

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Several years I came across a story in the *Chicago Tribune* by Barbara Brotman. She began:

Three years ago, a new sight appeared at our neighbor's house across the street. It was a patio—a flagstone circle surrounded by hostas and impatiens and topped by a set of wrought-iron chairs and a table.

It would have been charming, but unremarkable if it had been in their backyard, the usual spot for patios. But this patio was in their frontyard. And sitting there many an evening or weekend morning, watching his children play or sipping a glass of wine or a cup of coffee, was Steve Bankes, our neighbor. It looked so inviting, especially... when he set out a fire pit and built a bonfire.

Which couldn't make Steve—a gregarious sort who refers to his patio-sitting as “fishing for people”—happier.

When you see the headline you can see why the article grabbed my attention: **“Front patio makes a great hook if fishing for people.”** Our life as Christians, lived out in the frontyards of our lives, so to speak, is our hook.

- B. Fishing for people, of course, is what Jesus expects us to do. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” [Mt 4:19] We invariably take that as an *individual* duty. But I love the image of Steve Bankes' front patio as a metaphor for our outreach *together*; as a church *family*. We each have the privilege and responsibility to carry the good news of Jesus and salvation to the people around us. But the New Testament always sets that *personal* work in the context of our life *together*.

To put it another way, the whole church preaches.

What I mean is that evangelism is a family affair—our church family. We don't all do the same thing. We team up,

with our various gifts, experiences and relationships, to be the body of Christ with the message of Christ. When someone comes to Christ it is usually through the combined touches of many Christians—who prayed, cared, explained, and persevered in love. Let me show you what I mean.

I. OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS THE UNMISTAKABLE EVIDENCE OF CHRIST'S LIFE IN US

- A. As I reminded you a couple of weeks ago, Jesus, in his prayer for the church, prayed *“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* [Jn 17:20-21] The obvious implication is that if the world doesn't see us *together*, as one with Christ, they won't be likely to believe in Christ.
- B. Jesus also said in **Jn 13:34-35**, *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”* We have to be engaged with one another to love one another. Then Jesus suggests that simply knowing we are his disciples by the love we have for one another will be a powerful draw to salvation in Jesus.

Now look at **Acts 2:42-47**... These verses are entirely about the extraordinary fellowship of the first Christians and then you get to the last verse and we see people who watch this coming to Christ every day.

II. OUR APPEAL TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T TRUST JESUS BEGINS WITH OUR DEEP AND VIBRANT FELLOWSHIP (ACTS 2:42-47)

- A. These verses describe the first days of the church. Nothing hindered the Holy Spirit. Every believer was a new believer

stunned by the grace and life of Christ. Never had such fellowship been known. Never had a whole city been so ready to respond to Christ. **These were the greatest days in history to that point!** We won't likely experience that kind of intensity but these things don't change:

- B. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The apostles were teaching them about Jesus, using both their own recollections of Jesus' words and deeds—especially his death and resurrection, as well as the way that the Old Testament Scriptures revealed and explained Christ. The apostles' teaching is now the New Testament. **Any church worth our salt must be devoted to learning the Bible so that our faith is fortified and our lives are invigorated by the Holy Spirit and reoriented to Jesus.** Are you devoted to learning from Scripture so that the life and truth of Christ can be more and more evident in us?
- C. "They devoted themselves to ... fellowship," literally, to life in common with one another. The outgrowth of that devotion to fellowship was really amazing, as you heard. Those believers were together *a lot*, in large groups and small. They couldn't get enough of being together! **We can't be together so often but believers still have the responsibility and privilege of devoting ourselves to fellowship.** It's all over the Bible.
- D. I think the next two phrases describe the keys to their fellowship: "to the breaking of bread and to prayer." "The breaking of bread" is mentioned again in **v.46**, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." They met over meals and shared their experiences in Christ. This most likely indicates that they also shared in **Communion** as part of those meals together,

anchoring their faith in Jesus' new covenant in his blood and in the unity of his body.

And they always prayed together. This happened in homes as well as in larger gatherings. One prayer we know was that God “*would enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness*” and that God would prove the credibility of the gospel. **They prayed together often, and they prayed not only for their personal needs but for their boldness to speak about their faith in Christ.**

- E. Everything else that happened was the miraculous work of God—“wonders and signs performed by the apostles,” the believers having all things in common, the favor of all the people, and the Lord adding saved people to their number daily. The believers couldn't make those things happen. **But God worked out of the environment of Christian fellowship; believers devoted to the teaching, to being together, to prayer and praising God.** The whole church preached.

Now let me take you to a time some 30 years later, when the gospel had spread and churches were settling in. Often Christians were *not* enjoying the favor of all the people. Their neighbors *weren't* interested in Christ. Believers were misunderstood and persecuted. The exuberance of the early days had died down. The Apostle Peter, who had witnessed those first glory days in Jerusalem, wrote to them. Turn to **1 Peter**. Here's what it looked like then for believers to live in the frontyard.

III. OUR APPEAL TO PEOPLE SUSPICIOUS OF OUR FAITH REQUIRES GODLINESS AND READINESS (1 Peter 2-3)

- A. **1 Pet. 2:11-12...** Be holy. Do not sin. Live such good lives that even the enemies of the faith can't miss what God has done. Holiness creates a kind of gravitational pull to the

gospel. It's provocative, drawing people toward Christ, prompting them to ask, "*What is it with you people?*"

- B. Peter talks for the next 20 vss. about the potency of Christian submissiveness as the kind of good the pagans around us should see in us. Then he comes to **1 Pet 3:8-9...** **These are the kinds of good deeds that our neighbors should see**—the extraordinary unity, humility, love and grace we bring to our relationships, especially those with each other. Not just nice people, but *Christlike* people.
- C. **1 Pet. 3:15...** Let our reverence of Jesus Christ and our good deeds be so provocative—so distinctive from other people's *nice*—that people ask us about our hope in Christ. Then tell them what he's done for sinners and the wonders of our salvation. **Be opportunistic.**

Conclusion

So what are you hearing? **Our personal holiness and our life together—marked by our love for the Lord, his Word, and his people—is meant to be seen.** Our home-life as a church should be easy for others to observe. We should talk about it with our neighbors and co-workers. Tell them how we pray together, how much we enjoy our church family and the joy of worshiping God together; tell them what God is doing for us.

Like the headline says, *Front patio makes a great hook if fishing for people.*