

Pastor Sylvia Barrett

September 4, 2016

MESSAGE: By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35 NIV September 4, 2016

We are starting a new series on community, so it is very appropriate that this morning we are all celebrating communion together.

Comm-union: with-oneness. A way to celebrate that we all share the same recognition of the Lords Supper as integral to our faith.

Comm-unity: with-togetherness

Have you ever been, or felt truly alone? Felt that there is no one in the whole wide world that understand what you are going through, that is interested in you, or cares for you? In a small town, our families tend to hold us together. The chances are that quite a few people already know you, perhaps they have heard about you. They know of you. You went to school with many of them. You belong.

Even I, I suspect am known far more now, after three years, when I first arrived. It feels good to belong. To be part of a community. To walk into the Post Office and be recognized.

I came from Calgary, Alberta, a large city of over a million people. It is ironic to me that as the size of the community increases, the sense of isolation increases also. You would think that with **more** people to choose from, the **more** you would be likely to connect with.

Instead, in a large city, you get the feeling that if you fell down, people would just keep on walking. I passed a man sleeping on an air vent in downtown Calgary. People walked right on by, some even stepping over him in their hurry.

We are here today because we belong together.
are a community of faith.

We

We believe as Christians, that we are all members of God's family. We believe that his Son, Jesus Christ, came into this world to restore the relationship between mankind and God, by sacrificing his life for us. **Jesus Christ came to involve himself with our world.**

All plural words. We. Us. Our.

Which is why we are called to involve ourselves with our world. If you've ever been on a mission trip, you know what it means to leave your comfortable existence, and

enter a whole new world. And when you return, you come back with a much deeper appreciation for all the things we take for granted.

If you have ever slept on a mattress on a dirt floor, a bed is suddenly a wonderful blessing.

If you have ever showered in a room with a large hole and two buckets of water, one hot and one cold, a long hot shower becomes an delightful experience!

If you have ever gone without adequate food and drink for any length of time, a sandwich and a glass of cold milk, suddenly take on a whole new perspective.

When we step out of our community, and re-enter, we come back with often a new appreciation. **That is the downside of community**

We become so comfortable in our own little world, that we forget about everyone else. **We become exclusive, and not inclusive.**

Jesus faced a lot of opposition from the religious leaders for the people he spent time with:

The poor, the needy, the marginalized people of his time. He hung out with tax collectors, possibly the most despised of all community members, who often lined their own pockets at the expense of others. He touched lepers. He talked with people who had nothing.

Mark 2:16-17 NIV When the scribes who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating with these people, they asked His disciples, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus told them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Of course, this was ironic, since the people who thought themselves the healthiest, were actually the ones in most need of a doctor!

Last week in our Scripture, in the gospel of Luke, we heard him teach his disciples that anyone could invite a friend, a family member to a meal... but that really the disciples had to reach out of their comfort zone, and invite people who could really do with the help. After all, it's easy to love the people who love us. It is far more difficult to love the people who don't like us, don't trust us, and sometimes actively spend their waking hours trying to sabotage us. It seems an impossible task doesn't it? Like expecting a Democrat to like Donald Trump. Or a Republican to like Hillary Clinton. It just can't be done.

But of course, there are lots of things than can be done, if we put our minds to it. Not too sure on the political front, but it's a possibility!

You see, Christianity is such a counter-intuitive faith. It's one of the many reasons I love it so much.

Christianity takes ideas, and stands them on their heads...

We find by losing 'He who finds his life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake, will find it.' Matthew 10:39

We become great by becoming humble 'Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 18:4

We are exalted by being humble 'Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and who humbles himself will be exalted.' Matthew 23:12

We receive by giving: 'Give, and it shall be given unto you.' Luke 6:38

Our weakness is our strength 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' 2 Corinthians 12:9

So true community is inclusive, and not exclusive.

True community is also forgiving. It is compassionate. I spend time each week at an adult day center for clients who suffer from extreme mental, physical, and emotional challenges. They welcome anyone who visits with open arms. They go out of their way to reach out in love to total strangers. They also live their lives courageously. Each day is full of frustrations: bodies or minds that don't cooperate. But they live together, in community, rejoicing with each other on the good days, and commiserating with each other in the bad.

That is authentic community. And again, Jesus personified it. He cared. He came alongside. He healed. He spoke to people's loneliness, despair, and anguish.

And finally, authentic community is practical, down to earth. It is not fueled by regulations or academic papers, or part of our wonderful modern method of dealing with a problem, passing it on for someone else to deal with. SEP Someone Elses Problem.

No, authentic community uses whatever tools or equipment it has at its disposal. One of the best community suppers I ever ate at was at a homeless shelter. None of the plates matched, all the cutlery was plastic, the tables and chairs were rickety, and held together with duct tape. And I remember as I sat there, and passed round the dishes of mashed potato and carrots, and large wedges of meatloaf... thinking of my grandmothers' fine china, which sat in a china cupboard for 45 years of her life, because the occasion was never good enough for it to be put to use, because it could have got broken.

Real community, my friends is authentic.

It calls a spade a spade.

It includes,

It nourishes

It has fun,
Because people set aside their pre-conceived ideas of what they think they should be thinking, **and they let go into actually enjoying themselves.**

No dressing up,
No talking down.
shutting out,
boxing in.

No
No

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True community is celebrating, showing, and sharing love. A common concern for each other.

It's not all about you. It's all about us. We are united. We are one.

'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.'(Ephesians 4:4-6 NIV)

Today, as we take communion, as we come forward to share in the bread and the grape juice, let us truly celebrate this opportunity to set aside out the cares and concerns which weigh us down in life, and be lifted up by **God's Holy Spirit in our midst.**

God is with us in our community. God is here.
morning. Each morning. And always.

This

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, let us feel your presence in our hearts and lives. Give us the courage to live authentic lives, in community with one another. In the precious name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.