And what I mean by that is, what do we know and how do we belong to our work, if we work, to our community, to our family, but importantly for today, for church. Because this is Back to Church Sunday.

Are the slides not working? Oh, thank you. Thank you very much. This is Back to Church Sunday and Back to Church Sunday is a day when particularly we like to invite people who maybe have been to church in the past and haven't managed to get to church for a while. Or maybe even you've had a bit of a tough time with church and church and you aren't getting on as well as you could be. Or maybe you've never been in a church before. Or maybe you've come every week for the last 90 years. Whoever you are, welcome. Welcome this morning because it's great to have you with us. And haven't we got a nice church building? Isn't it nice? That window is remarkable, quite extraordinary. If I get boring or if you get bored of looking at me, look at the window. Let me read you some words from the Bible, from the book of Acts, chapter 2, just a few verses there.

This is about, when they say they, it means people, the believers in the early church. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

[2:32] All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold their property and possessions to give everyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with gladness and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Okay. What does that mean? What does that, what do all those words mean? So the word apostle just means followers of Jesus.

Leaders of the church. Leaders of the church. So the apostles were leaders of the early church. And they were just ordinary people. Ordinary men who were asked by God to get involved in leading the early church. But it's an unusual word. We don't hear apostle very often outside of a church context.

And they did four things quite a lot. They did four things in their daily routine together as a church.

[3:50] Teaching, learning, listening, studying. All that stuff about wanting to find out more.

Wanting to find out more about who Jesus is. Wanting to find out more about who God is. I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm sitting at home and maybe I'm reading a book or listening to some music or watching the television. And then I think something really odd. Like, I wonder how much water there is in that reservoir on the M62.

Now it would be reasonable for you to say, Andy, why do you need to know? And the truth of the matter is, I just don't. But it comes in my head.

And the really irritating thing now is, I can just look on my phone and it will tell me. It will say, oh look, there's 27 million gallons or whatever. I have no idea.

But in the days of the early church, but also now, one of the things that we do in church is learn, is listen to teaching, is share together, and know more about God.

[5:15] Because it's always good to know more about God. They committed themselves to fellowship, to being together.

And togetherness is really, really important part of who we are as Whitby Christian Fellowship. We get together for services. We get together for small group studies.

We get together for fun. I know that's surprising. But it's good fun having fun. We share food and fellowship and fun.

Fellowship is part of becoming and belonging and knowing who you are. Breaking of bread is just another word for communion.

The Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine. However, the Eucharist, there's lots of different words for it. But the breaking of the bread is simply a description of taking communion together.

[6:21] Something which Jesus tells us we should do when we're together. So, we do it here and sometimes we'll do it at our homes. But we break bread together just as the early church did.

And then we pray. And then we pray as they prayed. Praying for the things that we need.

Praying for the things that worry us. Praying for the things which are really challenging. Praying for the things that we need. And that's what the early church did. And that's what we try and copy. And as they did that, they saw miracles.

Now, miracles are complicated things. And depending on who you are, you will have a different view on miracles. All I can say is that in my life and my experience, I have experienced things happening which are miraculous.

I've asked God to do something and He's done it. Now, it would be very easy in one sense to say, well, that was just luck. Or coincidence. Or whatever.

[7:39] I forget which golfer it was that said, it's funny. The more I practice, the luckier I get. It's a little bit the same with prayer.

It's funny. The more I pray, the more miracles happen. So, wherever you are on the idea of miracles, all I can say is the early church prayed and experienced miracles.

This church prays and experiences miracles. And then they shared everything.

If somebody had a need, they tried to meet it. And that's what communities do. That's what friends do. That's what fellowship do.

That's what people who like each other and care for each other do. That's what the early church tried to do. And that's what we tried to do. We tried to help meet each other's needs.

[8:46] Some of you have never met me before and you won't know this. But it's a truth that many of my friends here know. I'm not allowed close to any power tools.

Or even screwdrivers. Or even hammers. In 1973, I put a shelf up. In 1973 plus 10 minutes, it fell down.

If I need a shelf going up, somebody in this lovely place will help me. There are some things I can do. But putting shelves up ain't one of them.

And I'm not going to start now. Because we share. We help. We support. We encourage each other.

They met together. They did things together. They worshipped God. And what we do here is worshipping God. What we do on a Sunday morning is worshipping God.

[9:52] What we do when we come together and have fun is worshipping God. What the wonderful people who do all the work in the cafe. Or all the work on the building. Or all the work welcoming you to come into the church this morning.

Or all the work whatever. Together. We're worshipping God. Because we're doing it for Him. And because of that in the early church.

People saw what was happening. And thought I'd like to have a go at that. That looks really good. And so they came. And they came. And they came.

And lots and lots and lots of people joined the church. And then 2,000 years later. People still have a glimpse of what churches do.

And say I'd really like that. And come and join us. And come and join churches. So.

[10:55] What's church? What's church?

What's this church? Just a group of people who have come together. To worship Jesus. And get to know Him better. We're a group of people.

