

January 14, 2024

“Community - Not What We Expect”
Matthew 9:35-10:4

FCF: Flawed assumptions about community

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus’ ways are not what we expect.

(magnet) This must shape our understanding of community.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Flawed assumptions can get you into trouble. Think about those height markers on the underside of bridges. Why are they there? Someone’s flawed assumptions. The NFL playoffs have started. You’ll hear player bios, stories of athletes now regarded as MVP candidates who had spent years being bounced from team to team. Why? Someone’s flawed assumptions. You go too long driving your car and ignoring the flashing lights on the dashboard, all to great harm for your engine. Why? Your own flawed assumptions. Again, they can get us into real trouble.

We do this in so many ways, including in our relationship with God. Case in point. Though He tells us of our need for fellowship with one another, we are slow to listen. Why? Flawed assumptions. That’s worth thinking about, especially as we restart community groups.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 9:35-10:4](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

With certain individuals, you should expect the unexpected. Take Jesus, for example. As we survey the Old and New Testaments, how is He described? Here is a sampling ([READ](#)):

The Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Holy One, Lamb of God, Prince of Life, Lord God Almighty, Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Root of David, Word of Life, Author and Finisher of Our Faith, Advocate, the Way, Dayspring, Lord of All, I am, Son of God, Shepherd and Bishop of Souls, Messiah, the Truth, Savior, Chief Cornerstone, King of Kings, Righteous Judge, Light of the World, Head of the Church, Morning Star, Sun of Righteousness, Chief Shepherd, Resurrection and Life, Horn of Salvation, Governor, the Alpha and Omega.

I could go on with other such titles. And I could easily press further, not just with His names but with His deeds. That is, not just who He is but what He has done, is doing, and has yet to do.

Here’s the idea. Given all of that, it would be absurd to think we could pin Him down or reign Him in. As is said in Narnia, He is good but He is not safe. He is our King not our advisor.

What does this have to do with our text? Our text shows us that Jesus’ ways are not what we expect. And that should shape our understanding of a host of things - including community. Jesus’ ways are not what we expect. And that should shape our understanding of community.

How do we see this? In at least three ways. First, the distress Jesus feels. Second, the delegation Jesus makes. And, third, the diversity Jesus creates. These are all quite unexpected.

I. THE DISTRESS JESUS FEELS

First, the distress Jesus feels. Consider what we read here ([READ Matthew 9:36](#)).

A) A Pressing Need

Matthew would have us to see that Jesus sees a pressing need, something weighty.

1. His assessment of the flock

Jesus makes an assessment of the flock. They are harassed, flesh torn apart. They are helpless, thrown upon the ground. They are like sheep without a shepherd, abandoned and defenseless.

2. The response of the Shepherd

So Jesus sees a pressing need. That stirs something deep within the great Shepherd's heart.

B) An Urgent Response

That pressing need is part of the distress He feels. Which demands a response.

1. The metaphor

(**READ Matthew 9:37-38**) The metaphor is of a harvest crop, a plentiful yield to come.

2. Its meaning

Pointing to souls prepared, waiting and ready for this good news, the gospel of the kingdom.

Two images - a flock and a harvest. And, tying the two together, Jesus calls for prayer.

Application:

What does this have to do with community groups in a local church? Take a big step back. How did you come to believe in the One who spoke these words? How did you get here? It was the fulfillment of these words. It was through people, one after another, praying over centuries. That's how you got here. Put another way, Jesus had us in mind even at that moment. He was treasuring and prizing you and me right then - worth living, dying, and rising for.

Is that how you see His flock? His body, the church? Are you willing, as Jesus would have you, to love, serve, and bind yourself to her in real ways? In ways that reflect His desires?

His ways are not what we expect. That must shape our understanding of community.

II. THE DELEGATION JESUS MAKES

That takes us to the delegation Jesus makes - how He sends us (**READ Matthew 10:1**).

A) Authority Given

Clearly, authority is given by Jesus to these twelve disciples. What does that mean?

1. Statement of continuity

Partly, it's a statement of continuity. Choosing twelve reflects the twelve tribes of Israel. It's a symbol of the continuity of God's plan of salvation, a plan progressively unfolding in stages.

2. Called to represent

But it's also a calling to represent. To be an apostle was to be "a sent one". It's tied to the Old Testament concept of legally representing another, to speak on behalf of the one who sent you.

B) Honor Bestowed

So, with the twelve, we see an authority given. And then honor bestowed as well.

1. The expansion of the work

A shift is taking place in Jesus' ministry, an expansion of the work. What we see with this delegation is Jesus' intention not only to continue His ministry but to expand it through them.

