

Welcome:

Good morning everybody. My name is Ashley and I'm a part of the teaching team here. This series that we're in is all about relationships, and I've got to tell you -- I'm not great when I first meet people. Mostly, I find that I don't know what to say and so, I usually don't say that much... but then that makes it more awkward. For example, there was one time when I was in college where I was planning on having dinner with some friends while I was driving through Dallas on my way back to OKC. Last minute, they asked if they could bring a friend of theirs along. I'm pretty amicable, so I said it was fine. The thing was, though, I was driving through Dallas to get back to Oklahoma City to do homework. So, I had a list of all the things I needed to do in my head and dinner was just another thing to do.

So, anyway, we have dinner and it was kind of awkward. I was thinking about all the homework that I need to do, which meant that I really wasn't being super active in the conversation, which meant that a lot of the conversations kind of fell flat. I was ready to get back to my homework and they could tell. So, the whole thing was kind of awkward. And then, as if it hadn't already been awkward enough during the conversation, the waitress came by to ask how we were splitting the check. And I tried to tell her that everyone would be separate, except my two friends who were dating. That meant that, of the four of us, there would be 3 checks. Of course, I didn't say that and she pointed to me and the new guy and I just nodded, like, "yeah, we're still separate."

Well, nobody took it that way, including the waitress. And so you can imagine my horror when I look back to the table and my friends and this new person who I've only known for about 45 minutes are all staring at me, wondering why in the world I would tell the waitress that me and this person were on the same check. So, I stammer and apologize profusely and they say it's fine, that they don't want to make the waitress change it again. So, it's no problem.

I won't venture to say that every time I meet a new person it goes poorly, but I will say that it often happens that I'm so distracted by my list of things to do that I miss out on relationships. Had I not been so distracted by homework in Oklahoma City, then I'd venture to say that I probably *wouldn't* have accidentally made someone I didn't know pay for my dinner and, honestly, I probably would've enjoyed dinner a whole lot more.

to-do list? Anyone else really good at completing tasks and achieving goals, but not-so-good at being present in the relationships behind those tasks and goals? And when you take a second, you know that's not how we were created to be, but our lives are so busy that it's easy to get distracted, especially when we're working on those relationships.

Today we're going to talk about feasting, which is an important practice in relationships that requires us to stop working on our relationships and enjoy the people God has given us. So, let's begin by reminding ourselves of this God who insists that we are more than what we produce.

Message:

Easter was our celebration of the resurrection. We celebrated the resurrection as proof that God is faithful to us. We're asking now, in the wake of Easter, how God's faithfulness to us changes our relationships. After all, relationships are the heart of faith. That's why we've talked so much about the kinds of work that has to go into healthy relationships; things like, quality time, differences, boundaries, Unconditional Positive Regard, and more. All of those things are important for healthy relationships because healthy relationships take work.

And while that's true, we can't work and work and work and work without stopping to actually participate in the relationship. That's not how we were created, nor is it the intention of relationships. Relationships are created to be life-giving things. So on this final week of our series on healthy relationships, we're talking about feasting, which is the way God created for us to celebrate our life together.

[Scripture Slide] What better day to talk about feasting than on an actual feast day? Today is Pentecost, which is the birthday of the Church. If you'll turn or click with me over to Acts 2, we'll discover what happened to bring the Church to life. If you got one of the free bibles out of the back, its on page ____.

Pentecost is a festival that originated early on in Israelite history. Pentecost began as a First Fruits festival. The Israelites were an agrarian culture, which meant their lives were generally centered around planting and harvesting food. So, they normally spent months and months just getting the dirt ready for plants and then the plants ready for harvest. And then a very small amount of time harvesting. And then more months of getting the dirt ready and then getting the plants ready for harvest.

It would have been easy for them to get lost in the nonstop work – sow, seed, grow, harvest, sow, seed, grow, harvest. Over and over again. So, God told the people that when their plants start to show their first fruits they are to have a festival. Hence, the first fruits festival. This was a time for multiple things. First and foremost, this was a time that the *entire* community got together. It was a time of thankfulness for the grace from their God who created their community and continued to sustain it – as shown by the first fruits of their harvest. Beyond that, though, it was a time to stop. Think about it - all of these respective families have been busy for months tending to their crops. They've been doing a lot of things constantly to keep the plants going. So, this was a God-mandated time for them to stop doing all of those things and spend time with one another, recognizing God's hand in all of it for them because the community wouldn't have been possible without that loving God. That's the intention of Pentecost – “Stop. And party in the name of the Lord.”

