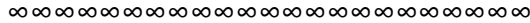


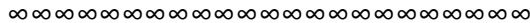
kidding – (not always kidding). When a brother needed a little loan to get by, or needed a ride to school, or needed anything, the brotherhood was there to help. We were family.



The simplicity of the Church of Acts 2 is very appealing. And, yes, even the memories of fraternity days seem oddly holy to me. With gas at almost \$4 per gallon and enjoying my new family here at Kingston Springs, I can imagine a scene that would include hearing the church bells ring and everyone would begin to stir and come to out to a place where breakfast would be waiting.

Then everyone would come into the sanctuary for a time of morning prayers. We would leave there and everyone would go do the things they do to contribute to the needs of the community – harvest, cook, mend, paint, patch, clean. The steeple bells would signal lunch after which people would go back to teach, learn, read, rehearse, meditate, and pray. After dinner people would gather in various homes to be encouraged by the reading of emails from Christians across the world telling what their day was like.

I'll confess that I would probably be totally bored in a very short time. But I have envied the simplicity that I have seen on a number of occasions when I have visited the Mennonites who live this kind of life.



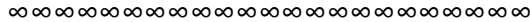
So what is my point? It is just this: Are we being the church of Jesus Christ? The church that Peter and John and Luke and Matthew and Paul first knew was one of celebration, discipleship, and community. It closely resembled the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God) that Jesus had taught them to be. The people each shared their gifts and graces for the good of all. They knew each other and literally were the family of God.

What has happened to that Church? By the end of the first century the Church described in Acts 2 no longer existed. The Christians were being persecuted and many had gone underground – literally, they were hiding out in the catacombs, the sewers, beneath the buildings of Rome. The church was changing.

The second or third generation of church leaders began to stop teaching, stop discipling, and began to “package” the Gospel. Eventually, in a few centuries, the Church held the keys to the gate of salvation: a system of sacraments took the place of free will and discerned choices. The people were being told what the Will of God was.

We come to today's Church after many attempts to re-form the church. We are in the line of John Wesley who studied the scriptures deeply and was convinced that the scriptural way of salvation was to be found in the first century-style discipleship. He established a Method that modeled the first Church of Jesus Christ.

I think that the time is right for us to look once again at that first Church. It is only a dream that we could return to the simple little self-contained village. Life is complex. But I think that returning to the church of the people of the Way or returning to Mr. Wesley's Method is possible.



The way back is to rediscover how our gifts and our graces fit together to form the body of Christ at Kingston Springs. 'Gifts and graces' is a way of talking about each of our individual inborn talents and our acquired skills. It is sharing what we have to offer out of our passions as well.

I believe that we live in a world that is more similar to the world that Jesus walked than at any time since. For the first time in centuries we live again in a predominantly pagan culture. We Christians are the minority and get little public benefit from being followers of Jesus Christ. Some of us may even sometimes feel like we slip away to the catacombs to do what Christians do.

This morning may very well be the launch of seeking the Way or the Method for our church family. The Lay Leadership Development committee has set their minds on helping us to discover the gifts and graces of every man, woman and child so we can begin to weave together a strong Christian community. They are asking that each family take a survey form home and prayerfully consider your responses. The form should be returned to the church via mail, email, or put into the gift-wrapped box that will stay in the sanctuary.

The plan for the results of the surveys will be to give people opportunities to learn, to serve, to lead. Nothing will be forced. But opportunities will be offered based upon who we are and not who someone thinks we should be – we pray the result will be that we will become like those Christian saints who spread faith in Christ across Europe and Asia, and we will become like those Methodists who spread scriptural holiness across England and America.

Scary, yes. Exciting, yes. I challenge you to consider this way of living, this method of sharing of ourselves. This may make this the congregation that your family needs the most, that your neighbor needs the most, that the world needs the most, to spread the Kingdom of God.