

Intentional Community, September 1st, 2019.  
1 Corinthians 12:12-27 & Matthew 26:36-45.

It is amazing how community can be formed. The way community is formed when a government - the UK - makes a decision to limit the amount of debate time over country matters, and thousands, across the UK meet to protest - community around a purpose and theme... community is formed when people go to watch their football team, songs are sung - some friendly, some perhaps not! - the colours, the shirts, the focus, the desire to see the team win, the shared defeats ; community is formed, when, as I remember, Christians from across the globe would gather for a missionary conference and would praise in different tongues, from different lands and nations, you could not communicate with each other easily, but you felt part of a community gathered in the Lord's name.

Is that a good description of a church community, of what happens when we come here? Is that what unites us? A common vision? A desire? The rituals / songs? Or is it more?



Paul writes to the Corinthians. Now, they were an eclectic group. Jews and non Jews. Slaves, free, similar to the groups Peter described last week. It was not a church which agreed on everything. A church community that had different views on its church leaders. It had people with a range of different spiritual gifts - some supernatural, some more natural. There were disagreements going on, and many problems. And in this Paul declares: 'For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body and we were all given the one Spirit to drink'. Again, at the end, 'Now you are the Body of Christ and each of you is part of it.' There is diversity, yet he declares in all this diversity, and disagreement, there is unity. You are the Body of Christ - not that you will be - or you were - You are. He says that to a congregation. So All Saints. 'You are the Body of Christ, baptised by one Spirit as to form one body, and you were all given one Spirit to drink. '

The Bible is teaching us. Christian community - this can be All Saints on a Sunday, it can be a small group during the week - is

about community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. We belong to each other through and in Jesus. We are the Body of Christ. And each of us, are a brother or sister to one another through Jesus. I am firstly a brother to you through what Jesus Christ has done for me and to me; others - you here and across this world - become brothers and sisters to me through what Jesus has done for you and them and to you and them. So I meet a Christian in a church such as All Saints. They are earnestly and devoutly seeking community - yet my foundation as to how I relate to them, is not whether I like them, they look like me, come from the same country, have the same amazing accent - even though those things are important to us, aren't they? No my foundation, my underlying value. I look at this person first as someone who has been redeemed by Christ, someone absolved from sin, someone called to faith and eternal life, someone in whom the Spirit dwells. The basis of my relationship, the basis of relationships in a church community cannot depend solely upon the person's personality or life experience or similarity or even if they are a mature Christian or starting out on the adventure of following Jesus. The foundation for community is deeper. We build upon what Christ has done to both us. And so Paul says - look at what Christ has done for you - that is how you encounter and act towards each other - Romans 15:7 - "Accept one another as Christ has accepted you."

God has already laid the only foundation for our community - he has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we met them. We enter into our common life as a church community not as those who want this or that from a community but we enter first thankfully, these are the people we are knitted to, whom God has deemed to be our brothers and sisters in Christ for now and all eternity. It is good to look around you. You are stuck with each other for all time! We are

thankful for giving us other Christians who live by God's call, who live by God's forgiveness and who live by his power and his promise. We are thankful for the Lord's work that this person is a brother and sister, that he too has been redeemed. Christian community is not some ideal we seek to realise to create. Rather Christian community is a reality created by God in Christ, in which we may participate. The ground, the strength, the promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ.

So as we look around, as you wait to receive Holy Communion, as you have coffee, consider. Some of these you know well, some of them are godparents to your children, some you have known for years, and some are strangers, you don't know them at all. Yet.

All, everyone is a brother or sister in Christ. So a question.

***How do you act towards your blood siblings and how does that shape how you act towards your brothers and sisters here?***

This talk is one of five on community. Intentional community. God intentionally created a community of brothers and sisters through Christ. However, how intentional are we about forming community, with the ones with whom we are related?

Let's consider Gethsemane with Jesus.



Photo taken February 2019. Believed location of the Garden of Gethsemane.



Why does he go to pray there? He goes to a favourite place - Luke says it was his usual place, when in the city he went there to pray. Judas knew where to bring the temple guards. Jesus

goes to a garden. There were no gardens in the city of Jerusalem. Wealthy people had them on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Someone anonymous, gave Jesus access - not the first time someone anonymous helped Jesus - the anonymous who provided the upper room. Sometimes that is we are asked to do - 'what is in your hand, offer what you have to others' . Is that what community, life together is about - offer what you have?

Jesus goes to the garden again. He wants God's fellowship. He wants human fellowship. They are called to watch with him - it is present tense - so to be watching with him. Why does he invite them? Why does he form community - why does he share this time with them? Why not go away alone?

