

EMBRACING THE MESS
Screen Shots of Crazy Grace

Acts 2:42-47

Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

November 6, 2016

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/embracing-the-mess-screen-shots-of-crazy-grace/>

As I read our text this morning, notice how many of our five sails are referenced in this brief passage from Acts 2: God-centered worship, life-changing faith, authentic relationships, community transformation, global partners. [Read the text].

A screenshot is a static image or snapshot of whatever is on your computer or smart phone screen at the moment. In Acts 2, Luke gives us screenshots of authentic relationships, made up of crazy, radical grace and hospitality.

As I read this passage, I think of two stories from my trip to Ukraine last September. The first (triggered by v. 42) is about Vasyl, with whom I had dinner one evening. He told me about his new church plant. He said one day, he was praying, "God, bless our church." And the Lord spoke to him and said, "You're not a church yet. Just a gathering of humans." Vasil said he started serving sandwiches, increasing their face time, relaxed family time. And after that, guess what? They not only began to be a church, they started evangelizing! (see vv. 42, 46b-47).

The second story is triggered by v. 43, the "awe factor." It's about Sergei, the student FBC JC is sponsoring. When the war started in 2014, he and his family were forced to flee from eastern Ukraine. For one solid year, he and his family traveled, wandered and helped refugees. In Sergei's gentle manner, he said, "This time was personally fruitful for me. Two things took on new meaning in my life--God's greatness and God's family."

I wonder if we know how rich we are, to have the privilege of fellowship. And I wonder if we can fathom what God is up to in our midst. And they lived out their relationships in Acts through large group (the Temple) and in small groups (in homes), v. 46. It's all about authentic relationships! Even quantum physics bears testimony to the interconnectedness of life. Contrary to old-school thoughts, the universe is not made up of building blocks but of complicated relations--interconnectedness lies at the core of all that exists [paraphrase of Ilio Delio, source unknown]. And so the church. We are not separate units. We are deeply woven together. In fact, when v. 46 says they were "together," the Greek word is a compound word, "homo" (the same) + "thermo" (to burn or glow). They were on fire together!

But here's a warning. this "togetherness" as NOT homogeneity or sameness. Sameness is NOT authentic relationships. Do you recall the political differences of the twelve original disciples? One collected taxes for Rome and another was a Zealot, previously committed to the violent overthrow of Rome. But in Christ, they were one! Two days from election day, that's a good

thing to remember--followers of Christ first! This is what defines us, not our earthly, political affiliations!

But the fellowship of believers had grown far past the original band of followers. After all, v. 41 says 3,000 were saved at Pentecost. Preaching professor Tom Long has made an interesting observation about the Apostle Paul's "greeting list" at the end of his Roman epistle, in chapter 16 [a lecture at CBF Leadership Institute, June, 2016]. There were 26 people mentioned. Of those singled out for courageous and dangerous service, nine were women (counter-cultural for his time). And of the 26 listed, 12 were not Roman--they were immigrants! Strangers! Some were slave, some were free, some were homegrown, some guests. You see? "Authentic relationships" does not equal sameness.

So we have to be careful that authentic relationships never deteriorate into cliques. I know a family in North Missouri who moved off of the farm, away from their small, country church, to a county seat town and a much larger church. Finally, after valiantly trying to connect, they moved their membership yet again. The reason? The husband said, "I looked around and couldn't think of six people I would want to be my pallbearers if I died." People don't leave church because of steep parking lots. They leave for lack of relationships!

Late last summer, the Florida State University football team visited Montford Middle School in Tallahassee, FL. Wide receiver Travis Rudolph saw one boy, named Bo, sitting by himself and went over and sat by him, ate with him and talked FSU football. You see, Bo has been diagnosed with autism. His mother said, "For one day, I didn't have to worry if my sweet boy ate lunch alone."

People who are different, getting to know one another, taking time to be one in Christ, living Gospel hospitality. And the world sees. And the world is drawn to it, hungry and ready for authentic relationships.