

Kingdom Living: Community

Luke 10: 1-12

We begin a new season today, the season of Lent, a time of introspection and growth. This year, for Lent, our theme will be Kingdom Living and over the next several weeks, we will be taking a look at how our understanding of the Kingdom of God shapes our everyday living as people of faith. We will be taking a look at how the Kingdom of God calls us to transform our world in hopes of creating a place here on earth where all are welcomed as children of God. We will be taking a look at how Kingdom Living challenges us to become the people that God created us to be.

Today, we begin our series by taking a look at the word, “Community” and how Kingdom Living calls us all to be in real authentic community with one another. As I sat down to write this sermon, I kept coming up with a mind block that had to do with just what exactly do I mean when I say community? How are we to define community, a word that has become so generic that really it can mean anything? What do we mean when we say community? For example, when we think of community, we may think of our church. We may think of our actual Midway community. We may think of the places where we work. We may think of

various other organizations that we are involved in or connected to in our daily lives. We may even think of our global community.

What do we mean when we say community? How would we describe community for us as people of faith? Over the years when the church has talked about its community, it has used the word “family” to define and give understanding and meaning to the group gathered there for Sunday morning worship. But even this image is incomplete. It doesn’t truly capture the ever-changing realities of our world. Most people when they think of the word “family”, they think of family to describe, two parents and 2.5 children, all healthy, clean, immaculate and perfect. But our world is a changing and this ideal image no longer captures the true nature of family in our day and time.

It leaves a lot of people out. It leaves out single parents, struggling to raise their children while working full-time. It leaves out people who are not part of a “traditional” marriage: either through same-sex marriages or simply because they have decided that marriage is just not for them. This image of the perfect family leaves out the grandparents who after raising their own children are discovering they are now raising their grandchildren. This image of family, used by the church for many years, leaves a lot of people out, exactly what the Kingdom of God calls us not to do.

So what do we mean when we say community? I think in reality, regardless of what images or words we use to describe community, at the heart of our conversation, what we are really talking about is love, a love that empowers us, a love that supports us, a love that challenges us, a love that makes us realize that we are responsible to and for one another. I think when we talk about community, especially for the community of faith, we are really talking about love, a love that costs, a love that demands, a love that gives. We are talking about the same love that we experienced the first time we opened our hearts to God, and we are talking about the same love that we are called to share as part of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

When we talk about community, in reality we are talking about creating opportunities where the image of God is recognized in all and we live in true relationship with one another, no walls, no boundaries, no separation. Just our true authentic selves, allowing each other to be who we really are, no pretenses, no perfect images. Just like Jesus wanted his disciples to do when he set them out in pairs of two, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God had come near.

It has always amazed me that Jesus would send his disciples out with nothing but the clothes on their backs until I realized that he intentionally wanted them to create real opportunities for community with the people that they would meet. Without their stuff, the disciples were empty-handed and had to rely on the

kindness of strangers. They had to trust that someone would take care of them, that someone would welcome them into their homes. The disciples had to rely on someone else's hospitality, on someone else's kindness, that someone would share their love them.

He told them to leave their belongs and carry nothing with them because he wanted them to become vulnerable, so that they would become open to where the Kingdom of God was leading them along their journey, all of which is an essential part of creating community. Jesus wanted the disciples to really experience how they were connected with others and that is hard to do when stuff is cluttering up life, a wonderful reminder for us today, especially when we live in a world that is so focused on individual needs that this idea of being connected, this idea of being responsible to and for one another, this idea of living in true community with one another seems out of place.

Because everything about our world is about seeing to our own wants and needs. We are told constantly that we will be unhappy if we do not have the latest item. So we run to the store to buy the latest hot technology, the latest fad, not caring that a country is being torn apart by war and greed, torn apart over a precious metal mined to supply our every growing need to have the latest and greatest item.

It matters not that we can go to the store and buy inexpensive clothing, clothing that we have been told that we need to feel better about ourselves when our closets are full of clothes we don't wear anyway, and not care that this new blouse or shoe was made in a sweatshop by a young child working for less than pennies a day.

It matters not that we live in a society that has an overabundance of food, that our grocery store shelves are stocked with thousands of items because we can't do without while countries are suffering from severe poverty and hunger.

All because our world tells us that it is about our own needs, about our own wants and that is all that is important. As long as I have everything I need and want, what does it matter that people are suffering or dying to meet those needs? We live in a world that tells me that I am the only one that matters.

That is the world's way, not the Kingdom of God's way. That's way Jesus sends his disciples out, vulnerable and exposed. They would have to rely on others. They would have to build relationships with people who may be different from them to survive. The disciples would have to experience the giving love that can only be found in true community.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He knew that once the disciples found a place to stay and food to eat, that it would become easy to distort the relationships in the community by only receiving, by making sure only their needs were met, by

making sure that only their concerns were heard. Jesus knew that once the basic needs of life were met, that it would be easy to slip back into the pattern of it's all about me.

So he reminds the disciples of their true purpose. He reminds the disciples that true community based on love receives as well as gives. Jesus wants them to understand that being in community with one another, that being responsible to and for another costs and demands something of ourselves.

Jesus tells his disciples that while they are experiencing the hospitality of others, they are called to engage the people around them as well, to listen to their stories, to hear their concerns, to celebrate their gifts, to heal the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God had come near. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that true community is a give and take relationship. It costs us something each and every day and it demands something of ourselves. It demands our time. It demands our gifts. It demands that I actually pay attention when you talk and not just try to press my own agenda. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that true community calls us to see each other with the eyes of God, eyes that recognize that each one is a Beloved child of God, made in the image of God and without them, the Body of Christ is incomplete, weakened, and lacking.

Jesus wants the disciples to understand and for us today to understand that true community gives us a vision, a vision that is greater than we could ever

imagine, a vision that connects us and sustains us, a vision that compels us to respond to this broken and hurting world with love, grace and hope, a vision that reminds us that the Kingdom of God is near.

The good news is that we are called to live in community with one another, to live in relationship with people who think like us and act like us as much as with the people who don't. We are called to realize that we are responsible to and for each other. No one said that it would be easy. We have all had our moments where we wished that we could just go to some desert island and be by ourselves, no one making demands of us, no one asking things of us, no one there but us. Sounds really good until we realize that it is just us, a pretty lonely place to be.

And certainly not the way God created us to be. God created us to be in community with one another and Jesus showed us just exactly how to do that. He told us that he came to serve not be served, that he came to give not receive, that he came to reconcile and heal this broken world. He showed us how to be in true community with one another, how to live out the Kingdom of God in our lives every time he welcomed someone and embraced them as his own.

Sure the desert island looks good now and again, but in the words of wise church father, "Who does the hermit serve? Who does the hermit tell about the Kingdom of God? With whom does the hermit share God's love?"

We are not created to be alone. We are created to be in true community with one another, supporting one another, challenging one another, loving one another, and experiencing the Kingdom of God with one another. We must remember that the Kingdom of God does not exclude and as people of God's Kingdom, who live out the principles of God's Kingdom in our everyday lives, neither should we.

We are called to be in community with one another just like Jesus showed us how to be during his time here on earth.

May we always strive for Kingdom Living, centering our lives on God and serving one another through community. Amen.