

I. Intro:

A. In the Sundays of May 2011, we focused our worship basically on a single verse of Scripture – Acts 2:42

1. In that one verse can be found four core practices ... can you find them on the front of your bulletin?
2. These four practices were not just passing trends or activities they casually tried ... Bible tells us the church was very intentional and persistent in doing these

B. Reviewing the practices themselves

1. Fellowship

- a) Something we tend to do pretty well here at WMC, in fact sometimes pride ourselves on it: We know how to hang out together, build stronger ties with each other
- b) The challenge is that neither Jesus nor the early church limited their fellowship to people who looked and thought just like they did

2. Teaching

- a) Although our high-tech world is vastly different from that of the 1st century church, if we want to grow deeper in Christian maturity, we still need spiritually sensitive teaching and preaching
- b) In a time of information overload, we're pretty good forgetters ... without a regular diet of biblically based teaching in various formats, we will naturally drift away from God

3. Prayers

- a) We noted that the early church prayed for several things:
 - (1) They prayed to be ready for what God was going to do
 - (2) Prayed to discern the gifts of leaders and to call forth leaders
 - (3) Prayed for each other's' needs, and
 - (4) Most interestingly, they prayed for their own boldness in their partnership with God!
- b) We fairly often pray for those 1st three, but how often do we pray for our own boldness in speaking and living out the good news of Jesus?

4. Breaking of bread

- a) The breaking of the bread actually meant 2 things at same time:
 - (1) Literal meaning is the church shares real bread with real people

(2) Metaphorical meaning is the church itself becomes bread, so that we *are* the body of Christ broken and shared with the world

II. Not enough today to just talk about the four practices ... let's look at how they tied together under the series theme

A. Ever been in a Sunday school class or a workplace training event where the leaders present you with two hypothetical options, and they require a forced choice between the two?

1. Kind of like, "If you were stranded on a desert island, who would you rather have with you: Brad Pitt or Steve Jobs?"

2. Well, I don't like those exercises very much, but in order to make a point, I will exercise a "preacher's privilege" and ask **you** a few forced choice questions

a) Will ask about how you would describe some church activities. You need to respond from the two choices given. For our purposes here, answering "neither" or "both" is not an option.

b) So, when you go to a baptism service we have at our church pond, is that "fellowship" you're engaging in, or is it "mission"?

c) Many of you came to the big summer picnic we had two weeks ago. Some of us brought guests from outside the church, but others did not. So at that picnic, were we "doing community," Or were we "doing outreach"?

d) And when a Sunday school class spends part of a day helping at The Depot, is that "Christian nurture" or "Christian witness"?

3. These categories you see on the left and the right ... they're all euphemisms for "bonding" and "bridging", the title of today's theme

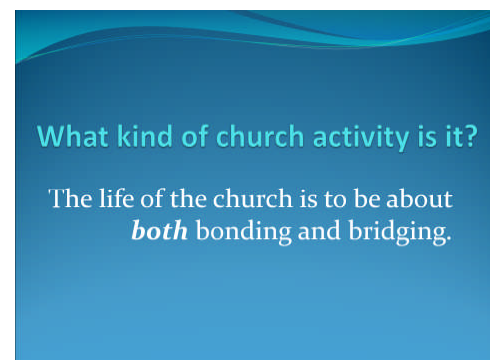
4. The fact is, you and I know (in our heads) that the answer to these questions is really "both"



B. God calls us to **both** bonding and bridging

1. The early church, with all four of these core practices, was doing **both** bonding and bridging

2. And we the church in 21st century are still called to do the same



- a) It's not a matter of being a bonding church *or* a bridging church
- b) Like so many complicated choices in life, an either/or choice is often a falsely narrow choice
- c) Our theme is purposely called “bonding and bridging,” not “bonding or bridging,” because for Christ's church it is not an either/or matter

III. Nor is it simply a matter of giftedness:

A. We Mennonites tend to be known for how we talk about and live out community

- 1. Over the years *this* congregation has developed a fairly attractive reputation for fellowship, caring, and nurture
- 2. By and large, WMC people are there for each other, giving and receiving support in forms of genuine community that some have said they didn't find anywhere else
- 3. We're pretty good at bonding ... But what if we said, “As Mennonites, we're much more gifted at bonding, so let's just leave the bridging to the Baptists and others who are stronger in that area.”