Very ordinary people. Lots of different experiences in life. Lots of different ages. Some of us are young like me. And some of them are older.

Don't laugh. Thank you. Some of us work. Some of us don't work. Some of us have jobs in this area. Or that area. Or the other area. We're just ordinary.

Ordinary. People. But we have one ambition. The only reason we come. Is to get to know Jesus.
[11:51] A bit better. And this is a place of encouragement. Of welcoming. And of hope. I hope you have felt welcome this morning.

I hope you felt encouraged to be here. And I hope somewhere during this service. You might feel hopeful. We're also a place where we can be real.

We're also a place where we can be real. And be honest. About our doubts. And fears. And there will be people here this morning. I have no doubt. Who are saying it sounds all very well Andy. It sounds absolutely smashing. But I'm not sure I understand or believe that. And that's okay. That's absolutely okay.

You're allowed to say that out loud. You're allowed to say, I don't understand what you're talking about. People may ask me all the time.

[12:54] I don't believe that. But it's a place where you can say that honestly. And people will just talk with you honestly. About what they believe.

And what you believe. And have a cup of tea at the same time. It's a place where we share our lives, the ups and downs, the goods, the bads, the funds, the difficulties of our lives. We share it together.

It's a place where we learn together to be part of God's family in church. And so here's a simple but complex, oh sorry, I'm going ahead of myself.

What about you? Sorry, gang at the back. What about you? Maybe you feel this morning that there's just something missing in your life. You can't put your finger on it, but you just feel a sort of, it's not quite, not quite right. It doesn't feel, my life feels complicated. My life feels difficult. My life feels a bit sad.

Something you can't quite put your finger on, but you're thinking this morning, not sure. Maybe you're feeling a bit lonely. Maybe you're feeling anxious or a bit lost.

[14:29] Loneliness is really hard and very prevalent in our town, in our country. We don't want you at Whitby Christian Fellowship to feel lonely or anxious or lost.

Maybe you've had a Christian faith a long time ago, but it's just gone a bit. Maybe you've had a feeling too far away. Maybe you've never, ever heard the truth of who Jesus is or whatever. Or maybe you've just had a funny feeling this morning that you could do with God in your life. maybe you're feeling that if you're feeling that allow yourself to be honest with yourself don't say well I do feel that actually but I'm not going to tell anybody or I'm going to pretend it doesn't exist just allow yourself to sit with that feeling and ask God if he's real to come and talk to you okay so we do then get to that slide the simple but complex truth there are you'll see on the back of in the cafe there are probably a couple of hundred books there there are thousands probably millions of books written about God you'll never ever ever read them all but here's some simple stuff that you don't need a book to hear

God knows you and he understands you I don't understand myself Andy I know I understand that but God knows you and God understands you and more than that God loves you God thinks you're brilliant God sent his son Jesus to die on a cross be raised from the dead three days later because he loves you not us he does love us he loves you as an individual he loves you very very much indeed God forgives you God forgives you whatever you have done and you can sit there today and tell me

Andy God wouldn't forgive me and I can look you in the eye and I can say oh yes he does he does and he will that's the deal that's the deal and God desperately wants you to be part of his family the church if you're from Whitby this church or another church in Whitby if you're from somewhere else a church in your hometown your home city your home village God wants you to be part of who we are God wants you to be part of a family and that's massive and complex and complicated but it's also dead simple God loves you he forgives you and he wants you to be part of who we are now we have a three year old granddaughter

[18:30] I have to say that every time I stand up because it's true and we were playing Play-Doh and I thought I'd bring some Play-Doh to show you this is a Play-Doh heart okay a Play-Doh heart and God loves you and if this is a you it's not going to work I'm sorry if this is you God wants to put his heart into you there's a God shaped hole in your life that can be filled with the heart of God that sounds really weird I understand but it's also really true for each of us sitting here today and those of us standing here today there's a God shaped hole in your life and he wants to fill it but this is the other truth he won't nearly pull his head off this is you doesn't look like you but it's you and the truth

of the matter is there's a you shaped hole in our church we miss you you're part of who we should be and without you we're the less for it because just as God has oh brother there's a God shaped hole in your life that you need

God to fill we also need you to come and be part of who we are because the early church that we read about in the beginning people just got together and learned together shared together sang together worshipped together shared communion together and that's what we want to do here but we really want you to be part of who we are because when you are it expands all of us it's better for all of us I'm going to finish but let me finish with a plea I'm sorry the play-doh got a bit soft and soggy I nearly pulled the head off that wasn't the idea but whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey with Jesus whatever that means for you can I encourage you today to believe that God loves you and we need you as part of who we are if that makes any sense to you and you'd like to talk about it please come and chat afterwards there's John there's me there's Andy and Mike and Alan and lots of other people all of who will be delighted to speak to you I should have mentioned at the beginning as well there's cake and coffee through there but if something's just scratching at you today come and talk come and chat come and see what we could do together for God Amen