

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service with Communion - Mothering Sunday
10:30AM 15th March 2026
Selina Chan leading & Rev. Dr. Zoltan Biro preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk
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THEME: Enjoying the company of each other: Fellowship - Psalm 133 & 1 John 1:5-7

Good morning, dear brothers and sisters. Last Sunday we've learnt from the Scripture "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:34). Simon has reminded us that we should follow Jesus' advice, i.e. "Seek first the Kingdom of God." (Matthew 6:33) and lead a simple life as our Spiritual Habit.

From this week onwards, the preaching will be focusing on Corporate Spiritual Habits. Today Zoltan our Minister will explain about the importance of developing and enjoying the company of each other, or simply our Fellowship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Beloved in Christ, let us gather in the joy of fellowship!

**We come not as strangers, but as brothers and sisters in Christ,
invited to enjoy one another's company under God's blessings.**

Let us walk in the light of God,

Maintain and grow ourselves in real fellowship!

**Lord, teach us how to put into practice of what we believe,
let the light of truth have its work within us.**

O Lord, we come to worship You and to share life together. Amen.

HYMN

Light of the world You stepped down into
darkness

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore You

Hope of a life spent with You

*Here I am to worship Here I am to bow
down*

*Here I am to say that You're my God
You're altogether lovely Altogether
worthy*

*Altogether wonderful to me
King of all days, O so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly You came to the earth You created
All for love's sake became poor*

*Bridge I'll never know how much it cost x 2
To see my sin upon that cross x 2*

TIM HUGHES © 2001

FAMILY TIME

(*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which teenagers and children will leave for their groups)

HYMN BP&W 530

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning

Give me oil in my lamp, I pray.

Give me oil in my lamp, keep my burning,

Keep me burning till the break of day.

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
Sing hosanna to the King of kings.*

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
Sing hosanna to the King.*

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising...

Give me joy in my heart, I pray.

Give me joy in my lamp, keep my praising,

Keep me praising till the break of day.

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving...
Give me love in my heart, I pray.

Give me love in my heart, keep my serving,
Keep me serving till the break of day.

PRAYER & REFLECTION

Let us come before our holy God, who is light,
and confess where we have walked in shadows that may harm our fellowship.

**Lord, forgive us when our words have divided rather than united,
when we have withheld love, forgiveness, or encouragement,
when selfishness, pride or indifference have hindered our fellowship.**

Silence for personal reflection...

But we know, if we walk in the light and have fellowship with one another,
The blood of Jesus will purify us from ALL sin.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

BIBLE READINGS: Psalm 133 & 1 John 1:5-7

SERMON

Enjoying the Company of Each Other: The Habit of Fellowship

Psalm 133:1; 1 John 1:5-7

Good morning, church family.

We are continuing our series on Spiritual Habits or Holy Habits. In a way we are focusing on the practical ways we look after the garden of our souls. We often think of habits as chores: brushing your teeth, doing the dishes, or working out in the gym. But in the Kingdom of God, habits aren't just tasks; they are hoses through which God's grace flows into our lives.

Think about your physical health. If you eat well, move your body, and get enough sleep, you don't just "have habits", you have liveliness and energy. Your body functions the way it was designed to.

So far, we've looked at habits that grow us internally, like bible reading, reflection and prayer and manages our growth externally like solitude and simplicity. These first 7 habits focused on us as individuals. Today's habit is The Habit of Fellowship, which shifts our focus from ourselves and helps us understand to grow with others.

Now, let's be honest: in our modern world, we've watered down the word "fellowship." We think it's just the 15 minutes of coffee and biscuits after the service, or a quick chat about the weather. But the Bible presents fellowship as something much more regular and much more powerful.

Listen to this:

*"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." Psalm 133:1 **And**
"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..." 1 John 1:7*
What these verses say that when we walk with God we also walk with each other. You cannot fully have one without the other. Christian faith was never intended to be a solo sport.

1. Fellowship is God's Design

When the Psalmist writes, *"How good and pleasant it is,"* he's using a very specific pairing of words. Think about it. Many things in life are good for you, but they aren't pleasant. (I'm looking at you, blended kale and 6:00 AM workout). On the other hand, many things are pleasant, but they aren't good for you. (I'm looking at you, double-bacon cheeseburger and binge-watching all episodes of Friends, all 236 of them).

But David says that when God's people dwell in unity both will happen. It is healthy for your soul, *and* it feels good. Why? Because we were designed for it. Even in the garden of Eden, before sin ever entered the story, God looked at man and said,

"It is not good for man to be alone."

We are hard-wired for community.

During my ministry I met many people who said to me. I have faith, but I don't go to church. They often say to me: "Pastor, I don't need to be in that building to be a Christian. I can worship God just fine on my own." Which is true to a certain extent.

A colleague of mine met someone at a camping trip, who had similar views about practicing fellowship. So, he took the fire poker and pulled out a single, glowing red coal. He set it off to the side. Soon this glowing red coal turned grey. The glow faded. The heat vanished. Within minutes, it was cold to the touch. The pastor then moved it back into the pile of burning logs, and almost instantly, it began to glow with heat and light again.

