

August 12, 2007

“The Call to Community: The Pattern of Jesus”

FCF: Skepticism regarding our need for community

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the clear pattern of Jesus,
(magnet) we should intentionally pursue vibrant community.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION:

Relationships are not what they once were. We’re fragmented, spread out, mobile commuters living, for all intents and purposes with dozens of shallow acquaintances in five or six semi-communities – family, friends, work, play, neighbors, church. The weather brings it home. I remember reading of a heat wave in Chicago. Years ago, people opened their windows, their doors, spent the evening on their porches, some even going down to the beach to get some relief. No more. Now the windows are closed, the doors locked, and everyone is inside. And sadly, we then read of the elderly dying in their homes for lack of air conditioning, too scared by their community to open things up.

It didn’t used to be like this. We’ve lost not only community itself but any sense of our need for it. We’ve lost not only community itself but any sense of our need for it. And with that, we’ve lost something fundamental to what it means to be a human being.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 133**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Community is well worth pursuing. I was reading recently in 2 Timothy. In the last chapter of the last letter from the apostle Paul, we find him imprisoned in Rome and awaiting execution. He felt himself cut off and abandoned, exiled from the churches he founded and from the people in them he knew and loved. A number of his close circle of traveling companions had – for a variety of reasons – left him or become separated from him (**READ 2 Timothy 4:9-13**). Paul longed and asked for three things: books and parchments to keep him occupied, a cloak to keep him warm, and people to keep him company – especially Timothy himself. Paul longed for the coming of Christ and he longed for the coming of Timothy as well. The two longings were not incompatible. In fact, human friendship is a loving provision of God for mankind. We need to understand that when our mind is bored, we need books. When our body is cold, we need clothing. And when our spirit is lonely, we need friends. To admit this is not to be unspiritual. It is to be profoundly human. We need community. And it is well worth pursuing.

This is the first in a three part series on biblical community and the rationale for our emphasis on community groups. Really the rationale is quite simple. Your children know. Ask them what they learned in their classes this morning, what was the main thing, and they will tell you, the answer to every searching question – “Jesus.” The same is true here. The rationale behind this emphasis is Jesus – what we could call the clear pattern of Jesus. A pattern that when considered, makes clear we should be intentionally pursuing vibrant community – our church as a whole and each of us as individuals.

The pattern of Jesus makes this clear – both His person and His prayer.

I. THE PERSON OF JESUS

First, the person of Jesus. It shouldn’t shock you to learn that Jesus in His very person is unique – the only being there ever was or ever will be fully God and fully man.

A) His Divinity

He is fully God. He has the nature, the titles, and the attributes of God. He does the works of God and He receives the worship due God. Jesus is fully God.

1. His place within the Trinity

He is the second member of the Trinity – one God in three persons. A fundamental aspect of God’s beauty and glory is that He is not alone. Within the godhead there is what we could call an eternally shared life, a communion existing outside of time itself.

2. The image of God

What are the implications of this for us? We as human beings are made in the image of that God – representing Him in this world and reflecting something of what He is like. Made in the image of the Triune God. This means that a human person living as a solitary individual is an oxymoron. To fail to live in community is to be less than human.

B) *His Humanity*

The divinity of Jesus points to the shared life of community. And so too does His humanity. Yes, He is fully divine, fully God. But He is also fully human, fully man.

1. His struggle and need

If we think of His struggles and needs during His earthly ministry, we usually isolate them to His temptation in the wilderness and His suffering on the cross. But His struggles and needs arose at other times as well. Consider the night of His betrayal, the night before His execution, His time in the Garden of Gethsemane in prayer (**READ Matthew 26:36-46**). Yes, He longed for and asked for His Father to spare Him that cup. But in facing that, He also longed for and asked for His friends to stand beside Him. And the pain of their inability to do so is hard for even us all these years later to hear.