B. If that were to happen, then the kingdom of God in our part of the world, in our sphere of influence, would not grow like a mustard seed

- 1. Without bridging at the local church level, the kingdom of God starts to shrivel and dry up
- 2. If we're all about bonding with each other inside these walls and very little about bridging with those outside the church, then I foresee 20 years from now a church that will look quite different from what we see today
 - a) Twenty years from now, when the children who came up for children's time today are all grown up, some with families of their own, if we haven't done any bridging, it's possible that those young adults won't be here at all
 - b) Instead, we may see an aging church, half the size that it is today, with very few children here at all

C. Friends, it doesn't have to be this way

- 1. I don't truly believe that a much smaller, much older and more isolated Waterford Mennonite Church is inevitable!
 - a) There's too much of the enlivening Spirit of God here! There's too much creativity here!
 - b) Too much missional heart here to just turn ourselves inward, enjoy our nice fellowship, and watch the world disintegrate around us!

2. I recognize that all churches have different strengths and personalities, and not all churches need to live out the kingdom of God in exactly the same way

a) At Waterford, I don't think anyone will ever confuse us with Assembly Mennonite Church, or with College Mennonite Church, or with Grace Community Church

b) But using the language of congregational giftedness to justify not making gospel bridges to those outside our comfort zones ... Well, that's just plain a cop-out!

3. God intended for every church to engage in both bonding and bridging, in some way.

IV. (Impact of this text from one particular Sunday)

A. 2½ years ago we let this text simmer within us for four weeks. Then just before Pentecost Sunday, we had a very special Sunday (Watched DVD last week and was blessed all over again by it)

1. On that Sunday, we baptized Michael Bodiker, an adult who grew up here, moved away, then married Jodi, from the Catholic tradition ... Mike's baptismal testimony of mature Christian faith was powerful

2. Then we had a parent-child dedication for Mike, Jodi, and their daughter Maya, as they seek to raise Maya in the Christian faith community they find in both WMC and Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Warsaw

3. Earlier in this year we also dedicated Maya's little sister, Kylie

4. In these double rituals on the same Sunday with the Bodiker family I saw both bonding and bridging being enacted and reaffirmed

B. But that wasn't all that happened that day.

1. We also heard from a panel of three "prayerful listeners," who reflected on what the congregation had experienced in this series.

a) Both Lorraine Reinford and Goshen college student Ben Sutter had thoughtful comments and questions to share.

(1) They especially noted how comfortable we are with our fellowship based on similar life situations or with like-minded people

(2) They wondered if we at Waterford can value (and not just tolerate) leaders who challenge us to relate to people not like us?

(3) They then wondered if this could be how we staff our congregation for bridging.

(a) You may recall this question was asked at a time of general recognition of the need to expand our pastoral staff, including possibly specifically with some outreach responsibilities

(b) Little did we know that one year later we would have already bid farewell to Pastor Tina, and two years later have Cindy here with some outreach components as part of her new position as Pastor of Community Life.

2. If you appreciate being challenged to more bridging and not just bonding as a church, the good news is ... you got Cindy!

a) And in the next few years, I'll be supporting her and Mission and Service Ministry Team in a philosophy that's less about outreach programs than it is about building our capacity to relate to those who are "other" than us.

3. If you're uncomfortable with a church moving toward more bridging, the bad news is ... you got Cindy

a) And you also got three other pastors who won't let you off easy with assumptions that the ministries of the church should primarily benefit the people already in the church

b) Will you value us pastors (and not just tolerate us) if we continue to challenge us all to be a bridging and not merely a bonding congregation?

V. Want to conclude this morning with one more way that Acts 2:42 may still impact our congregation today

A. What really struck me most from the prayerful listeners in that special service were Rod Hollinger-Janzen's responses to this question from Tina: "What call or invitation from God did you hear in this series?"

1. Rod suggested two kinds of prayers that might arise from this series:

a) A prayer of *opening ourselves to more of God*, to more of the Holy Spirit ... being more open to God leads to greater love, as a sign of the Holy Spirit's activity among us

b) A second prayer is to *ask God for humble, teachable spirits*, that we may see and hear more from God than we currently do. When we carry teachable spirits, relationships are strengthened ... and when that happens, the kingdom of God expands

2. As we move into a time of sharing, I invite you this week to deliberately pray these two prayers: to open ourselves to more of God, and pray for humble teachable spirits.

B. God's word comes to us in many forms, sometimes through one voice or many voices. We invite you to add your voice for the benefit of the gathered community.