

August 18, 2017

## “The Call to Community: The Pattern of Jesus”

FCF: Loss of community

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

### TOPIC INTRODUCTION:

A sobering quote from Charles Reich’s *The Greening of America* ([READ quote](#))::

Modern living has obliterated place, locality and neighborhood, and given us the anonymous separateness of our existence. The family, the most basic social system, has been ruthlessly stripped to its functional essentials. Friendship has been coated over with a layer of impenetrable artificiality as men strive to live roles designed for them. Protocol, competition, hostility, and fear have replaced the warmth of the circle of affection which might sustain man against a hostile environment...America (has become) one vast, terrifying anti-community.

I remember reading of a heat wave in Chicago a few years ago. Keep in mind that, in days long before, people opened their windows, their doors, spent the evening on their porches, some even going down to the beach to get some relief. Not anymore. Now the windows are closed, the doors locked, and everyone is inside. So sadly, we then read of the elderly dying in their homes for lack of air conditioning, too scared in and by their community to open things up.

We’ve lost community. Not only that, it would seem we’ve lost any sense of our need for it. And with that, we’ve lost something fundamental to what it means to be a human being.

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Community is worth pursuing. I was reading recently in 2 Timothy. In the last chapter of this last letter from the apostle Paul, we find him imprisoned in Rome and awaiting execution. He felt cut off and abandoned, exiled from the churches he founded and from the people he knew and loved. And he 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. Those 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 worth pursuing.

One Sunday a year we stop to put emphasis on our Community Group ministry. The rationale is quite simple. The children here know. Ask them what they learned in their classes this morning – “Jesus.” That’s the rationale behind the emphasis – what we could call the pattern of Jesus. A pattern that makes clear we should be intentionally pursuing vibrant community.

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

### I. THE PERSON OF JESUS

First, the person of Jesus. It shouldn’t shock you to hear me say that Jesus in His very person is unique – the only being there ever was or ever will be who is 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 to God. Don't miss this. 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 that has "always been".

### 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. Each and every single one of us. This means that a human person thriving 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 us towards the shared life of community. And so too does His humanity. Yes, Jesus is fully divine, fully God. But He is also fully human, fully man.

### 1. His struggle and need

When we think of His struggles and needs during His earthly ministry, we usually imagine 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, that terrible time in the Garden of Gethsemane ([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 us to hear.

### 2. Our struggle and need

Think with me now. If Jesus – the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace – if Jesus in His sinless humanity needed such relationships, companionship, and friendship in His life, how much more do we? And, pushing further, if we are being remade into the likeness of Jesus, what then does that mean for our engagement in communal life?

Such is the person of Jesus. And it plainly shows our need for community.

### *Illustration:*

In describing the life of the church, 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 develops this idea, Paul makes two 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 profound image.

### *Application:*

But honestly, to get what Paul is saying here and then run with it in any real way requires a paradigm shift. Some of that is rooted in our culture as it encourages a spirit of individualism in ways quite foreign to other parts of the world. But some of it is also rooted in our hearts. We

are so proud, so bent in towards ourselves with a spirit of self-sufficiency. So 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,”* that is a paradigm shift. And a call to prayer.

This is worth pursuing. But we need eyes to see what God has in mind to 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. Let’s look at John 17 and “the High Priestly Prayer” the night before His death.

### A) The Requests

There are three parts to this prayer - Jesus’ prayer for Himself, then for His disciples, and then for us. We’re honing in on the third part (**READ John 17:20-26**). What do we see here?

#### 1. The realization of unity

The realization of unity among Jesus’ followers. Not in broad theoretical 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 and grounded 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. Why? For what purpose? Two things.

#### 1. That the Father may be glorified

First, that the Father may be glorified. That’s the refrain of this prayer, much as with the Lord’s Prayer. “Hallowed be Your name” – “May the Father be honored and loved, trusted and obeyed, revered and served, as He should be, as He is worthy.” Jesus wants His Father to be glorified.

#### 2. That the world may know

But, not only that, Jesus also wants the world to see and to know something. A living united testimony of a community, a shared life - something visible to the world that the world may then know the Father has sent the Son – that hope might be found in the reality of the gospel.

Such is the prayer of Jesus. And it shows us our call to community and its importance.

### Illustration:

You may have heard there’s a solar eclipse tomorrow. Related to that, I want to tell you about Apollo 8, the first manned spacecraft to leave Earth orbit, to reach the Moon, and to return home. It was December 1968. This is how the astronauts described the Moon (**READ quote**):

Essentially gray, no color...like plaster of Paris or a sort of grayish beach sand...It looks like a vast, lonely, forbidding place, an expanse of nothing...clouds of pumice stone...The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring, and it makes you realize just what you have back there on earth.

There is a beauty and barrenness to the Moon. Not like the Earth with its many colors on one sphere. The Moon is uniformity. But the Earth is unity. And those two things are very different.

### Application:

Jesus is praying not for uniformity but unity - a living vibrant community filled with what we might describe as all sorts of terrain and temperatures, soil types and water depths, bound together in one place, in one orbit. That's what He longs for, partly what He lived and died for.

Why is this important? Let me take a moment to say something about the chaos in the news as of late. Uniformity is all we can muster up outside of the gospel. "You have to look like this, act like this, think like this. And not like that. Then we'll accept you. Then we'll include you and not reject you. Or beat you and kill you." That's not unity. That's a twisted caricature, a cheap knockoff of the real thing. That's what leads to the chaos in Charlottesville - blind hatred and hateful responses to hatred. It's insecurity cringing before diversity and never tasting of real unity. And we were made for so much more. Which is just what the gospel brings.

That's what makes this worth intentionally pursuing. We were made for so much more. And the world is crying out for so much more. Which means at least a couple of things. We have to be willing to resist the stubborn pull towards isolation and superficial relationships - past Christianity Lite. We have to be willing to do that and then, as we do so, we can also be assured that even our feeblest efforts will meet with some success. Why? Because of who is praying.

This is the clear pattern of Jesus. And so we should be intentionally pursuing community.

## **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. In the wake of all that, the rest of us in that apartment decided to carve out a time once a week for Bible study and prayer – just us. The bonding that took place in those months, the openness and vulnerability that developed, the transformation of that place of pain into a shelter of encouragement – it was all Jesus. And I grew. We all did. But then the school year ended and we headed our separate ways for the summer. And I remember driving in that old Mustang, leaving Blacksburg and heading back to Richmond with this sense of mourning. Why? What had happened? I had tasted of the beauty of what I was made for and had never really known before – community.

Now what I experienced and had come to know I needed is true for us all. It is a basic part of what it means to be human. And the answer is still "Jesus" – the One in whose image His followers are being remade, the One who has made us into and placed us within a Body such that we are truly and deeply interdependent on one another, and the One who has prayed and is still praying that we might be one, coming to realize and marvel in what it really means for Him not only to have made peace between us and God but also peace between us and each other.

The Community Groups model is not the only way to pursue this. But it is a tested and helpful one. I hope your appetite is whetted. I pray your imagination and longings are stirred. For this is well worth our pursuing. And we can know we have God's blessing as we do.

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