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How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
How very joyful it is when God’s children gather as one!
How very strange and wondrous it is when the whole group of those who believed are of one heart and soul!

From the very beginning, God created humankind to be in relationship, to be forever reminded that we belong to God and we belong to one another. And so, too, from the very beginning, we have longed for belonging - hoped for, searched for, yearned for, needed other people, needed our common Creator.

When the community gathered after that first Pentecost, Scripture tells of a most beautiful truth that seemed like a dream: All who believed were together and had all things in common...day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple...praising God...having the goodwill of all the people... It is no wonder that day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. That longing for belonging, that built for one another and for God was fulfilled in their communion. The God-shaped hole inside each of their hearts was poured into again and again without running dry.

My friend Jonathan lives in a community that is the closest thing to the early church I’ve seen. The house he shares in community is called Rutba House. Jonathan lives there with his family and others, the residents changing based on who needs a room and stability in the transience created by housing insecurity, coming home from prison, and the longing of their neighbors. They share space and food and money and goods - all in common. They share the breaking of the bread and singing of hymns and prayers and worship. They share it all. All.
He says, “Just like a beautiful song on a guitar, it takes a whole lot of work and practice and that can be pretty frustrating. Community is a whole lot of meetings and a whole lot of trying to live together with people who can frustrate you and say the same things over and over again for twenty years...And...community is the way of the cross. It can open us up to new life. It is the Good News. It is the life worth giving everything for.”  

The story of the early church did not stay put. Communities sprang up and sustained and surely fell apart and were built back up and spread far and wide. The promise born from their faithfulness was meant to be the possibility forever and ever for all God’s people in all times and places. The joy we know as a community of believers is the resounding echo of the joy those disciples knew. Of what it feels like to speak your pain and have your neighbor pray for you. Of what it feels like to break bread with your lifelong friend and the child you made baptismal promises to and the newfound neighbor. Of what it feels like to study Holy Word around a table and insights spark a darkened corner in your mind. Of what it feels like to physically be in a space with other people who are unafraid of their doubts and dreams and questions and hopes and love for Jesus Christ. Of a hand finding their space in yours whether in passing of the peace or at your bedside.  

Is community a whole lot of work? Of course it is. But the joy - the joy of not being alone but seeing in our neighbors’ eyes that we belong to God and we belong to one another is a joy unlike any other.  

This week in Vacation Bible School, the children and adults alike gathered around this holy idea and holy possibility of being neighbors and community to one another. We shared stories about how community is complicated and how it is full of love. Of how it means taking risks and how good and pleasant it is when we can rejoice as one. Our conversations were so rich and in the manner of that early church, I cannot help but share the feast with you and invite you to do the same.

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1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqfDho7htlk
For the next few minutes, I’d like you to scoot closer to a neighbor in the pews, minding those for whom it is difficult to scoot so gathering nearer to them. Get in small clusters of 3-5 folks and I want you to answer this question: **how have you found joy in our community?** I’m going to ask the children to filter out into the sanctuary to aid you in this activity and then I will invite someone from each side of the sanctuary to share their story as they feel comfortable. Friends- **how have you found joy in our community?**