

**QUESTION:** What was one thing that stood out to you about Sunday's message?

### Adding to the Family

When we bring the gospel to the world, we are not just trying to change the minds of people who live far away, we are adding to the family. In Acts chapter two, we read about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but we also read about the birth of a community. Let's read from the verses following Peter's sermon to see how the church of new believers formed a family:

**With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:40-47, NIV).**

Those who responded to Peter's sermon and gave themselves to Christ became a family. They learned together, ate together experience the presence of God together and pooled their resources to ensure that all the needs were met. They were not just people who had changed their minds about Jesus, they were a family. In the same way, everywhere that the good news of Jesus is being preached people are being added to our family. The growth of the church means the growth of our community.

**Question:** In what ways has this life group been like a family?

## A Very Large Family

One of the many important things that comes from focusing on missions is a growing awareness of our brothers and sisters around the world. It is a reminder that our shared faith unites us more than ethnic, national, or political associations. We are a part of a huge family of faith. In the early church, Christians in Jerusalem were experiencing significant hardships due to a famine. Christian communities everywhere took part in making sure that those needs were met. Last week, we read that Paul asked the Roman church to help him in his mission to Spain, but Paul also told the Romans about his mission to take a collection from the gentile churches to the poor in Jerusalem. Let's read that now:

**Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings (Romans 15:25-27 NIV).**

The churches of Macedonia and Achaia were gentile churches. They were culturally and ethnically different from the churches in Jerusalem. Perhaps it would have been natural for them to think that Christians far away from them were none of their responsibility. But Paul always emphasized that Christians everywhere were part of a larger family.

**QUESTION:** Have you ever been deeply impacted by a missionary sharing stories about the people with whom they work?

## The Reluctant Prophet

If Paul is the New Testament's example of a good missionary, Jonah is the Old Testament's example of a bad one. Perhaps we know Jonah best for being swallowed by a fish. But the message of the book of Jonah is that the mission of God will require that we learn to love even our enemies enough to want to see them come into the family. There is not space in this Bible study for a full discussion of the book of Jonah, but we can touch on the main point of the book. Jonah had been called by God to go to Ninevah and preach a message of repentance. Jonah fled the mission of God and was swallowed by a fish. He cried out to God for mercy and was spared. Finally, Jonah complied and proclaimed the message to the people of Ninevah. Let's read Jonah's response when the people repent:

**But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:1-3, NIV).**

Jonah's response to the mercy of God was anger. Although he had been very happy to be the recipient of God's mercy, he was not happy to see God show mercy to the Ninevites. The City of Ninevah was the capitol of the Old Assyrian empire which had dealt harshly with Israel. Jonah was pleased for God to bring judgment, but he was not pleased to see God's mercy. A missions focus reminds us that God wants to see the salvation of every people group and nation in the world. God does not rejoice in the death of the wicked but wants to see people everywhere flourishing in new life in Jesus. Christians cannot see other ethnicities, nations, or movements as those whom God

wishes to bring judgment. Rather all people are loved by God and he stands ready to welcome them into the family. We must be equally open to all who will come.

**QUESTION:** Why do you think it matters to a local church like ours to be reminded about the Christians living around the world?

### Prayer

Take the time to check on prayer requests from last week and pray for any new or continuing needs in the group. Give praise to God for answered prayer.