

**DOING LIFE TOGETHER****Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18, 21-23; Acts 2:42-47****(Read Acts 2:42-47)**

**Intro:** Quite a few years ago my friends Ray and Elaine lost both of their fathers in a span of just four days. As I recall, Elaine's dad passed away on Monday and Ray's dad on Friday. I was visiting with my parents that weekend and I went with my dad as he took a casserole to the grieving couple. Elaine opened the door and when she saw it was us, she melted into our arms in sobs of both grief and gratitude. She needed to see loving faces right then and we were just in time delivery. That was community.

A couple years ago, the lady who lived next door to us was struggling to survive with 4 kids, a big house, and no husband. He had abandoned her for another woman. I'm certain she was in deep depression and could not face life let alone making sure her yard got mowed on a fairly regular basis. So I decided to mow it. It was quite a project with my push mower because it had gotten pretty shaggy, but I pressed on. And then I heard the loud and heavy sound of a big Cub Cadet and I turned to see that my neighbor Randy had joined me in the project. We made short work of it. From then on, Randy would mow one week and I would the next. That was community.

A couple weeks ago I received a phone call from Ruth Homuth at about 7:30 PM on a Tuesday evening. A phone call from Ruth is not a surprise – she calls me a lot. But this time she said she needed an angel of mercy to go check on Jim Perry. Many of you know him – he used to be part of ABC and comes back to visit from time to time. Jim is Ruth's former neighbor and lives right down the street from me. Ruth still watches out for her 90 year old friend even though she now lives several hours away. She does this by calling him daily at 8 AM. That morning, however, he had not answered and 12 hours of repeated attempts had the same outcome. So Fiona and I walked down to check on Jim for Ruth. Jim was fine. And he LOVED having a visit from Fiona. And Ruth was relieved. That is community.

And speaking of community, Jim's neighbors, Steve, Parrish, and Ken, check in on him daily already. So, no matter what, he's in good hands. That's community.

Today, as we are now about 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the way through our Summer Series entitled REVIVAL: Living the Gospel and Restoring the World, I want to show that a key for restoring the world, and the Church, for that matter, is doing life together – better known as community. We cannot live without it. (PERIOD!) In a society where relationships have diminished, this core value called community needs to be rightly returned to its prominent place in the church. Just think about it . . .

**Even Creation was done in community**

- In Genesis we read, *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:26-27. The Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been community from eternity. Let US, make mankind in OUR image. That is plural. That is together. And it is community. And look at it again. To be made in the image of God is indication that the creation of humanity has community built into it from its very inception.
- And look at the text Matt read to us from Genesis 2. God said from the very beginning that it's not good for man to be ALONE. We were created for togetherness. In fact the creation of the helper suitable for the man included the investment of one of his ribs. Community take investment. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. Doing life together takes intentionality and sacrifice and it's all worth it.
- As I said before . . .

**Community is a core value of Christianity**

- In the last year or so we did a sermon series on the Brethren in Christ Core Values, and Core Value #5 is Belonging to the Community of Faith: We value integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance. But it's not new with the BIC. From the very beginning of the church, doing life together has been foundational. Acts 2:42 says they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to FELLOWSHIP. Acts 2:44 says all the believers were TOGETHER and had everything in common. Acts 2:45 says they sold property and possessions to give TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED. Acts 2:46 says they CONTINUED TO MEET TOGETHER and that they ATE TOGETHER with glad and sincere hearts. That togetherness really seems to show up a lot there. Know why! Because it's the way God intended

it – from the beginning of time and from the beginning of the Church – community has been a foundational principle. And notice how the church grew because of it. That society was equally starved for community.

- But, increasingly, in society AND in the Church, in a society that is starved for community . . .

### **Relationship has been moved to the back burner**

- Ron Sprunger was telling me the other day of his intention to take the community back that has been stolen by the demise of the front porch. He told how, the night before, he and Linda parked themselves in the driveway in front of the house in order to interact with the world. Before the evening several people stopped in for a visit. The Sprungers regained some territory from culture whose quest seems to be the destruction of community.

- We live in a world where all too frequently people suffer loneliness in the middle of a crowd. Over the past months I've been hearing stories that seem like a Monty Python sketch in the pattern of their Ministry Of Silly Walks. But instead of being a comedy sketch, this is real. England now has a *Ministry of Loneliness*. There are many articles on it, but the first I heard was on NPR back in January. Listen,

The U.K. has appointed a minister of loneliness to tackle what Prime Minister Theresa May calls a "sad reality of modern life" for many U.K. citizens.