Before we enter into Acts, remember where Jesus' followers are. They came to Jerusalem with Jesus, where he was crucified and then raised from the dead 3 days later. Then, he spent 40 days with his followers teaching them and in that time he promised that the Holy Spirit would come and be with them. And then he left. And that was about 10 days ago.

Let's enter into Acts 2 now and see how Jesus' followers are enjoying Pentecost. We'll start in verse 1 -

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Let's pause here for a second. This festival has been around for hundreds and hundreds of years at this point. When it first began, yes, the Israelites were all in the land that God brought them to and they were all speaking the same language, but since then, the Exile spread Jews across many nations, where they ended up settling. So, there are Jews who are still very devout and still come to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival, but whose families haven't lived in the land for generations and so don't speak that language. Let's continue -

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. -- Acts 2:1-12

So, think about it -- you're someone who lives in Jerusalem and your family, neighbors, entire community, and all of the Jews who live in a bunch of different countries are all in Jerusalem. And they're coming together and preparing for this huge party that lasts days because of how much feasting is going on. So, it's a party, and of course you're enjoying it because how can you not enjoy a lot of good food and a lot of fun people who are all excited to be with each other and are excited about the future and are all worshipping the same God? The only thing that's a little weird is that you can't really understand what most people are saying. You're all there for the same reason, but sometimes conversations can be strange. Someone tries to ask you where the bathroom is and you accidentally bring them to the kitchen, or you start talking to someone, thinking they understand you, and are surprised that after 10 minutes of conversation, they convey to you that they actually don't speak the same language as you at all.

But then, all of the sudden, the Holy Spirit descends on the people. And suddenly everyone can hear their own languages being spoken. How much better would *that* party be?! God told them to have this party and then God crashed it and made the party like a million times better. So now, there are hundreds and hundreds of people, all there worshipping the same God and

partying just like before, except now the party is turned up to eleven because everyone can understand each other.

Let me be clear -- Pentecost as a festival wasn't an entire community just doing the same thing at the same time, but they were celebrating together. All of them. The entire community. In the same way, the descending of the Holy Spirit wasn't something that was individual either. It didn't fall on just one person, but fell on a whole community of believers.

And this was intentional. Couldn't the Holy Spirit have come at any time? But it didn't happen until there were people dedicated to celebrating God by taking a break to feast all together. That's the birth of the Church - a new humanity, a new family, a new kind of party people who know what it means to truly be together and not just doing the same thing at the same time.

Now, I know what you're thinking - Pentecost, the day that the Holy Spirit descended on the people, the *birth* of the Church - that's just a...party? I mean, very serious people have talked about this in very serious ways for literally thousands of years. It has to be more serious than that.

Well, I'd say that God takes partying very seriously. Probably more serious than we take it, in fact, because he actually told the people to have 3 parties or feasts like this a year. 3 times a year God's people are supposed to stop, take a breath, spend time with one another (undistracted time) and party for like a week. And, if we read Revelation 7, we know that this is what the Church is *supposed* to be.

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar,

“Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne
and from the Lamb!” --Revelation 7: 9-10

Well, that sounds familiar. People from a lot of different nations. All in one place to worship God, not to work. And all able to understand each other. Hmm, it's kind of like the Acts passage we just read was an example of the way the Church is supposed to be - a lot of people who are all different, all partying in the name of the Lord. I mean, they were shouting with a great roar. If that doesn't sound like a party to you, then I don't know what does.

It's kind of like Acts was the first proof of life of the Church, much like the first fruits were the proof of life for the Israelites. These people, from all over the world who were all gathered to just *be* in relationships are the preview of the Church. And they may have been the first fruits, but God's planning to harvest people from every people, every race, and from every corner of the globe. This insight from Acts 2 gives us the sneak preview of what the rest of harvest will grow to become.

