

6. A healthy church gathers together in loving community.

1. Intro: Over the last few weeks, we have been exploring what the Bible says about the Church - the body of Christ. Specifically, we have looked at the idea that the Church is the people of God, filled with the presence of God, in order to accomplish the purposes of God. We've investigated what a healthy church looks like locally, that it gathers together to hear and embrace the truth of God's Word, that it is marked by generosity, and that it publically identifies with Jesus Christ, in part through communion and baptism.
 - a. Today we want to chew on the communal aspect of the church a little bit more. We talked last week about how different our understanding in the West is of community and how hard it is for us to grasp. Baptism signifies a passing not just from life to death, but from one community to another. The reality is that even if we understand these things in our minds, it is quite difficult to grasp the concept in our lives.
 - b. As an example of this, consider Paul's letters. I would suggest that the vast majority of the time, when you are reading 1 Thessalonians, for example, and Paul says to pray without ceasing, you think about how you need to keep a mindset of prayer during the day. This is because you are of the western persuasion. Did you ever stop to think that in the original language, many of those commands were in the second personal plural (you's guys). In other words, Paul is saying, "Never stop praying together!" A marked difference from the way we interpret things in our individualistic worldview.
 - c. Our friend, Kevin, who works in SE Asia, explained something of the importance of community in his muslim neighborhood. If his neighbor were to die, it would not be a family affair, but a community affair. One person would get the body, another person would clean the body, another would dig the grave, and so forth. That type of community is beyond our cultural understanding. It is challenging for us to view our own family members in that capacity let alone the people who live across the street or down the road. Still, the Bible infers, expects, even assumes that type of communal worldview.
 - d. In the last ten years, I have read too many books on how to form community. The creation of intimate relationships is something every church is desperate to do. Rick Warren stated in the Purpose Driven Church that people will start going to a church because of the preaching, the youth ministry, or something of the like, but most people will stay because of the community. Community, retention, shutting the backdoor (as they call it in the church business world) is what everyone seems to be trying to do. In a Christian world that is shrinking in the USA every single year. In a country where churches are closing their doors week after week never to reopen, community is the unicorn. People seem to think that it is what will give them the longevity they desire.

- e. Churches and church leaders try to figure out how to create community. Perhaps it is a program, a system, a structure, or a leader. Perhaps it is a curriculum that needs to be taught. Perhaps it is a meal that needs to be had. Maybe it is a book that must be read.
 - f. As I have put down the pop culture Christian books, however, picked up my Bible, and thought, I have come to a realization. Community, as we pursue it, is a misunderstanding.
2. *[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 ESV)*
- a. Look at the unique claims about the people of God, his body, the church
 - i. We are exiles in our own society → a wandering people (wilderness)
 - ii. We are owned by God → purchased w/ his blood (passover)
 - iii. We are finally a people of our own → crossed through the waters...
 - iv. We are recipients of great mercy → chosen not b/c of worth
 - v. Why? To proclaim his excellencies → the Gospel
 - b. What you see in this passage are a lot of identity statements → WHO YOU ARE
 - c. What you don't see are a lot of suggestions → e.g. "Jesus wants you to act like a priest"
 - d. Community is an identity, just like family is an identity or team is an identity
 - i. It is part of who you are, not something you pursue
 - ii. Yes, you can have good community or bad community, but community itself is an identity.
3. Speaking of bad community, Jesus' community was a mess
- a. Think about Jesus community...
 - i. Fishermen, tax collectors, a zealot, a thief
 - ii. Fought about who was going to be the greatest
 - iii. Made their moms argue on their behalf
 - iv. Think they know everything
 - v. Talk about the wrong people for the job!
 - b. These were the men that Jesus chose
 - i. We don't see the perfect team
 - ii. We don't see trust exercises or team-building
 - iii. Community for Christ wasn't about picking the right people or having the right set-up (our default...)
 - c. Community was an identity - it was something they were → Jesus' followers, his disciples, his 12.
 - i. What bound them together wasn't their ability, their structure or anything else → it was their Christ