May announced the position Wednesday, appointing current Minister for Sport and Civil Society Tracey Crouch.

"I want to confront this challenge for our society and for all of us to take action to address the loneliness endured by the elderly, by carers, by those who have lost loved ones — people who have no one to talk to or share their thoughts and experiences with," said May.

According to government figures, more than 9 million people in the U.K. "always or often feel lonely" and "around 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with a friend or relative in more than a month."

Easing Old People's Loneliness Can Help Keep Them Healthy. An increasing body of research has found that feelings of social isolation can have profound health effects; according to a government commission, loneliness is as bad for people's health as smoking 15 cigarettes daily.

"Loneliness can be triggered by a life event, such as a bereavement or becoming a parent, with certain groups, such as young people and carers, particularly at risk," said Crouch. (End Quote)

- This loneliness is a sad reality in more than just the UK. In fact, Canada is now considering it. And it's a problem here too. (Tell about the blog I read "Why is Everybody Lonely All the Time?") But the American way is to say "Buck up and smile! We don't need anyone's help. We're all about rugged individualism." But that is not a biblical concept. And the reality is, Paul Simon's words "I am rock, I am an island." are a lie. The truth is, people are dying of loneliness. Literally. In just the last month headlines screamed that suicide is up by as much as 30% over the past two decades and the ones spreading the news seemed surprised (**notice on this graph that some rates are up almost 60%**). There are all kinds of reasons given for what they call an epidemic, but I know as God has been increasingly pushed off of people's radar, despair has flooded in. Many people see no option when life seems so empty. But I also know loneliness is another key. Seventy years ago Hank Williams's heart cry was *I'm so lonesome I could cry*. Today it seems that for many it is *I'm so lonesome I could die*.
- Instead of giving in to despair and surrendering to statistics, we as the Church need to promote and strive for selfless and life giving community. We have the answer. We have the basis. Only Christianity has the kind of community needed for carrying out the successful restoration of the world. So since our series is on that very subject, let me take the brief remainder of this talk to show how . . .

### **Community restores the world**

- Gabe Lyons writes "When community is working on all cylinders, the ripples of community touch the world." And then he goes on to say, "As Americans we are immersed in a society where independence reigns and individualism is our god. But it's galvanizing the opposite reaction. Instead of creating loners. The pendulum is swinging toward a deep craving for community." In other words, people are fleeing loneliness and despair because they know, deep down, there is something better. What they, often reluctantly, discover, is that loneliness is a huge hole in their soul where only Jesus Christ can fit.

- That's where our mission comes in. I gave some illustrations as I began this talk of community in action. It can be as simple as taking a meal, it can be as much as Spring-cleaning a house or taking in an international student. But what happens when we serve is that walls come down and people come together.
- Sometimes that community means serving the greater community. Volumes can be said with absolutely no words spoken when a Christ Follower steps in to serve in the name of Jesus. Often that is all it takes to get the ball rolling for more and expanded community. (Tell about buying coffee for people behind me in line at Sheetz)
- This kind of community is contagious. N. T. Wright, says this of community (some of it is on the front of your worship folder)
 

“It is a place of welcome and laughter, of healing and hope, of friends and family and justice and new life. It's where the homeless drop in for a bowl of soup and the elderly stop for a chat. It's where one group is working to help drug addicts and other is campaigning for global justice. It's where you'll find people learning to pray, coming to faith, struggling with temptations, finding new purpose, and getting in touch with a new power to carry that purpose out. It's where people bring their own small faith and discover, in getting together with others to worship the one true God, that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.” (End Quote)

**Conclusion:** There was a lot of what I just read in that quote that describes ABC. In so many ways we are that place of welcome and laughter and healing and hope. We come here and we know we are among good friends and family. We have hurt with people who struggle with chemical dependency. We are what Gabe Lyons describes as “...a community of people who have found healthy patterns of human relating and new standards for how to treat one another, serve one another, and even forgive one another that run counter to the world.” And that's what we are. We are counter revolutionaries of community.

Living life alone is a dangerous proposition. Doing life together is dangerous to the plans of the evil one. Let's be a community that pushes back at the loneliness epidemic and makes an impact for Jesus Christ. God never intended us to do life alone, let's do life together and bring the world with us. Amen.