2. The necessity of more workers

And with the expansion of the work comes the necessity of more workers. This is quite startling. Paul speaks to it ([READ 1 Corinthians 3:9a; 1 Thessalonians 3:2a](#)). That is honor bestowed.

This delegation tells us something about a Jesus shaped community and what He desires.

Application:

“How so?” you ask. And what does all this have to do with the church today? Consider that this is a delegation not upon one or a few but to all. No, we do not have apostles today in the sense of the original twelve. But each of us, as followers of Jesus, has still been granted a form of authority and honor. We are all sent in Jesus’ name as ambassadors of His kingdom.

How do you see your fellow ambassadors? Will you dismiss one whom Jesus has given such authority and honor? Will you assume you have no need of your fellow ambassadors?

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III. THE DIVERSITY JESUS CREATES

But there is one more thing. Not only the distress Jesus feels and the delegation He makes but also the diversity He creates. That is, who He sends ([READ Matthew 10:2-4](#)).

A) Different Backgrounds

There’s a lot to say here. Let’s start with just the different backgrounds reflected.

1. The stories

The stories - Peter is always listed first while Judas is always listed last. We know quite a bit about a few of these on the list. But with the others, we really hardly know anything at all.

2. The status

Such are the stories. Then the status. We have two sets of brothers in the group. And then the various professions. Some had a white collar background. Others were more blue collar.

B) Different Perspectives

Those different backgrounds then lead us into the different perspectives. This is so vital.

1. Poles apart

Especially with Matthew and the Simon listed towards the end. Matthew was a tax collector - for the government, working in service of Rome. Simon was against the government, working to overthrow it. He was a Zealot - a political activist, a revolutionary, possibly an insurrectionist.

2. Brought together

Do you see how different these two men were? And yet, they had been brought together in the service of Jesus. In fact, it is really only the power of Jesus that could break down such barriers and bring such men together. Think back to what we heard from Ephesians 2. This is so vital.

Who does Jesus bring together? Folks from all over. Consider this diversity He creates.

Illustration:

The 2024 election cycle will be ugly. Are we ready? Consider this story ([READ](#)):

During the 1992 presidential election a friend of mine told me about an awkward moment in his Bible study. One of the group members expressed excitement because that Sunday, she had seen a bumper sticker promoting the “other party” in the

church's parking lot. She was excited because, to her, this was an indication that non-Christians had come to visit. Imagine the awkwardness when another member of the group chimed in, "Um...that's my bumper sticker that you saw."

That could easily happen here. It never should. I hope it doesn't. But it certainly could.

Application:

We make such wild assumptions about how a person votes and the state of their soul. But look at who Jesus called, this group He spent a night praying over before He summoned them. Who do we see around the campfire each night? Matthew and Simon, the tax collector and the insurrectionist. Think of what a testimony that was at that time to folks in the region. Politics has a place. But putting Jesus first puts this and everything in its place. It's put in perspective.

Such diversity is a testimony. But it is also how we come to know God. C. S. Lewis wrote of this in *The Four Loves*. The context is a band of friends. One had just died (**READ**):

Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald....In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to Heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying "Holy, Holy, Holy" to one another (Isaiah VI, 3) The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall all have.

What is Lewis saying? We can't know each other by ourselves. Each of us brings something distinct out in the other so that it takes the group to really know someone. How much more with God? It takes a community just to get a glimpse of Him. We are so much poorer in isolation.

Jesus' ways are not our own. That must shape our understanding of community.

CONCLUSION:

According to recent studies, we are living in the largest and fastest religious shift in U.S. history. This shift is larger than the number of conversions during the First and Second Great Awakenings and the totality of all the Billy Graham Crusades combined. Some 40 million adult Americans who used to go to church at least once a month now attend less than once per year.

It's the great dechurching, a seismic shift. What's behind it? Partly church malpractice - abuse of all kinds, racism, misogyny, political syncretism, and clergy scandals. But such awful things are not actually the driving factor. The surveys and stats show it is far more mundane. Folks just tend to drift. It's rarely one thing. It often comes by incremental decisions, subtle compromises. "We're just sitting out for a season. We'll be back." But they don't come back.

I was reading an article in *Christianity Today* this past week by Mia Staub. She writes of her own struggle to connect with fellow believers, the damaging lies of self-sufficiency, the pain of loneliness, her need and resolve to press through it, and then the eventual joy of discovering each Sunday that she was surrounded by fewer strangers than the week before. That was God's gift. Amidst the pull towards dechurching, she discovered the rich restorative beauty of Christian community - the very thing I pray we will discover as we relaunch our community groups.

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