

Commitment Expresses Itself In Community

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Scriptures:

Genesis 32:28

Luke 2

Luke 10:1

Acts 1

Acts 2

The Bible tells us from beginning to end about the unfolding of God's relationship with His people.

In the first five books, we begin with one couple living in a wonderful garden and having close fellowship with their Creator as He walks with them in the cool of the evening. Sin wrecked that harmony. The following books trace the progress of God's relationship with His people through the lives of Abraham, father of Isaac, father of Jacob who 'wrestles with God.' (Genesis 32:28). God tells Jacob that from now on he will be known as "Yisra'el" which means "wrestled with God." Jacob fathers twelve tribes who become known as God's Covenant people. The Israelites are eventually led into the promised land we know today as Israel.

As you read through the book of Psalms you will find many which are headed, "Psalm of Assents". These were sung by groups of Jewish pilgrims on their way to celebrate the festivals in Jerusalem. Attending the festival was an expression of their shared faith in God. As we enter the New Testament, we find Joseph and Mary taking Jesus on such a pilgrimage when he was twelve years old. (Luke 2:40-50). As they travelled home in a large group of fellow worshippers, they assumed that Jesus was with others. However, when they tried to find him, panic set in. They hurriedly returned to Jerusalem and found Jesus discussing issues of faith with the teachers of the law in the temple. Look again at Jesus' response to his parents' questions. "Did you not know I would be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:29). Bringing Jesus up must have been unusually difficult.

Following His baptism by his cousin John, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where was tempted by the devil, yet remained without sin. Following this He chose and called His disciples. It was normal for a Rabbi to begin his ministry at around the age of 30 and to gather men around him to teach them by word and example.

So Jesus had chosen twelve to walk with him, but the number was to grow. Luke 10:1 tells us that he called 70 (some versions say 72) whom He sent out to proclaim the Kingdom of God with miracles and healing following.

Thousands came to listen to Jesus as he taught, and on occasion he fed them, multiplying small amounts of fish and bread. We must always remember that if there were five thousand men present their wives and children would have been with them. These were amazing miracles.

After Jesus had been crucified and had risen we read that the number of disciples who waited in prayer after Jesus' ascension was 120 (Acts 1:15) and by the end of Pentecost 3000 souls were added to the fledgeling church (Acts 2:41). The New Testament continues to make us aware of the ups and downs of church life. The book of Acts contains a history of the early years. Paul's conversion results in him visiting major cities around the Mediterranean, founding churches and teaching them by letter how believers should live and share in the church's life. Paul always travelled with a group of fellow people when possible. Life in a church is not guaranteed to be trouble free. Sometimes people are hurt and leave a church, but God's plan is for them to be drawn back into a fellowship where they can find healing and again know the love of God flowing to them within that community.

So the history of the Jewish faith and the Christian church is expressed in the gathering of people. There are leaders who stand out, but commitment expresses itself in community.

Prayer: Father, Son and Holy Spirit who dwell together in the unity of community, thank You that You have called us to love You and to love one another. May the love we show to one another bring glory to Your Holy name as we witness to the world around us. Amen.