Christians are like those coals. When we are separated, we don't just get lonely—we grow cold. When we are together, we burn brighter and hotter than we ever could alone.

2. Fellowship is “Commanding God’s Blessing”

But fellowship isn't just about "staying warm." Psalm 133 gives us two strange but powerful images to describe what happens when we practice this habit.

- **Image 1: The Oil.** The Psalm mentions oil running down Aaron’s beard. This image is taken from the consecration of the priest to serve the community. In the ancient world, oil symbolized blessing, consecration, and being filled by the Holy Spirit. The oil didn’t just sit on top of his head, it flows down. When we are in unity, the blessing of God doesn’t just stay on one person: it "drips" onto everyone else.
- **Image 2: The Dew of Hermon.** Mount Hermon was a place of incredible, life-giving moisture in a dry land. Unity is like a spiritual refreshment. When you’re exhausted and your "soil" is dry, the fellowship of the believers is the dew that brings you back to life.

But these two images serve a purpose in the psalm, not to make us feel warm and cosy, but for us to understand that fellowship commands God’s blessing.

"For there the Lord commands the blessing."

God doesn't just "offer" a blessing to a unified church. A unified church commands God’s blessing. If you want to be sure that you get God’s blessing, you must be in the company of His people.

3. Fellowship is intentional

a. Habit not a feeling

Some people say, "I'm just not a 'people person.'", or that "I'm an introvert and I don't really do the 'fellowship' thing." But the Bible tells us that fellowship is a habit, not a feeling.

The early church understood this. Acts 2 tells us they "devoted themselves" to fellowship. They didn't just wait until they felt social. They practiced it as a discipline. Fellowship isn't a personality trait; it's a spiritual habit.

Some of you may remember I used this puzzle to illustrate how every member is important in the church. Hold a single piece: it's hard to tell what the picture is. It looks irregular, lonely, and incomplete. It's only when the pieces give up their independence and "submit" their edges to the pieces around them that the beautiful image of God begins to appear.

You are a piece of God’s picture. We can't see the full beauty of God’s work in this city if you are sitting in the box by yourself.

b. Vulnerability not perfection

Real fellowship is more than small talk. It's shared faith, shared struggles, and shared encouragement. It's the "light" of honesty reaching our lives.

"If we walk in the light... we have fellowship with one another." **1 John 1:7**

True fellowship requires transparency. You can't have fellowship in the dark. If I'm wearing a mask, and you're wearing a mask, our masks might be having a great conversation, but we aren't in fellowship, we are not connecting, not in any meaningful ways. The issue is that without deeper connections we will struggle when the “storms of life” hit us.

Actually, we can learn a lot from the **Redwood trees** in California. They are the tallest living plants on earth, yet their roots are surprisingly shallow. How do you think they stand?

Their roots reach out and wrap around the roots of the trees next to them. They are quite literally "anchored" to each other. Christianity works the same way. We survive life's storms because our roots are connected.

4. Practical Application: How to Practice Fellowship

So, how do we practice this habit this week? Let's get practical.

1. **Prioritize the Gathering.** Don't just show up when it's convenient. Make the gathering of the saints a non-negotiable rhythm.

2. **Go Deeper.** Next time someone asks, "How are you?", try answering honestly. Instead of "I'm fine," try "I'm struggling with a work thing, could you pray for me?"
3. **Focus only on one act.** Pick one person this week to intentionally encourage. Send a text, buy a coffee, or write a note.
4. **Be open.** Stop pretending to be perfect. Perfection is a wall; vulnerability is a bridge.

God designed the church to be a family, not a crowd. A family where we belong, where we grow, and where we hold each other up like the redwoods.

This week don't just be in church. Practice the habit of fellowship. Reach out your roots to others, walk in the light, and watch how God commands the blessing in your life. **Amen.**

BP&W 471

*Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together,
Lord,
Bind us together with love.*

There is only one God,
There is only one King;
There is only one Body,
That is why we can sing.

Made for the glory of God,
Purchased by His precious Son;
Born with the right to be clean,
For Jesus the victory has won.

We are the family of God,
We are the promise divine;
We are God's chosen desire,
We are the glorious new wine.

BOB GILLMAN © 1977 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

COMMUNION

Invitation

Come everyone who wants to:
Come if you can recite the creeds,
Come if you can't remember the words to Jesus loves me;
Come if you've been in the church since birth,
Come if you've lost your way a few times but found your way today;
Come if you like to study theology,
Come if you like to finger paint;
Come if you like tradition and ritual and ceremony,
Come if you like balloons and laughter and jumping in puddles.
Come if you like all these things and find the wonder of heaven in them all.
Come as you are: old and young.
Just as you are: one family, right now, each of you, every one of you, and have a seat right here.

Welcome

It looks like bread, and it is bread. But God is incredibly imaginative. There is a surprise in this bread, for within each crumb, God has folded nothing less, than heaven. And when we break it, and everyone has a piece, what we are doing is saying, "Let's share together the story of Jesus."

