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I was at our former church site when the big “dinosaur” clawing machine moved in and two days later witnessed the crumbling of down of the kitchen wall, and was reminded of the children’s bedtime story of three pigs who built houses of three different materials. A big bad wolf comes by and blows down the houses of two pigs made with straw and sticks, but cannot blow down the house of the pig whose house was made of bricks, except in the case of our church, the ease with which the kitchen wall fell down, I thought we could have done what the big bad wolf did - gather around the church and huff-and-puff and the whole building would have collapsed!

Our sights are not fixed on the crumbling edifice next door, rather on the construction activity starting on the other side, where we as the body of Christ shall find new expressions of *being* Church. Over the next year, at Church and Deacons meetings, we shall talk, discuss and explore what these expressions of *being* Church might be, as we grow in faith and in the knowledge of God’s Word, to discover His great plan for us, for the world around us, and the world beyond us.

While one church building comes tumbling down, and another is about to start going up, we as the Body of Christ, the true and real Church, are exploring the building blocks which make up the church.

We know that God is the Author of Life and His Word sustains all life and is eternal. We know that the Church’s foundation is the Word of God, that the cornerstone of the Church is God Son, Jesus our Christ, in whom we His body are anchored.

All this, is the foundation which God laid eons before this world came into existence.

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The first building block we discovered was the Holy Spirit, who on the one hand is like the damp-course of a building, preventing rot and mould and other damaging agents creeping up from within and destroying the body of Christ, and on the other hand, like a skilled brick-layer, making sure that the body of Christ is growing straight and strong, able to withstand the storms it will face here and now. The Holy Spirit is God's **agent** to look after God's precious assets, we His people, and the Holy Spirit is also our guide and counsellor, to make sure we don't go *walkabout*, and miss God's call to spend eternity with Him. There is no conflict of interest as the Holy Spirit executes His responsibility to God and His care for us.

The second building block we discovered, is the mortar/cement which holds the building blocks together, and **must be** applied on the top and at the bottom of each brick and in-between each brick, is **prayer**. Prayer is the glue/mortar which holds together, bonds with and binds together each brick; without prayer, the body of Christ would not stand. It might as well be like the dry stone walls we see in our countryside, even the best-made of them, crumbling and falling down in time, needing to be restored at great cost!

The third building blocks of the Church, which we shall examine today and over the next few Sundays, is the Body of Christ, we His chosen ones, each of whom has special gifts to exercise, roles to perform, responsibilities to shoulder, and tasks to complete.

The book of Acts is an historical record of how God accomplishes and succeeds to restore, His ancient promise to Abraham, that through his descendants, God's blessings will be poured out to the whole world; and it is one of His most important descendants, Jesus of Nazareth who made this universal blessing possible.

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The Body of Christ, we the people, has many important roles in this world, the first of which is **FELLOWSHIP**.

I found it very interesting that the English dictionary makes a distinct difference between **a community in fellowship** which is described as companionship, friendship, togetherness, mutual support and solidarity, and a **church fellowship** which is described as an association, society, club, fraternity, brotherhood and benevolent society!¹

Surely the editors got it wrong! The **Church fellowship** should be about companionship, friendship, mutual support, togetherness, and solidarity, all of which is outward looking and service oriented, being inclusive by observing other's needs and drawing people together, to meet each other's needs; while **a community in fellowship** would be better described as a society, a club, an association, a fraternity, brotherhood or benevolent society, which is mostly exclusive and inward looking, seeking to preserve itself!

As such, a community in fellowship is about preserving the institution of the community, while the Church fellowship is less concerned with institution, and more concerned with people in need.

This is the lesson the Disciples learned during the start and the early years of the Church, as it learned how to organise itself to meet peoples' needs.

In Acts 3 we read how this was practiced (*read: verses 42-47*). The fledgling, young Church, organises itself to meet people's needs. Such was the bond of fellowship, whenever any of the disciples got into trouble with the authorities, the first thing they did when they were freed, was to

¹ Apple Dictionary referring to <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fellowship>

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go where the the disciples were gathered, to share their story and rejoice together, that nothing worse had happened, and they were free to continue proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And when something worse did happen, like when the disciple Stephen was arrested and stoned to death, following which a great persecution against the church broke out in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Samaria, Luke says, *Devout men (men whose faith was so strong they were not afraid to be seen living their faith, took Stephen's body) and buried him, (and as was Jewish religious custom) mourned for him (but in a way which was far greater than normal).*

The disciples were scattered, not because they were afraid, rather house-to-house searches and imprisonment would have prevented them from going *about preaching the word*.² They knew the strength they had in their fellowship, that each would look after the other, and so they could afford to be bold.

Then comes a time when a disciple named Agabus predicted there would be a severe famine in the land, which Luke says happened when Claudius was Emperor. So *the disciples determined, everyone according to their ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea*.³ It's wonderful to read how, as the Church grew in numbers, there were more people who did not know each other, yet each person saw beyond themselves, into the world **around** them, and to the world **beyond** them, to help as needed. Such was the strength and the bond of fellowship!

The strength of their fellowship was tested when Paul and Barnabas had a "sharp" disagreement and decided to separate and go their own way,

² Acts 8:4

³ Acts 11:29

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but we learn from Paul's letter to Timothy⁴ and his letter to the Church at Colossae⁵, they were reconciled not long after. Such was the strength and the bond of fellowship!

The record of this outward-looking, caring for each other *fellowship*, goes on through the life of the early Church. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome, a kind of house-arrest because Caesar thought he would be less of a problem confined in Rome than roaming around the Roman Empire. The last two verses in the book of Acts tell show mistaken Caesar was! *(Paul) lived in Rome two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness and without hinderance.*⁶

To appreciate this kind of ***fellowship***, we have to go, once again, to Genesis chapter 2 where God and the first two humans enjoyed a relationship of absolute trust. They enjoyed each other's company, talked freely, and shared cautions and dangers without suspicion. This kind of relationship was the only kind of relationship there was, therefore no need of a word to describe it! This relationship was later used to describe *ideas such as common or shared house*⁷, *"binding" or "joining"*⁸, *companion*⁹, *including a wife as a companion*¹⁰ ... *A most important dimension in the life of people in such a relationship was a sharing together in the study of Scripture and law, and table fellowship.*¹¹

⁴ 2 Timothy 4:11b

⁵ Colossians 4:10 (AMP)

⁶ Acts 28:30-31

⁷ Proverbs 21:9

⁸ Exodus 26:6 ; Ecclesiastes 9:4

⁹ Ecclesiastes 4:10

¹⁰ Malachi 2:14

¹¹ <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/hbd/ff/fellowship.html>

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So when Jesus tells His disciples, *I have longed to share this Passover meal with you*¹², He is expressing His desire to **fellowship** with them in this kind of a deep relationship. Holy Communion is not about the elements of the meal: bread and wine. Holy Communion is about being drawn into deeper fellowship (relationship) between ourselves and God, through His Son Jesus our Christ, the result of which is that we are drawn into a deeper relationship with each other. The two elements, one loaf of bread and one cup of wine, stand as symbols of this relationship.

If **Baptism** can be simply described as *an outward expression of an inner commitment*, **Holy Communion** is *an open and visible bold act, which evidences a deep, inner and invisible relationship with God, through Christ*.

People say “the Church is dying”, referring to empty churches as the sign of “dying Churches”. Fellowship in the Church is the visible evidence of God at work.

The question before us today is, *how will people know God is at work, if they don't see fellowship at work among us?*

AMEN.

¹² Luke 22:15