Two possibilities. Peter, James, John, have been privately with Jesus, when Jairus' daughter was raised, at the Transfiguration, and they talk privately to Jesus about the end times. Does he invite them because they need to learn further. Do they need - as apostles - to see vulnerability in leadership, to see how crisis is faced and wrestled with. He shares life together to help them as believers and as future leaders.

Do we invite people into our lives? Do we share with others not just the joys but the struggles and the testimonies of the past? There is a song writer, Michael Card - his songs include El Shaddai and Come to the Table - had a mentor William Lane, theologian. When Bill Lane was diagnosed with cancer, he chose not to be open only to those close to him, such as his family, but he said, he wanted Michael to share in this journey, "I want to show you how a Christian man dies." Sharing life together as a community is at times about letting people in, because, of how it may help them as Christians. I enjoy many parts of my calling. One area is how I like working with wedding couples, and I

always tend to share quite a lot about how Jolanda and I work out our marriage. Some of it is quite personal. Yet it is about letting people in, so they can learn from some of the bits of wisdom, practice etc I've and we've picked up. It doesn't matter how I look in the story. It is about helping the others to grow or to be prepared.

So, do we talk about our faith with others here? Is there past examples you can share in a home group, the lessons you learned and seen? Maybe you are going through a difficult time, could God invite you to let someone else into your journey, someone you normally wouldn't because, of how the Lord wants to use you to help them grow? A writer said: "Others ... become agents of grace in our growth toward wholeness in Christ, while we become agents of God's grace in their growth." (R. Mulholland).

Of course, you may say Jesus wasn't thinking that. He was thinking of human company. Because of the terrible event he was facing - being separated from the Father. A theologian once said: "At times of trouble you want people to be with you, we may not want them to do anything, or even talk with us. We only want them there." (W. Barclay). Jesus was opening his heart to his disciples and to God. Gethsemane means oil press - Jesus experiences being pressed at the place of the press. Intentional community. To not suffer alone. To share with others your vulnerability, your struggles with God over the issue. This is one reason for the shape of our home groups. Our home groups include a significant amount of time within the bible studies to share about life and also have a significant amount of time at the end to share and pray together about the things that are going on. To allow people to pray with you.

That is one role of the prayer ministry team, a safe place, to come and say - please pray with me, and they pray with you or listen as you pour out your heart to the Lord knowing it does not go any further.

Christian community is about not suffering alone.

However Jesus is disappointed. Totally loving to the end of Peter, James, John. But he asks them to keep watch. He prays a heartfelt prayer - which they hear - yet when he returns they are sleeping. He asks them couldn't you keep watch with me one hour? He goes and prays again, but again they have drifted off when he returns. He did not receive the support he wanted and needed. He wanted them to be with him. To pray with him, pray for him. That was all the one who have given so much to them, asked of them...

This community isn't perfect. No community is. Perhaps some of us have been disappointed, let down, maybe hurt by a Christian community. Maybe you feel let down or have been hurt by this community.

I think if we have been hurt by another community, it is a great challenge, how to relate to a new one. I remember a dear friend. Rachel. Rachel had been a missionary kid in Egypt and other countries. She would move to a new place. Make friends. Then had to move again. This was in the 1980s. So technological and keeping contact was all very different. She went through this time and time. She told me, she got to the point where she didn't open up any more, didn't try to make good friends, because she knew she'd have to leave and say goodbye and it would save more pain. I got to know Rachel at Uni. With everything she went through she made a choice to let folks in, in our Christian fellowship. When we have been hurt in another community. The choice do we try again is a huge question for us.

For those here, who have been hurt by All Saints or people here,. I am sorry if you have been hurt. It is hard to speak without generalising. I think the first step may be to acknowledge the pain, in a safe setting to others. To ask wisdom from God how to relate to those people who hurt you, to consider if the relationship can be restored to how it was, or if there needs to be different boundaries. And to ask God, to begin to bring his healing balm into those wounds that have been caused. There is much more that can be said and in such a case, perhaps a personal conversation is better.

So to conclude. God intentionally placed each of us into a community when we became a Christian - the global Body of Christ. This too - All Saints - you are the Body of Christ. Each here are our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is the foundation for our community, under our personal preferences and likes and clicks. Many of us have close sibling relationships. How does it change you to look at everyone here as you do to your close siblings?

How intentional will we be? Will we choose to share life with others in this community about how God is working or what we are journeying through?

Can we be vulnerable? If we have been hurt in the past by a Christian community what is our next step? If we have been hurt here by All Saints, or its people, what is the first step towards your healing...?

Over the coming weeks, we will consider other aspects or marks of a Christian community...

To finish a quotation to consider:

"Community: we trust one another

We support one another in pain.

We disagree in love.

We genuinely respect one another.

We are **for** each other in the long haul.

We need to be vulnerable.

We submit to God what He would have us do." (N. Vest & J  
Johnson)