

THE RENEWAL OF COMMUNITY

Acts 2:1-13, 37-47

Introduction

Have you ever heard of the "4 G's" of Grace City? Missionary Dan talks about the "3 G's" of Japan and reveals qualities that we are not always aware of. He talks about the "3 G's" in Japan: Gaman (patience), Ganbaru (perseverance), and Giri (duty). Do you agree with the "3 G's"?

In fact, the 4 G's of Grace City are like an antidote to these 3 G's. First of course is "God," then "Grace," which is also the name of the church, and the "Gospel," which we should hear every day. Now, what is the fourth? It sounds a bit like a joke, but the fourth "G" is "Gourmet."

Jesus shared a meal with many people as he revealed the central message of the Bible, the gospel of the Kingdom of God. What a tasteless book the Gospels would be if we removed the meal scene from the Gospels. It was through the meal that Jesus shaped the gospel-centered community called together by God.

For that reason, on this day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, let us look at how the gospel-centered community is renewed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit renews not only our individual lives, but also the community.

Acts 2:1-13, 37-47

2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested[a] on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe[d] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and

belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Now let's take another look at Grace City's Vision.

Grace City is a gospel-centered community. Our vision is for Tokyo to be filled with God's grace by reproducing disciples of Christ. Our mission is to bring the gospel movement from Tokyo to the world by transforming lives through faithful teaching and worship of the Bible, helping to restore communities, contributing to cultural renewal, and responding to social pain.

Achieving Grace City Vision is not possible in our own strength. We need the Holy Spirit. How does the Spirit lead the gospel-centered community? First, let us look at the prominent work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel-centered community. How does the Holy Spirit work among us?

Second, I will address the role of each of us in a gospel-centered community. Third, Gospel-centered communities are missional: a multiplying movement of Christians and churches. Grace City is a missional community.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit

As we can immediately see from today's Scriptures, a gospel-centered community, or church, cannot exist or continue to exist without the work of God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. When the Holy Spirit came, as Jesus promised, "there came a sound like the blowing of a violent wind" (v. 2) and "tongues like flames were divided and appeared" (v. 3).

This phenomenon clearly symbolizes the coming of God's Spirit, since according to the Jews and the Bible, spirit, breath, and wind are the same word in the Hebrew language, "ruach. Also, according to the Old Testament, the manifestation of God was often accompanied by fire or flames, so the "fiery" manifestation signifies the coming of God Himself. It is a special event in which God's Holy Spirit came, stayed, and filled our world.

What did this cause? Jesus' disciples spoke the gospel in other languages. They began to testify of Jesus the Messiah, who died, rose from the dead, and is alive, and of the Kingdom of God. Before, they had often misunderstood the gospel and were timid and selfish. They became new people and spoke as witnesses of Jesus Christ. As it says in Acts 1:8, "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jerusalem was home to Jews and foreigners of diverse languages and cultures who had immigrated from surrounding countries. From Iran, Iraq, Mesopotamia, Western Asia, Turkey, Greece, and Egypt to North Africa and Arabia, the gospel of Jesus was spoken about in their respective languages. It was astonishing!

There is a very rich and diverse work of the Holy Spirit packed in here. First of all, they were timid and hiding, but the Holy Spirit ignited their hearts. He filled them with courage and joy.

John 14:16, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

To begin with, the disciples misunderstood the Kingdom of God and Christ. The Holy Spirit gave them a correct understanding of the gospel in their hearts. In other words, they repented, abandoning their own assumptions, prejudices, and selfish expectations. They began to speak with renewed faith in Jesus.

John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

And speaking in another language implies humility. It implies tolerance for people from other countries and cultures. Religious issues are always associated with cultural differences, but the Jew vs. Gentile issue was especially serious. Passion for truth, love, peace, and tolerance was needed. The Holy Spirit gave them these things.

Many biblical scholars have suggested that the events of unity, peace, and mission at Pentecost should be interpreted in contrast to the episode of confusion, conflict, and division at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

In the Tower of Babel episode, the people were puffed up with pride to make a name for themselves by building a tower so high that it would reach the heavens. For this, God judged them and made them unable to communicate, leading to confusion, unbelief, conflict, and division. In contrast, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and gave them restoration to preach the gospel in different languages. Those who saw and heard this were "dumbfounded" (v. 6) and "amazed and perplexed" (v. 12), but this is quite different from the "confusion" in the Tower of Babel episode. It is a community full of love and peace, sharing the gospel with all.

The Holy Spirit will also produce abundant fruit in you and use you in the gospel ministry. Galatians 5:22,23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

2. We Are in Community

Therefore, when Peter, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, preached powerfully about the crucified and risen Jesus, those who were listening were pricked in their hearts as if they were the ones who had crucified Him and asked, "What shall we do?" They realized their own problem.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins." The most important thing that is made clear here is the change of heart that comes with repentance and forgiveness! As lives are remade and forgiveness is experienced, new communities and relationships begin.