- ii. Bonhoeffer - It is not the experience of Christian community that is primary, but solid and certain faith in the God who calls Christian community into existence for God's purposes.
 - iii. The Christian community is bound together by faith, not by human design.
 - iv. All human design would be somewhat self-serving and based upon "me"
 - d. Jesus community was a mess, but in the mess he loved them perfectly
4. Jesus' command was to love one another
- a. Leading up to his death, Jesus prepares himself to sit down and eat w/ his friends
 - b. Now, in this time in history, feet were gross...
 - c. After washing their feet, Jesus said this: *[34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* (John 13:34-35 ESV)
 - d. Overview of the "one another" commands in the New Testament
 - i. One word in the greek, used 100 times in 94 NT verses
 - ii. 47 of those verses give specific instructions to followers of Jesus related to community in some form. Here is how the commands break down:
 - iii. UNITY - 1/3 of the commands deal with followers of Christ getting along with one another
 - 1. Be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50)
 - a. Christian community is not an ideal which we must work to realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate as we model the gospel (and thereby live at peace)
 - b. It is a spiritual reality (created by the Holy Spirit) not a human reality of our own efforts
 - 2. Don't grumble among one another (John 6:43)
 - 3. Be of the same mind (Romans 12:6, 15:5)
 - a. In Christ, Christians belong to one another. This is a divine reality and not dependent upon experience. We are bound to one another because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, not because of shared interests or like-mindedness or common experiences
 - 4. Accept one another (Romans 15:7) → think: family
 - 5. Don't devour one another (Galatians 5:15)
 - 6. Don't envy one another (Gal 5:26)
 - iv. LOVE - 1/3 of the commands instruct followers of Christ to love one another
 - 1. Love one another (John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Rom 13:8; 1 Th 3:12)
 - 2. Through love, serve one another (Gal 5:13)
 - 3. Tolerate one another in love (Eph 4:2)
 - a. Our periodic disillusionment with the Christian fellowship is actually an important crisis. It is a beginning point for the

fellowship to become what it is by God's gift as we practice the gospel

4. Greet one another w/ a kiss of love (1 Peter 5:14)
 5. Be devoted to one another in love (Rom 12:10)
 - v. HUMILITY - 15% stress an attitude of humility, service, and deference
 1. Wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
 2. Give preference to one another in honor (Rom 12:10)
 3. Regard one another as more important than yourselves (Phil 2:3)
 - vi. The rest could really fall under one of these categories...
 1. Bear one another's burdens
 2. Don't lie to one another
 3. Encourage one another to good deeds
5. To love is to give very being for another person
- a. *[1] For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. [2] But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. [3] For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, [4] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. [5] For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. [6] Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. [7] **But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. [8] So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.***
- [9] For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. [10] You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. [11] **For you know how, like a father with his children, [12] we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.** (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 ESV)*
- i. This passage summarizes our calling to one another
 - ii. Vv. 7-8:
 1. Share our own selves (gk: souls, essence)
 - a. the vital force which animates the body; the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions;
 2. Nursing mother is a great description →
 - a. Tender, affectionate, desirous of you, giving your very essence

- b. Ex: Brand new baby in our house. Gina is tender... affectionate... desirous... gives her very essence...
 - c. In a lot of ways, that's what having kids is - little vampires
 - d. Willfully give them more than they deserve more frequently than the deserve at great cost to yourself
 - 3. Paul says that they loved the Thessalonians like that
 - a. Desiring their maturity, loving them, serving them, giving to them, at great cost to themselves
 - 4. This isn't just because Paul helped start these churches... This is the call of all people being made into Christ's likeness b/c this is how Christ loves
 - iii. Vv. 11-12
 - 1. Like a father w/ his own children... Exhorting... Encouraging... Charging... To walk with God!
 - iv. Loving one another is to give your very essence, your very soul, to another person...
 - 1. Forgiving the community rather than fleeing from it
 - 2. Spurring the community on to good deeds rather than complaining that they don't do the stuff Christians are supposed to do
 - 3. Giving selflessly when someone in the community has a need
 - 4. Being spent for the maturing process of one another
 - a. Do you feel like your leaders are spent for your sake? I hope so
 - b. We should be spent for one another!
 - 5. Giving, loving, sharing, forgiving, and on and on
- 6. We don't need to find the perfect community, we need to commit ourselves to our broken community.**
- a. THIS IS IT: Community isn't something we pursue - it is what we are.
 - b. What makes it special isn't when we figure out how to "do it" or structure it
 - c. What makes it special is when we are obedient within our community
 - d. Community is the crucible that makes you like Christ.
 - i. It makes the gospel HUGE
 - ii. Affinity doesn't make God big, grace does.
 - e. Community is the place where we live out the gospel.
 - f. In community, you get a chance to be Jesus to another person
 - i. To be loving like him... To be a servant like him... To give like him... To proclaim like him... To challenge and exhort like him... To be wounded like him... (and forgive) To suffer like him... (so that others can grow) To die like him... that others may live
 - g. A healthy church gathers together in community (complete w/ all the drama) and then loves one another in the mess
 - h. At Revolve: Discipleship Groups (don't have community w/ your DG? Don't complain, set the pace!) Friendships... (come to potluck). Serve Staff...