

August 19, 2007

“The Call to Community: The Resistance We Face”

FCF: Naiveté in the pursuit of community – it won't come naturally

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the resistance we face,
(anchor) we must intentionally pursue vibrant community.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION:

Where naïve expectations meet daunting obstacles, discouragement and despair follow closely behind. Case in point, Erin Gruwell in the film “The Freedom Writers.” The language is a little rough in spots so be advised if you plan to see it. Erin is a young teacher sent into a high school classroom filled with troubled kids. She has her smile and her ideas. And no clue as to what she's getting into. And in the early part of the story, her expectations and those obstacles collide so dramatically that she nearly gives up.

I bring this up because of the need we all have for our expectations to be grounded and readied for what we might face – even in the worthy pursuit of community.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 5:13-16](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Our children have grown up on the “Frog and Toad” stories. One of my favorites involves grumpy Toad's attempt at a garden. He begins well – planting the little seeds and watering them. But he quickly grows impatient. He expects to see them grow overnight. Frog tells him he needs to be nicer. So Toad speaks softly to them, reads them stories, and sings them songs. And, in time, the seeds do grow. I can only wonder if the story had gone on for just a few more pages and weeds had grown up. Toad's frustration would have given way to consternation. “*Now what?*” I can hear him saying.

There's something of that in what we need to consider this morning. The beauty and benefits of community are such that it's worth the effort. We talked about this last week. We find we were made for it. Absolutely. But the reality is that there are weeds coming up in the garden. So with the beauty and benefits come heartache and hardship. We find it's not only worth the effort but it needs the effort as well. And we need to consider that as we're venturing forth together with community groups. Because of the effects of sin, because of all we're up against in pursuing community, it needs the effort.

Jesus says His followers are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Which tells us who we are and what we're to do – to shine in the darkness, to stop the decay, and to stay distinct. It also tells us something of where we are and why we're to do these things – because the world is dark and decaying, needing but resisting the very gospel we bring. And we need to be ready for that. Community is what we were made for. In that sense, it is the most natural thing in the world. But at the same time, there is a very real resistance to it. And so if community is going to be realized, we must be prepared to intentionally pursue it. And be aware of each source of this resistance.

I. THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

The first being the world and its ways. Now we need to be clear as to what the Scriptures are usually speaking to regarding the world – not earthly creation but fallen creation ([READ 1 John 2:15-16](#)). What are the ways of the world? Two categories.

A) Relativism

1. General definition

First, that of “relativism” – a radical skepticism, the rejection of absolute truth. Reality itself depends upon your perspective. There is no one meta-narrative, no unifying story.

2. Effect on community

No ultimate rules, commands, or standards applying to all. *“It’s all up for grabs.”*

B) Narcissism

That’s the first thing we need to reckon with – relativism, *“It’s all up for grabs.”*

Now the second is what we could call “narcissism,” meaning *“It’s all about me.”*

1. General definition

A radical individualism, an infatuation with the self, named after Narcissus of Greek mythology who fell in love with his reflection in a pool of water. *“It’s all about me.”*

2. Effect on community

Which then brings with it a radical selfishness and an unbridled individualism.

Both of which are incredibly destructive to deep and abiding community.

Illustration:

I came across the true story of a psychologist attempting to treat three patients in a psychiatric hospital, each of them with delusions of grandeur. Each believed themselves to be the messiah with a call to save the world. And a revealing conversation took place one day between the three of them. One said, *“I’m the messiah, the Son of God. I was sent here to save the earth.”* “How do you know?” the psychologist asked. “God told me,” he said. To which one of the others responded, *“I never told you any such thing.”*

Application:

Now there’s a lesson in that – the insane effects of relativism and narcissism on community. It really tears it apart. And it’s not just “out there.” It’s “in here” as well. We are affected and infected by this mindset in more ways than we realize. Case in point – the lie of “the right to happiness” which does nothing but feed our self-centeredness.

Is there any hope for us? Can community ever gain any footing? Yes! Because even with all that, Jesus intends, has won, is praying, and is working for far better for us. What we read about in Acts 2 earlier was real and can happen. It can happen.

II. THE WEAKNESSES OF THE FLESH

Well, that’s the first area of resistance – the ways of the world. The second is this – the weaknesses of the flesh. Here again, we need to be clear as to what the Scriptures usually speak of here – not human nature but fallen nature ([READ Galatians 5:16-17](#)).

A) Self-dependence

1. General definition

To walk by the flesh is to live the lie of self-dependence – the creature foolishly insisting to the Creator that they can and will do things their own way in their own strength.

Illustration:

Which is just to go the wrong way to go. True story ([READ Regals, IV 2](#)):

Roy Regals was a lineman for the University of California in 1929 when they went up against Georgia Tech at the Rose Bowl. The game was scoreless when he picked up a fumble and headed for the end zone--the wrong end zone. A teammate chased and tackled him with one yard to go, but on the next play, Regals’s quarterback got sacked in the end zone for a safety. When the game was over, his team had lost by one point. Thus, Roy Regals has been known ever after as “Wrong Way Regals.” ...It was later said of him, “He had instincts without direction.”

