“FLAWED PERFECTION”

“WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.”

THOSE FIVE WORDS MAY BE THE MOST MEMORABLE WORDS I REMEMBER FROM ANY CLASS – AT ANY LEVEL – THAT I HAVE EVER HEARD.

THEY WERE THE FIRST WORDS SPOKEN BY THE PROFESSOR OF A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CLASS I TOOK IN SEMINARY.

THEY WERE WORDS THAT HE USED AT LEAST ONCE EVERY TIME THE CLASS MET.

THEY WERE COMFORTING WORDS – ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE OF US WHO WERE INTIMIDATED BY THE FORMAT OF THE COURSE.

EACH CLASS MEMBER WAS GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADING AN ENTIRE HOUR & A.
HALF SESSION – PREPARING LESSONS FOR OUR FELLOW STUDENTS.

THOSE – LIKE ME – WHO HAD ENTERED SEMINARY WITHOUT A GREAT DEAL OF CONFIDENCE IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE & THEOLOGY WERE REASSURED OVER & OVER AGAIN THAT WE WERE ALL IN IT TOGETHER – THAT WE WOULD BE SUPPORTED & ENCOURAGED BY ONE ANOTHER.

IT MADE FOR A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE FOR ALL OF US.

WE EAGERLY LOOKED FORWARD TO EACH WEEK’S CLASS BECAUSE WE KNEW SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN THAT WOULD DRAW US TOGETHER MORE CLOSELY THAN EVER.

AND THAT WORD “TOGETHER” SEEMED TO BE THE OPERATIVE WORD FOR THAT ENTIRE COURSE.
IT WAS, BY NO MEANS, A “PERFECT” COURSE.

NONE OF THE SESSIONS TURNED OUT EXACTLY AS
THE LEADER OF THAT SESSION HAD INTENDED THAT
IT WOULD.

BUT OUR TOGETHERNESS MADE IT WORK.

OUR TOGETHERNESS TURNED ONE DISASTER
AFTER ANOTHER INTO WHAT COULD BEST BE
CLASSIFIED AS “FLAWED PERFECTION.”

WHEN WE LOOK AT THIS PASSAGE AT THE END OF
THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ACTS, WE FIND
SOMETHING QUITE SIMILAR.

HERE WAS A GROUP THAT ALSO LOOKED
FORWARD TO EACH GATHERING BECAUSE THEY
KNEW SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN THAT WOULD
DRAW THEM MORE CLOSELY TOGETHER.
THESE VERSES ARE THE FIRST VERSES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE THAT TELL US ABOUT THE INITIAL FORMATION OF THE CHURCH.

THIS IS IT.

RIGHT HERE IN THESE VERSES IS WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.

AND, AMAZINGLY, THE VERY FIRST VERSE OF THIS PASSAGE TELLS US ESSENTIALLY EVERYTHING WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WHAT MATTERS IN THE CHURCH.

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE PRAYERS.”

THERE WAS SOMETHING HAPPENING WITHIN THAT GROUP OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS THAT MADE OTHERS LONG TO BE A PART OF IT.
THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT DREW THEM INTO THAT FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS.

THEY SAW SOMETHING IRRESISTIBLE IN WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THEIR MIDST.

THEY WERE FILLED WITH “AWE” AT WHAT THEY SAW & THEY DESPERATELY WANTED TO BE A PART OF IT ALL.

IN ESSENCE, WHAT THE DISCIPLES WERE DOING WAS SIMPLY CONTINUING ON WITH THE EXPERIENCE THEY HAD SHARED WITH JESUS.

THEY HAD STUDIED TOGETHER, SERVED OTHERS TOGETHER, WORSHIPED TOGETHER & PRAYED TOGETHER.

THE DISCIPLES WERE SIMPLY BUILDING ON WHAT THEY HAD EXPERIENCED WITH JESUS IN THEIR YEARS TOGETHER.
AND YET, EVEN WITHIN THEIR SMALL BAND OF TWELVE, THOUGH, THEY WEREN’T FREE OF CONFLICTS & DISAGREEMENTS. 

THEY HAD THEIR PROBLEMS, THEIR DISSENSIONS, THEIR MISUNDERSTANDINGS, THEIR MOMENTS OF TENSION & PERSONALITY CLASHES. 