It looks like a goblet of wine, and it is wine, but God, being God, didn't leave it there, and has squeezed into each drop, a promise for the whole world. And when we pass it among us, and everyone has a taste, it sort of whispers to our souls, and sort of tangles with memories, telling us: God loves us, God loves us, God loves us, completely.

So, lets break bread and listen to the story, and share wine and hear the promise...

Story

One-night Jesus and the disciples were sitting in a room and the meal table was spread before them. There was lamb and herbs and bread and soon they were all filled. They were all talking to each other about the days and months that had passed. Peter, was telling them about how he felt when he stepped out of the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee ... do you remember that? Andrew talked about the time he found a small boy with two fish and five barley loaves and presented the boy and his meal to Jesus in front of that crowd of 5000. And how on that day everyone had enough. All the other disciples told their memories of what had happened to them while they were following Jesus.

Eventually Jesus himself interrupted them all and said, "Here's another story" and he lifted the bread lying on the table. He paused as everyone fell silent and listened, and he said, "This bread, this is the most important reminder you have of me. More than all these stories. This bread is an image of my body. I break it (BREAK) to show you that my own body will break. I want you all to break this bread so

you all understand what's happening to me and remember what I have done for you: dying because I love you all so, so much."

All the disciples were speechless as Jesus passed the broken bread around. They didn't understand in the same way that none of us fully understand. And while the bread was passed Jesus lifted up the cup and for a moment while everyone fell silent again. "This wine," he said, "is another reminder of me. But it is a symbol of my blood that will be spilled when I die. But do not be afraid because placed within this is a promise, that I will be with you always wherever you go. I will never let you go, because I love you so much even death cannot separate us!"

And again, Jesus passed the wine round them all. They all took a sip and still none of them understood just as none of us could with honesty say we fully understand.

So today we share the very same meal that Jesus did with his friends: the bread and the wine that remind us of our stories of Jesus and what he did for us because he loves us so much.

"This bread is my body," says Jesus. "Eat of it, all of you."

Sharing bread

"This wine is my blood and within it is a promise. Drink of it, all of you."

Sharing wine

HYMN BPW328/MP33

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

CHARLES WESLEY (1707–88)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A Prayer for Mothering Sunday

Lord, on this Mothering Sunday, we give you thanks for all who have nurtured, guided, and cared for us. We thank you for our mothers by birth, by adoption, by choice, and by circumstance, for those who have shown us kindness, patience, and strength.

We thank you for the joy that our mothers bring. We also pray for those who find today difficult — for anyone grieving, longing, or remembering. Lord, hold each heart with tenderness.

Bless the mothers who are tired, the carers who feel unseen, the parents who worry, and the families who need healing. Surround them with your peace.

May we learn from the love we have received and share that love generously with others. Help us to nurture and encourage one another, reflecting your compassion in all we do. **Amen.**

A Prayer for Iran and the Middle East

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, we pray that Your light exposes what is hidden; let Your truth break through. Grant the people of Iran hope in these uncertain times and Your peace in their hearts.

We pray for all the nations in the region – Israel, Lebanon, the Gulf States. Bring wisdom to leaders, courage to peacemakers and guidance to all who work toward reconciliation.

Jesus, Prince of Peace, let Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth - in Iran - as it is in Heaven. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.**

Hymn BPW 393

The Church's one foundation
 Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
 She is His new creation
 By water and the Word.
 From heaven He came and sought her
 To be His holy bride;
 With His own blood He bought her,
 And for her life He died.

Elect from every nation,
 Yet one o'er all the earth;
 Her charter of salvation,
 One Lord, one faith, one birth;
 One holy name she blesses,
 Partakes one holy food,
 And to one hope she presses,
 With every grace endued.

Mid toil and tribulation,
 And tumult of her war,
 She waits the consummation
 Of peace forevermore;
 Till, with the vision glorious,
 Her longing eyes are blest,
 And the great Church victorious
 Shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union
 With God the Three in One,
 And mystic sweet communion
 With those whose rest is won.
 O happy ones and holy!
 Lord, give us grace that we,
 Like them, the meek and lowly,
 On high may dwell with Thee.
 S. J. STONE (1839-1900)

BENEDICTION

Go now, in the joy of fellowship,
 Knowing how beautiful and harmonious it is when we dwell together in unity.
 Walk in the light as God is the light, Enjoy the company of each other,
 And let the blood of Jesus Christ continue to cleanse and unite us all. Amen.

THE GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.

Events to highlight next week:

Wednesday 18 th	10:30 12:00 2:00	Renew Café Bible study iCaf English lesson and First Steps course
Thursday 19 th	10:30 10:30	Toddlers Bible Study
Friday 20 th	10.30 5:00pm	Prayer Meeting Upper Room Table Tennis
Sunday 22 nd	10.30	Entering in God's presence together: Worship (Acts 2:42-27; Hebrews 10:24-25) READING HALF MARATHON – Road closures in central Reading from 9.30 Come early for coffee and croissants!

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