



**ENTER** God's presence

**Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."**  
 – Nehemiah 8:10

Lord God, may your praise be always on our lips and your Word in our hearts. Restore and renew us again today as we gather to hear your word and to be reminded of the blessings you have given us through your people, the church. Amen.



**SHARE** life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **Who, from any part of church history, would you most like to invite to a dinner party? Why?**
4. **What is the most positive team/group experience you have ever had? What made it so good?**

It was a spectacle that was filled with awe and wonder. Fifteen dolphins, riding down waves in perfect formation, mirroring each other's moves, working as a team, living life together, speaking one another's language. If you are a dolphin, your community is vital. You rely on them for companionship and fun, for protection and provision. Scientists have found that these synchronized actions and interactive relationships can lead to bonding, close cooperation and even reduce stress. If it is that way for dolphins, how much more for humans. God has created us for relationships. We are formed to be engaged in the lives of others. We are shaped to relate, share and care for others, especially in Christian community. To be isolated for any reason for any extended period of time causes a person to lose touch with reality -you suffer physically and emotionally. To be isolated from the Christian community damages your spirit - you lose touch with the reality of the Father's love and your neighbour's need. The results are disastrous; your soul begins to wither and harden. The longer the separation the more lasting the damage. That's why faith formed relationships are vital to our ongoing health

Week beginning:  
**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

Worship series:

**Faith Formed**



**VERSE** for the week

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

**John 13:34-35**



**REMEMBER** this week

Lives connected by the unbreakable bond of Jesus' love...

Lives united by the eternal power of the Spirit...

Hearts transformed together and living in sync with the Father's will...

are God's living billboard of grace to the world that draws others more closely to fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

and vitality in life. The Holy Spirit uses these relationships to transform and shape us in God's image and reveal the power of God's love in us and through us to the world. Only in faith formed relationships do we find life in its fullest and a joy that never ends.



**LISTEN** attentively

**Read Acts 2:42-47**

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. What stands out to you as the biggest difference between the church as it is described in Acts chapter two and the church today?**

The way of life among the early believers certainly sounds different to what most of us experience today. Are you in awe because you see your pastors, or anyone else for that matter, doing signs and wonders? When is the last time you pawned one of your most treasured possessions so that you could help to feed or shelter the poor? Do you even recall a time when the church had the goodwill of all the people? Not to mention the daily growth that the Lord brought their way each day. It might lead some to ask the question, 'Has God abandoned the church?' Maybe the better question for us to ask is, 'Have **we** abandoned the church?'



**GROW** deeper

**Take a look at John 13:31-35**

Jesus' new command to his disciples was not simply to love one another, but to love each other as Jesus loved them himself. Jesus' love is an all out, selfless and sacrificial love which we see borne out as he hung on the cross, not for his own benefit, but to redeem you and me and his disciples in all times and places. His command to us is not simply to get along and tolerate each other as best we can, but rather a call to selflessly and sacrificially put the needs of others above our own needs. This is where the difference begins. Notice that in Acts 2:42, the new converts devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, sacraments, and prayer. That sounds like what we still do today doesn't it? We go to church, listen to a pastor teach/preach the word, have communion, say some prayers and have a cuppa and fellowship after the service. Sound the same doesn't it? Now have a look at verse 44 of Acts 2. Are all those who believe together and do we have all things in common? Do we treat our time and money and abilities as though they are on loan to us from God and are to be used for the good of all or do we hoard these things up for ourselves and become stingy with the blessings God gives to us? Jesus' love was a radical love, it is the kind of love he wants us to show others.

- 8. Have you ever had the opportunity to give radical Jesus love to someone? What happened?**
- 9. Why do you think it is so hard for us to love like Jesus, today?**

We might think that the kind of life described in Acts 2 is just unrealistic and unachievable today. After all the world is so different to how it was then. We simply do not live like that any more. Well that's just it, people didn't live like that back then either. The way the Christians loved and cared for each other was a new thing. They actually practiced what they preached. If one man had two shirts and one had none, then the answer was simple, give your shirt to the shirtless man and go home to put on your other shirt. God provided everything the people needed as individuals but he provided it through the community.

- 10. Share a time when God has blessed you through the actions or generosity of a Christian community?**



## **LIVE** purposefully

God extends his grace to us through his word, and through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. He also extends his grace to us through the love and care expressed in and through our relationships with others. Yet we all know that our relationships with others are not always the caring and nurturing things that God would want them to be. We can often hurt and damage each other with our words and actions, just as easily (maybe more easily) as we can bring comfort and healing. The most powerful tool in overcoming our broken relationships is forgiveness. Just as Jesus died so we could have forgiveness from our Heavenly Father, so now we have been empowered by the gift of God's Holy Spirit, to offer forgiveness to those who may have hurt us in the past. Think again about our dolphins, if they exclude a member of the group, they put that individual at risk and they weaken the whole pod. When we are unforgiving, or hold grudges, we isolate others from the community and put them at risk but we also put the life of the community in greater danger too. Our Christian communities are strongest when they are places of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. When we are not displaying these characteristics, the whole community suffers and is weakened. Let's work together in being united with Christ and being a community that reflects his love and grace to each other and to the world.

- 11. Sometimes the people closest to us can hurt us the most. Is there someone you have hurt or who has hurt you that you need to be reconciled with? Why not try reaching out to them this week?**
- 12. In this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, meeting with people has been difficult. Depending on where you live and your current situation, you may not be able to physically meet with other Christian friends. What are some other techniques you can use to encourage and support others and receive encouragement and support yourself during these difficult times?**
- 13. Take some time this week to write a note of encouragement to someone who has made a difference in your life or supported you in your walk with Jesus.**



## **PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for creating us for relationship, with himself and with others.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you with his love to empathise with others and to be the hands and feet of Jesus in all your relationships.
- Pray for those who are alone, or trapped in abusive relationships. Ask that God would be tangibly present to those who are lonely or living in fear.



## **BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], may the love of Christ infuse all your relationships. Amen**