EACH ONE OF THEM HAD THEIR OWN FLAWS. 

THEY WERE, BY NO MEANS, PERFECT. 

BUT THEY SAW A HIGHER CAUSE TO WHICH THEY WERE COMMITTED AND THEY WORKED TOGETHER IN WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS “FLAWED PERFECTION.” 

YES, EVEN WHEN THERE WERE ONLY 12 OF THEM, IT WASN’T ALWAYS SMOOTH SAILING. 

SO JUST IMAGINE HOW MUCH MORE DIFFICULT IT BECAME WHEN THEIR NUMBERS BEGAN TO EXPLODE
& THEY GREW EXPONENTIALLY & DID SO IN SUCH A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME.

HOW DO YOU KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY?

I WOULDN’T CARE TO GUESS HOW MANY TIMES OVER THE YEARS I’VE HAD SOMEONE SAY TO ME, “I WOULDN’T HAVE YOUR JOB FOR ANYTHING IN THE WORLD. HOW DO YOU KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY?”

WELL, FIRST OF ALL, I WOULDN’T NOT HAVE MY JOB FOR ANYTHING IN THE WORLD.

AND SECONDLY, I HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND & ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WHEN IT COMES TO KEEPING EVERYONE HAPPY, YOU DON’T BECAUSE YOU CAN’T.

BUT YOU TRY TO MAINTAIN A FOCUS ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS.
I THINK THAT’S WHAT’S GOING ON HERE IN THESE VERSES IN ACTS.

I THINK THAT MAY BE THE REASON LUKE TELLS US ABOUT THESE FOUR THINGS FIRST WHEN HE’S TELLING US ABOUT THE EARLY CHURCH.

THERE WAS STUDY, SERVICE, WORSHIP & PRAYER.

THIS WAS WHAT MATTERED.

THIS IS WHAT WOULD DRAW PEOPLE INTO THEIR FELLOWSHIP.

THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER IN THEIR FLAWED PERFECTION IN A COMMITMENT TO THESE VITAL ASPECTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THAT’S WHAT FILLED THOSE AROUND THEM WITH AWE & WONDER.
THEY SAW A TOGETHERNESS WITHIN THE FAMILY OF FAITH & THEY WANTED IN ON IT.

THEY SAW PEOPLE WHO LOVED ONE ANOTHER, CARED FOR ONE ANOTHER, SHARED WITH ONE ANOTHER & SUPPORTED ONE ANOTHER & THEY WANTED TO BE A PART OF IT.

THAT’S WHAT HAS ALWAYS DRAWN PEOPLE TO THE CHURCH.

THERE IS A TOGETHERNESS IN JESUS CHRIST THAT CAN’T BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

IT’S A TOGETHERNESS THAT’S OPEN TO EVERYONE.

YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE INVITED TO JOIN.

YOU DON’T HAVE TO ACHIEVE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF FINANCIAL SECURITY.
YOU DON’T HAVE TO HAVE SOCIAL STATUS.
THERE’S NO REQUIRED LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE
OR EVEN UNDERSTANDING.
THE TOGETHERNESS WE EXPERIENCE HERE IS
FOR EVERYONE.
CARL SANDBURG WAS ONCE ASKED, “WHAT IS THE
UGLIEST WORD IN THE HUMAN LANGUAGE?”
AFTER THINKING FOR A WHILE, HE REPLIED,
“THE UGLIEST WORD IN THE HUMAN LANGUAGE IS
‘EXCLUSIVE.’”
ON THE FLIP SIDE, PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST
BEAUTIFUL WORDS IN THE HUMAN LANGUAGE IS
“TOGETHER.”
IN OUR INCREASINGLY ISOLATED & FRAGMENTED
SOCIETY, WE ALL LONG FOR TOGETHERNESS, DON’T
WE?
WE WANT UNITY.
WE WANT FELLOWSHIP.
WE WANT TOGETHERNESS.
WE WANT TO FEEL LIKE WE BELONG.
IRONICALLY, TRAGICALLY &
HEARTBREAKINGLY, I’M AFRAID THAT’S NOT WHAT
THE WORLD SEES OR CONCLUDES WHEN THEY LOOK
AT THE CHURCH TODAY.
THEY DON’T SEE UNITY.
THEY DON’T SEE FELLOWSHIP.
THEY DON’T SEE TOGETHERNESS.
AND, IN SO MANY CASES, THEY DON’T FEEL LIKE
THEY BELONG.
UNFORTUNATELY – FAR TOO OFTEN – THE WORLD
CONCLUDES THAT THE CHURCH IS MORE
REPRESENTATIVE OF THAT “UGLIEST WORD IN THE
HUMAN LANGUAGE” – EXCLUSIVE – THAN THE BEAUTIFUL WORD TOGETHER.

