

## Formed for Fellowship

I know it was a long time ago, but some of you may remember the movie: "Castaway," starring Tom Hanks. It's still a fascinating story. Chuck Noland, a character played by Tom Hanks, worked for Fedex when his small Fedex plane crashed into the Pacific ocean. The pilot was killed and Chuck found himself all alone on a deserted Island. His only company was the Fedex boxes from the accident that washed up on the beach.

For a while Chuck resisted the temptation to open the packages because they belonged to someone else. But as his hope of rescue faded and his loneliness increased, He began opening the cartons. The letters he found inside some of the packages were great, for although they were not his and although they were written for someone else to read, they represented human contact. He read them over and over again until he felt a connection with the people he did not know and will probably never meet.

One of the packages Chuck opens contained a volleyball, with the "Wilson" logo printed on it. In his hunger for companionship, Chuck cut his arm for blood and used the blood to paint a face on the volleyball. He named the volleyball "Wilson" after it's logo and began to carry on a conversation with it, or "him." In time Wilson became Chuck's dearest and only friend. One of the most heart-rending scenes in the movie was when Chuck constructed a raft and was out on the ocean on his way to being rescued. There was a storm that came up and swept Wilson overboard and took him off in another direction. When Wilson was lost I found tears running down my face right along with Chuck's.

The lesson we learn from Chuck in "Cast Away" coincides with the second purpose for our lives. We said last week that we are wired by God for Worship. What we see this morning is that we are formed by God for fellowship, fellowship with Him and fellowship with one another. We are made for God's Family. Hebrews 10:24-25a say, *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another."* We were made for fellowship and

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when we imagine that we can live well without the kind of fellowship God made us for, we soon find ourselves in a very bad place. **We were formed for fellowship.**

Now what I am also suggesting this morning is that the kind of fellowship we were created for is something more than what passes for fellowship in the common thinking of the world. The kind of fellowship I am talking about is the kind spoken about in Scripture. It is fellowship with four distinct characteristics. Christian fellowship is intentional, mutual, serving, and loving. It is the kind of fellowship modeled for us by our Lord Jesus Christ and a kind of fellowship which we can see evident in the early Church.

First of all, Christian fellowship is **intentional**. That is, we choose to belong. At some point people who come to worship here at Fourth Street will see or hear the invitation to be baptized and to unite with us in church membership. What we are saying by this is that it is not enough just to worship together or hang out together. Biblical fellowship is not casual. To be all that it is meant to be it requires a real commitment to God and a real commitment to one another.

John 13:1 says, *"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."*

The key phrase in this verse regarding fellowship is formed by the two little words, *"His own."* Initially, Jesus called 12 men out of the world to "be with him," and they committed themselves to follow Him. He called them "his own." Paul says in Romans 12:5: *"In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others."* Think of that: I belong to you and all of you belong to me. Because of Christ's working in each of our lives we intentionally belong to one another. **In the Family of God we find a place to belong.**

Christian fellowship is intentional. Secondly, Christian fellowship is **mutual**; it involves a mutual sharing. In our Scripture passage this morning we see this being played out in the exchange between Jesus and Peter: John 13:2-6 tell us: *"The*

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*evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

One of the reasons our fellowship with one another is often lacking is that there is no mutual sharing. Christian fellowship is meant to rise to the level of friendship and real friendship requires mutual sharing. It requires a sharing of time, experiences, inviting one another into each others homes, sharing our problems, our joys, and our dreams. But you know how that often goes. Some of us will share our hearts with others but we don't want to take the time to let others share their hearts with us. Others will listen to other people but they won't reveal anything about themselves. Some will visit other people but they don't want other people visiting them. Some take the attitude: I'll help you with your problem but as for me, I'll suffer alone.

When Jesus moved to wash Peter's feet, Peter drew back. The intimacy was too threatening, too embarrassing. But Jesus made it clear that Peter had to receive as well as give. I think this interchange between Jesus and Peter goes to attack the main things that keep us separate and isolated from one another's lives and they are pride and fear. You see, I have to swallow my pride and fear to share my heart with you. You have to swallow your pride and your fear to share your heart with me. The alternative to mutual sharing is continued isolation. The secrets we cling to separate us from one another; the secrets which we share bind us together. The severity of our problems is magnified when we bottle them up inside. Their severity is lessened when we share them with each other. **In the Family of God, we find a safe place, to share our lives.**

Christian fellowship offers belonging and requires mutual sharing. A third facet of Christian fellowship is **service**. When we commit ourselves to each other in the Family of God, God

gives us a sense of belonging and a safe place to share our hearts, but He also gives us a mission to serve others.

When couples come to me to get married I tell them that their marriage is for them, to bless them, but not for them alone. If they work to build a good marriage, that good marriage will also become a blessing to their parents and to their children and to their grandchildren and to the neighborhoods and communities in which they live. Their good marriage will be a blessing to all who know them and will send ripples of wholesomeness out into all the world.

We need to think this way regarding our commitment to one another in the Family of God. Our covenant with one another is meant to bless us, yes; but, it is also meant to bless others. In fact, our fellowship will be made so much stronger and offer us so much more joy if we work together to bring God's blessings to others. In John 13:14-17, Jesus says, *"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."*

Now we could look at these verses and take from them that Jesus is concerned only with our serving one another. But when we think through what Jesus says here and when we think of where it is all leading, we have to conclude that more is intended. Jesus says, *"I have set you an example."* Then he says, *"no servant is greater than his master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him."* In a very similar sounding verse from Luke 22:27, Jesus asks *"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."* In John 20:21, the resurrected Jesus says, *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* So, just like Jesus, we are in the world to serve others, but we are not asked to do that in isolation. This is something we do together. **We are partners in serving others to the glory of God.**

I've been telling you that we are formed for Christian fellowship, a fellowship that is intentional, mutual, and serving. The fourth thing Christian fellowship includes is **love**: a deep, abiding, intimate, self-sacrificing love for one another. In John 13:34 and 35 Jesus says, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Do we really love one another? Are we willing to grow in our love so that as Paul says in Romans 12:10 we become *"devoted to one another in brotherly love?"* Does anyone look at us and exclaim, *"See how those Christians love one another?"* They should! Above all else what people should be able to see in us is love. God is love and so the major thing to be found in the Church of God is love.

Imagine the impact our church could have in our community if each of us, or all of us together, freely allowed the love of Christ to control our words and actions toward one another. Imagine the impact we could have if we would allow the love of Christ within us to overflow to everyone we meet. **We were formed for fellowship in the Family of God. That means we were made for love.**

Christian fellowship means a commitment to belonging, it means mutual sharing, it means serving others together, and it means loving one another as Christ loves us. Beloved we were formed for fellowship. Let us commit ourselves to fellowship with one another in the Family of God and let us offer fellowship to all the lonely people that God brings to our attention.

## The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601  
942-1007/946-4110

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### Formed for Fellowship

**John 13:1-17; 34-35**

Jon R. Neely, Pastor

[neelyjon@gmail.com](mailto:neelyjon@gmail.com)  
[4thstcog.com](http://4thstcog.com)