

Our Happy Place (2) - Community Yesterday's Sermon Summary

KW's 2nd core value, the most lengthy one, reads as follows -

Community – “We are Family”:

We are a community following Jesus together, so that we may know, love and honor Him. Together we learn and grow, supporting and sustaining each other through life's joys and challenges.



We recognize our spiritual duty to take responsibility for every aspect of our church community, which includes our people, our facilities, church grounds, and of all God's gifts in our own lives, such as our time, talents, and resources.

We endeavor to be a “big tent” church where all are appreciated and all can grow. This includes building and protecting a diverse community in which we don't always agree but are committed to respecting and learning from one another. We find our unity in Christ, His teachings, and the gracious, open-minded principles of the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA), one of which is that “God alone is the Lord of the conscience.”

To gain a fresh perspective on building community, we tapped into one of the most recent timeless classics in church history about that subject - Life Together, written by German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (in 1939). We focused on four quotations, and below we include scripture reading that undergird each one that you read throughout the week:

1) “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ...Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ...I am a brother or sister to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me; the other person has become a brother or sister to me through what Jesus Christ did for them...Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us...The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede...”

Our summary of these first citations was - Without Christ at its center and as its source, church falls apart: it's risky, countercultural community is impossible without Him.

Scripture reading this week on Christian community being, and only able to be, "in Christ": [Gal 3.28 NRSVUE](#) and [Col. 3.9-11 NRSVUE](#)

2) "God's Word can only come from the outside. In himself or herself the Christian is destitute and dead...But God has put this Word into the mouth of others in order that it may be communicated to us...The Christ in his or her own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brothers and sisters."

Our summary of that quote was - In part, community is indispensable to every Christian because we hear God on our own worse than we imagine, but through others better than we imagine.

The scriptures behind this claim would include - [Prov 12.15 NRSVUE](#) and [Prov 12.18 NRSVUE](#) and [Rom 10.14-17 NRSVUE](#)

3) "When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brothers and sisters. When we received forgiveness instead of judgment, we too were made ready to forgive our brothers and sisters. What God did to us, we then owed to others. The more we received, the more we were able to give, and the more meager our brotherly love, the less were we living by God's mercy and love."

Our summation for this quote was - That which we are receiving from God is that which we give to others, and ultimately that which binds us together in God's new family called church.

The virtues that Bonhoeffer are very much in line with those that the apostle Paul says are mandatory to create Christian community and hold it together: [Col. 3.12-17 NRSVUE](#) and [Ephesians 4.25-5.2 NRSVUE](#) and [Rom 12.9-21 NRSVUE](#) and [Phil 1.27 - 2.11 NRSVUE](#)

4) "Those who love their dreams of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial...They enter into the community of Christians with their demands set up by their own rules, and judge one another and God accordingly...The serious Christian set down for that first time in Christian community is likely to bring with him or her a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and will attempt to have everyone realize it. But God in His grace speedily shatters such dreams...in order to lead us into genuine Christian fellowship."

Our summary of these citations was - Sometimes, the greatest danger to church is my definition of church: my experiences in and ideals about church fall short of what God wants church to be.

This mirrors the tension between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in the New Testament, as represented in Romans 14, which includes the apostle Paul's advice for how to rise above one particular group's vision for what church should be - [Romans 14 NRSVUE](#). See too Ephesians 2.11-22 which speaks of the need to rip down that which separates differing groups so that they might be one in Christ - [Eph 2.11-22 NRSVUE](#)

More to Explore

Here are some more ways to explore community building...and Bonhoeffer:

- From a leading Christian periodical for those 40 and under, three simple ways for churches to build better community: [Three Ways the Church Can Build Better Community](#)
- A short devotional on how God's Spirit unites us together in community: [Real Community - James Bryan Smith](#)
- An excellent piece from Forbes on building community: [How To Build Community And Why It Matters So Much](#)
- Used in one of our Sunday School classes, this 2.5 min. talks about how one crisis pregnancy center seeks to create community: [What Is Community](#)
- A short devotional on building Christian community not by way of the maxim, "Only the strong survive," but by practicing "the strong survive to help the weak": [The Strong Survive to Help the Weak](#)
- A 27 min. video overview of the life and death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (note - it's from a 7th Day Adventist group, so we're not necessarily recommending all their products/videos, just this one): [Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Story of Courage and Faith](#)