NOW WE CAN ARGUE ABOUT THAT ALL WE WANT & TRY TO CONVince OURSELVES IT ISN’T TRUE, BUT THAT DOESN’T CHANGE THE FACT THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF PEOPLE PERCEIVE THE CHURCH AS BEING A PLACE WHERE THE MOST NEGATIVE HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS THRIVE.

WE’RE ARROGANT, BIGOTED & CLOSE-MINDED.

THAT ABOUT COVERS IT – UNLESS YOU WANT TO ADD JUDGMENTAL, EXCLUSIVE & HYPOCRITCAL – AND, UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO WOULD ADD THOSE TO THEIR LIST OF REASONS WHY THEY DON’T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE CHURCH OR WITH CHRISTIANITY.
I talked to a young person recently who said, “You know, I used to be really open about my Christian faith. I’d share my commitment to Christ with great enthusiasm. But I find I’m not so willing to do that anymore because if someone thinks I’m a Christian, they automatically draw conclusions about me that aren’t at all what I think it means to be a Christian.

But there are so many people who claim to be followers of Christ who spew hatred, fear & bigotry against anyone who’s different that I don’t stand a chance of convincing someone that’s not what it means to be a Christian.”

I pray that young person won’t give up.

And I hope you won’t give up either.
THE WORLD DESPERATELY LONGS FOR WHAT LUKE TELLS US IN THESE WORDS WAS THE ORIGINAL FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH.

THERE IS A DEEP HUNGER FOR LOVE & ACCEPTANCE WITHIN EACH OF US.

WE WANT FELLOWSHIP.

WE WANT TOGETHERNESS.

THE CHURCH – AT ITS FINEST – CONSISTS OF THOSE WITH A “FLAWED PERFECTION” WHO ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO LIVE OUT THOSE EARLY IDEALS.

A RECENT SURVEY REVEALED THAT ONLY ONE IN FIVE AMERICANS CLAIMED THEY HAD A REAL FRIEND IN WHOM THEY COULD TRULY CONFIDE.
THAT’S WHAT MADE THE CHURCH SPECIAL IN ITS EARLIEST DAYS & WHAT CAN STILL MAKE IT SPECIAL IN OURS.

IN A WORLD THAT BASES ACCEPTANCE UPON WHAT ONE CAN ACQUIRE, ACCUMULATE & AMASS, THE CHURCH CAN STAND APART.

THE CHURCH CAN SHOW BY ITS FELOWSHIP – BY ITS TOGETHERNESS – BY ITS “FLAWED PERFECTION” – THAT THINGS ARE DIFFERENT HERE.

IN THE CHURCH, THERE CAN BE LOVE, ACCEPTANCE & FORGIVENESS.

NO ONE NEEDS TO FEEL LONELY OR UNWELCOMED OR UNWANTED OR UNLOVED.

WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

EVEN THE COMMON & SEEMINGLY MUNDANE EXPERIENCES OF LIFE CAN BECOME UNCOMMON &
EVEN SACRED WHEN SHARED TOGETHER BECAUSE WHAT WE SHARE TOGETHER IS THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF THE RISEN CHRIST.

WHEN WE STUDY TOGETHER, SERVE TOGETHER, WORSHIP TOGETHER & PRAY TOGETHER, WE DO SO WITH CHRIST IN OUR MIDST.

MAY HIS PRESENCE AMONG US FILL US WITH SUCH LOVE & ACCEPTANCE THAT OTHERS WILL BE SO IRRESISTIBLY DRAWN TO US THAT THEY, TOO, MIGHT EXPERIENCE THE AWE & WONDER OF OUR “FLAWED PERFECTION” IN JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

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