2. Our struggle and need

My point is this. If Jesus – the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace – if Jesus in His sinless humanity needed the presence of such companionship in His life, how much more do we? And further, if we are being remade in the likeness of Jesus, what then does that mean for our engagement in communal life?

Illustration:

Some of you know one of the most striking passages in the Bible describing the life of the church is 1 Corinthians 12. There Paul uses the analogy of a body – one whole entity made up of a variety of interdependent parts (**READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14**). As he goes on to develop this image, Paul makes two vital points. First, the body needs each member. No one is expendable. And second, each member needs the body. No one can go it alone. It’s a great image, one any can easily understand. Yet one few truly believe.

Application:

Honestly, to get what Paul is saying here and then run with it in any real way requires a paradigm shift. To really grasp this deep reality of interdependency, to say with all our heart, “*This is indeed what the church is. And this is indeed who I am, who each of us is*” – it is a paradigm shift. And a call to prayer. This is worth intentionally pursuing. But we need eyes to see what God has in mind that we might then pursue it.

II. THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Which brings me to the second thing we see in the pattern of Jesus – not only His person but His prayer. John 17, “the High Priestly Prayer” the night before His death.

A) *The Requests*

(**READ John 17:1-5, 20-26**) What do we see in these requests?

1. The realization of unity

The realization of unity among His followers. Not in broad categories – unity out there, between “them,” but in interpersonal relationships, in here, between us. A deep unity.

2. Patterned upon the Trinity

The realization of a deep unity, community, among His followers. Patterned upon what? The Trinity itself – that communion, that eternally shared life, we mentioned before.

B) *The Purpose*

That is what Jesus longs for. That's the request. Now why? For what purpose?

1. That the world may know

A unity, a community, a shared life, visible to the world that the world may know the Father has sent the Son – that hope might be known and found in the reality of His grace.

2. That the Father may be glorified

And then, behind all that, the repeated refrain throughout this prayer is that the Father would be glorified – much as with the Lord's Prayer "hallowed be Thy name" – that God would be honored and loved, trusted and served as He should, as He is worthy.

Application:

Now, there are a lot of other things we could say about this prayer. But let me just focus on this. For whom is Jesus praying here? For us! For His followers ever since and even now! We are included here. And who is doing the praying? Jesus, the Son of God, our High Priest, whom we are told elsewhere continues to make intercession for us – not just that night but even now – Jesus is praying that we would taste something of a community patterned on the eternally shared life of the Trinity! Do you hear that?

Now that makes this worth intentionally pursuing all the more. Why? Because the Father is delighted to hear such prayers from His Son. And we then have hope that even the feeblest of our efforts towards this will redound to the greatest of blessings!

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with something of my own story. It was my third year at Virginia Tech – a tumultuous and trying time brought on by the death of one of my roommates who was also a dear friend. In the wake of all that, some weeks later the rest of us in that apartment decided to carve out a time once a week for Bible study and prayer – just for us. It was remarkable. The bonding that took place in those months, the openness and vulnerability that developed, the way the Lord transformed that place of pain into a shelter of encouragement – it was all of Him. And I grew. But that season eventually came to an end. The school year was over and we were each heading our separate ways for the summer. And I remember so clearly driving in that old Mustang of mine, leaving Blacksburg and heading back to Richmond with this deep sense of mourning and longing for those guys. In candor, the relationship with my girlfriend (not my wife of today) just did not have the pull it once did. Why? What had happened? I had tasted something of the beauty of what I was made for and had never known before – community.

Now what I experienced and had come to know I needed is true for us all. It is a fundamental part of what it means to be human. The answer is still "Jesus" – the One in whose image His followers are being remade, the One who has made us into a Body and placed us within that Body such that we are truly and deeply interdependent one on another, and the One who has prayed and is still praying that we might be one, in the richest sense coming to realize what it means for Him to have made not only peace between us and God but peace between us and each other. I hope your appetite is whetted. I pray your imagination and longings are stirred. For this is indeed well worth our intentionally pursuing. And we can know we have His greatest blessing as we do.

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