Think about it. Relationships are always fraught with conflict. Problems arise from envy, competition, hatred, and hostility. There is an infestation of standing above others and pretending that you are better than them. We see it in pay, position, evaluations, performance, lovers, marriage, ... even in the church.

Critic Shuichi Kato used an interesting phrase to describe the characteristics of Japanese communities: "competitive groupism/conformism."

"Ideally, everyone should do the same things and have the same opinions, and minority opinions are undesirable. However, there is intense competition both within and outside the group. Therefore, if we cannot do similar things together, we are ostracized by our peers. So while we may appear to get along well, we are actually in competition with each other. While we may appear to be in agreement on the surface, the truth is that there is constant strife and problems within the community."

That is why everyone and every community needs forgiveness brought about by the sacrificial love of Christ. We want our hearts to be transformed by God's forgiveness and love, and we want to be free from anger, envy, and resentment. Let us pray and ask for the Holy Spirit because we are imperfect.

However, it is easy for us to think that it is other people or communities that need to be changed, not ourselves. In this way, we act as if we don't have a problem, defending ourselves and keeping the Holy Spirit from working. Do you want Grace City to be transformed and renewed in a gospel-centered way? Start with yourself. Ask, "What should I do (in this community)?" Ask, "What can I do? Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit working in you, not the change in others.

Because if you experience forgiveness, you can forgive others. When you truly appreciate and rejoice in God's forgiveness and experience a change of heart, you will be kinder to those around you. Forgiveness and love by the Holy Spirit will make you new in your attitudes, deeds, and relationships. Repentance with God's forgiveness, this is the greatest hallmark of the Christian community, and your own part in it!

So if you are looking for a realistic Bible study and life-supporting experience, please join our community groups. We always study the Bible in these groups, but they are not just for bible study. Through Bible study, we experience the gospel of Christ and encourage each other in life. Many people are in need of such a community and group.

I too am in need of a community group. I haven't been in one for a while and would like to get back into one. I know a lot of people are not involved, so if anyone wants to join, let me know. Let's start together. We need to pray for each other about the deep pain in our hearts and be encouraged by the Word of God when we feel like our hearts are breaking. Community Groups are like a family, they are friends who will protect you.

This is called "fellowship (koinonia)" in the Bible. However, "fellowship" is different from mere verbal exchange, as we are told in verses 44-45 that people even shared their possessions (property). If someone was financially strapped and in need, they would sell their property and possessions and share generously.

It can be described as an attitude of not keeping one's success to oneself. The perception of success, achievement, wealth, and ownership is completely different. They see their success and riches as a contribution to society (fullness of forgiving love in the community), a practical manifestation of God's love and His Kingdom. In other words, the gospel-centered community is a "giving community."

3. Missional community

The church/Christian community as depicted in the Bible was thus very attractive. Acts 2:46,47, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Perhaps forgiving and loving community is necessary for all people of all ages, but I believe that in the Holy Spirit-led community, giving community became a reality in a much more thorough way. It was a community of true love and forgiveness, not only among friends, but even among those who were different enough not to want to be friends (slaves and socially awkward people) to share their lives and possessions with each other.

And in addition to performing acts of love, the disciples were truly passionate about sharing the gospel of Jesus with those around them. Along with their acts of love, they also shared with words the wonderful news of love surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Rodney Stark, sociologist of religion wrote THE RISING OF CHRISTIANITY.

It grew because Christians constituted an intense community, ... And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the "good news." (p.208)

Of course, our desire is not to increase the power of Christianity or the church. We want as many people as possible to know the gospel of Jesus, the power and hope of a life filled with forgiveness and love, through community. Through a gospel-centered community, we want those who are sad and disappointed to find new joy and purpose in life.

Where shall we begin? The Bible emphasizes "prayer," doesn't it? One of the hallmarks of the first community is also prayer. If you are mindful of the friends around you, pondering what their needs are and how you can serve them, you should pray to God. Remember your own lack of strength and begin with prayer so that you can work with God.

I find "10 Steps to Evangelism: Tips for Everyday Evangelism" by Tim Keller very useful.

- 1.Let people around you know you are a Christian (in a natural, unforced way).
- 2.Ask friends about their faith – and just listen!
- 3.Listen to your friends problems – maybe offer to pray for them.
- 4.Share your problems with others – testify to how your faith helps you.
- 5.Give them a book to read.
- 6.Share your story.
- 7.Answer objections and questions.
- 8.Invite them to a church event.
- 9.Offer to read the Bible with them.
- 10.Take them to an explore course.

If you liken evangelism to driving, you should never sit in the driver's seat. If you do, you will choose the route that works best for you and gets you to your destination quickly. But it will be boring, forced, or uninteresting to your friend in the passenger seat. You sit in the passenger seat and let your friend drive. Moreover, it would be a good idea to invite other Christian friends to join you at that time. Share the wonder of the gospel of Christ with your friends as you go to the places they want to go.

The Holy Spirit will work in them and add daily those who are being saved and make them one.