2. Effect on community

That’s self-dependence – instinct without direction – going the wrong way, with the effect not just of losing points and a game but tearing apart community. Spurning, if not the call to love altogether, then the biblical teaching as to what form love really takes.

B) Self-righteousness

1. General definition

But the flesh shows itself in another way – living the lie of self-righteousness – the sinner foolishly insisting to a holy God that they can and will earn their standing with Him.

2. Effect on community

Standards of one's own making. Causing despair in those who know they can't measure up or pride in those who think they do. One group then withdrawing from others, the other standing before them with arrogance. Again, either way, community is destroyed.

Application:

And this is not just “out there.” These are clear and present dangers for us all. Think of the warnings of the Old Testament prophets, the admonitions of the New Testament letters. With such resistance within, is there then any hope for community?

Yes! For the gospel is a life transforming story with a promise. Life in the Spirit is real. And He delights to root out these lies that we might then live together in truth.

III. THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

But again, we need to be aware of the resistance – the ways of the world, the weaknesses of the flesh, and then the works of the devil. How is the devil spoken of in the Scriptures? Peter says (**READ 1 Peter 5:8**). Paul warns (**2 Corinthians 11:14**). The devil stands ever hostile to God, working by whatever means to undo His purposes. Which means we then stand engaged in a conflict that is real and cannot be ignored.

A) Temptation

1. General definition

Recognizing the reality of our enemy's temptations, often subtle – enticing us, wooing us, attempting to draw us away from where we should be towards where we shouldn't.

2. Effect on community

Luring us into pride, self-sufficiency, thinking too highly of ourselves, into incremental compromise of community, tempting us to say of one another, “*I don't need them.*”

B) Accusation

1. General definition

Satan tempts. Yet he also accuses – denouncing us, reminding us of our sin, trying to shut us out of a vibrant fellowship with the Lord, drowning out the message of grace.

2. Effect on community

Pummeling us with shame and guilt, with past sins (but not the finished work of Christ), splintering community, accusing that we would then also say, “*They don't need me.*”

And giving into either – temptation or accusation – community is then undone.

Application:

He's been at this a long time. Much longer than any of us. So we have to take seriously C. S. Lewis' counsel by, on the one hand, not thinking too much of the devil's works but, on the hand, not thinking too little of them either. And remembering who is victorious, who we are told has already crushed the head of the serpent under His feet.

Illustration:

John Bunyan captured it well in his Pilgrim's Progress. Christian, on his way to the Palace Beautiful, realizes that the two horrifying lions on each side of the narrow path ahead are actually chained. They could roar and surge all they liked but the Lord of the hill had measured out the links of their chains. And so the pilgrim was able to pass.

This lion is on a leash. Though he may roar he is chained and defeated already.

CONCLUSION:

The world, the flesh, and the devil. These are the areas of resistance for which we need to be prepared. But none of which can stand against the power of Christ and His promises to us. Let me close with this. True story ([READ 750 Illustrations, pp.71-72](#)):

In October of 1993, in the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, police found an old woman dead on her kitchen floor. This was no ordinary discovery – she had been dead four years. Police speculated she died at age 73 of natural causes. That’s when her bank transactions ended. How can someone be so cut off from relationships that no one even notices when he or she dies?

To some extent, it was a mistake. According to the Associated Press, four years earlier, neighbors had called authorities when they sensed something might be wrong. When the police contacted the woman’s brother, he said she had gone into a nursing home. Police told the postal service to stop delivering the mail. One neighbor paid her grandson to cut the grass because the place was looking run-down. Another neighbor had the utility company come and shut off the water when a pipe froze, broke, and sent water spilling out the door.

To a great extent, though, it was not a mistake. One friend from the past said, “She didn’t want anyone bothering her at all. I guess she got her wish, but it’s awfully sad.” Her brother said the family hadn’t been close since their mother died in 1979. He added, “Someone should have noticed something before now.” The woman had lived in her house in this middle-class neighborhood for 40 years, but none of her neighbors knew her well. “My heart bleeds for her,” said the woman who lives across the street. “But you can’t blame a soul. If she saw you out there, she never said hello to you.”

As this neighborhood shows, a spirit of community only results when all of us reach out to one another. Relationships take effort.

Point well taken. Let me also transfer it to where we are here. Would we even know if the person next to us was dying on the inside? Would we know? And how would we?

Let me say it again. Because we were made for community, we should be intentionally pursuing it. And given the resistance to community, we must then intentionally pursue it. And we can – knowing not only are we made for it, but that the One who made us that way delights to see us flourish in it. Let’s go to Him in prayer.

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