But, the reality is, we're not really all that good at feasting and partying like they were. We're much better at accomplishing tasks - doing the hard work of our job, or school, or managing our schedule with kids, or even doing the hard work of relationships. It's much harder for us to stop and just *be* in relationships.

Now, am I saying that we just need to party all the time? Like.... fostering unsafe environments where people can make irresponsible decisions? No, not at all. What I am saying is that we as an entire people need to stop long enough to be able to *make an intentional point to spend time in relationship*. A true party is one that connects us deeper with God and each other - one that is centered on the grace that unites all of us as one people.

That's what we need, too. We need that break in production long enough to stop and truly connect with one another, apart from production. It's in our relationships that the Church grows, that the harvest is nourished, and that God's people are made better. The party is the time to stop and remember that that's what's important - not the production, but the people.

Are you doing this in your own lives? Do you make a point to spend intentional time with a significant other? Not a time where you're both working on something, and just sitting next to each other on the couch, but intentional, life giving time. Are you making a point to spend time with those that you consider close friends? A time to really connect with one another and with God? Are you making a point to intentionally stop doing work - whatever that might mean for you - to really relate with people?

This doesn't have to be something that is overly complicated. My husband and I and Chaquita and Charles get together on a consistent basis to have dinner together and hang out. And that's all we do. We hang out. We talk about random stuff. Play with the kiddos. Spend time together. Nothing overly complicated.

What does this look like for you? It doesn't have to be something overly elaborate - just something that takes you away from production and towards relationships. Maybe a game night once a week? Or taco tuesday with some people?

That person I accidentally made pay for my food became my husband, Jake. I was almost so caught up in my own agenda that I missed out on one of the most significant relationships in my whole life. Friends, that's the danger of a life without feasting, without breaks, without intentional pauses in our busyness.

Thank God for the grace we receive when we're too distracted to attend to the relationships God has given us. But let's not be a people who makes distraction the norm. Let's be a feasting people, a people who makes a point to celebrate the people God brings into our lives. Our relationships are good gifts from God, and God expects us to actually *enjoy* them. So, let's feast often. At birthday parties, on anniversaries, on holidays. And more often too - on Taco Tuesday, and at game nights, and at watch parties for games or shows. Let's live into the party people that Acts showed us how to be.

Communion

[Communion Slide] God's grace is always greater than our distractedness, which is part of the reason why the last thing that Jesus chose to do with His followers was share a feast meal. In that time, Jesus spent time with His disciples - not producing, but spending time together. The last thing Jesus showed His people was how to just be - be in relationship, be thankful for God, be themselves - not how to be productive. And that is why we take communion - to be reminded weekly that we are called to the relationships that build the Church and not to the productivity of the world.

And that is why, on that night, Jesus broke bread and gave it to them, saying "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat it." After the meal was finished, he gave them a cup of wine, saying, "This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Take it and drink it."

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion today. If you're willing to take steps to be intentional in your relationship with God and with those God has brought into your life, then you're welcome to come to the table this morning.

Before we approach the table, I'm going to lead you in a prayer of examen. I'll ask you four questions, and give you space to reflect in prayer. After that, I'll pray for all of us and then as you're ready, you're welcome to come forward. Here's the first question:

1. When in the last week did I pause to 'feast' with others?
2. When in the past week was my agenda more important than people?
3. What is one relationship God is calling me to be more intentional in this week?
4. How can I take time to 'feast' in that relationship this week?

God, you have gathered us on this day of Pentecost to remind us that you did not create us to work endlessly, even on our relationships. Rather, you created us to live together, to flourish in a life of joy, faith and love. We confess that far too often we get caught up in our own plans and agendas. We fail to recognize the graces you bring into our lives. Today, as we have all put our own agendas on pause to worship you,

Assignment + Blessing

We've spent the last 50 days together asking God to help us have healthier, stronger and more holy relationships. Today, as you go, would you go knowing the God who created you for relationships is the same God who works with you to make those relationships holy and life-giving. That's a grace that's worth celebrating, so take time this week to do just that. Feast with the people God has given you to love. As you do, know that the God who created you and brought you together is present in the midst of your celebration!

Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.