

Renewed Community
All Things New #13 | Ephesians 4:1-16
March 7, 2022

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Last five Sundays in this series, then onto Leviticus
- At the end, we'll do a teaching on "Renewed Church" | Change for health and growth

PRAYER

Introduction

- Murray Bowen's "togetherness" vs. "individuality" | we vs. me (*Friedmen*)
 - Tog. good: cooperation, safety, unity, care for others
 - Tog. bad: lack of critical thinking, reactivity, stampeding, mob mentality
 - Ind. good: objective thinking, variety of perspectives, strong individual
 - Ind. bad: self-righteous, rigid, cold and uncaring for others
- The Bible contains language of both individualism and collectivism
 - Ind. **Deut 24** ¹⁶ Fathers are not to be put to death for their children, and children are not to be put to death for their fathers; each person will be put to death for his own sin.
 - Tog. **Ex. 34** ⁷ ...bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.
 - **Daniel 9** praying and repenting for actions of ancestors
- Our culture has pressed hard on individualism, but gone through waves
 - Togetherness wave | depression to WW2
 - Individualism wave | post WW2 until mid-2000's
 - Currently in another togetherness wave, but in poles
 - "Black community" or "gay community"
 - Crass commercialism "Toyota family"
- Like the culture, American church has also gone through waves
 - Bonhoeffer "Life Together" in the 1930's
 - 1950's – Billy Graham-style evangelism "personal decision for Jesus"
 - Since 2000, popular use of the word "community"
- But with all of this noise around "community" how do we know what we're aiming at?

Big idea: Christian community is about Christ, not mere community

I. Christian community is difficult (no idealism)

Ephesians 4 ¹ Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Robert Creech Most of us who serve congregations have at one time or another abandoned any pure idealism about the nature of Christian communities. Clyde Fant, one of my seminary professors, observed, “In order to be disillusioned, you first have to be illusioned.” If our own experience in churches did not open our eyes to the reality that church members are merely people, with all that implies, reading the New Testament ought to do the job. The Gospel stories of Jesus’ disciples—their arguments, competition, and frequent misunderstandings of Jesus—indicate the material Christ chose as the foundation of this edifice, the Church (Eph. 2:19-20). The book of Acts shows us *churches*, the gathering of disciples in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, and other places. The stories deal with greedy disciples, grumbling factions, and prejudice and discrimination. Being God’s redeemed people does not imply being God’s perfect people. Paul would never have written most of his letters...if churches were not communities in which people sometimes behave like ordinary human beings. The letters to the seven churches in the Apocalypse offer the same evidence (Rev. 2-3). When people say they would like to be part of a true “New Testament church, I wonder, “Which one? Corinth? Galatia? Laodicea?” In many respects those ancient congregations differ little from the church down the street.

- Humility: “I’m a mess”
- Gentleness: “you’re a mess”
- Patience/bearing with one another: “this is going to take a while”
- Making every effort to keep unity/Spirit thru the bond of peace: “this is going to be hard”

Sin messes everything up, and even for those who are redeemed, remaining sin messes everything up. But this is no reason to give up, because we serve a Savior who conquered death.

II. Christian community is Christ in us

Ephesians 4 ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

- You get the idea that Paul thinks we can actually live in genuine community

⁷Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸For it says:

When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. ⁹But what does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

- Christ’s gift is himself, he gives more grace, forgiveness
- Quotes from Psalm 68: he descended down to us, lowly, poor, descended into the grave
 - But then, he rose from the dead, and ascended into the realm of heaven to rule
- Massive view of Jesus, no mere carpenter or rabbi – eternal Lord of all
 - Don’t settle for a lesser imitation!

Lesser Community

- Affinity | We like the same things
- Activity | We rally around the same causes
- Affection | We really like each other

**Each of these elements are totally fine, but they are a flimsy foundation for community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this...The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.

No idolatry: politics, activities, causes, or even community itself. It's because of and for Jesus.

III. Christian community is formative

Ephesians 4 ¹¹ And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.

- Leaders equip the saints (all of you) for the work of ministry.
- What is that work? Helping others mature as followers of Jesus: BUILD UP
 - Unity, knowledge, maturity, doctrinal soundness
- "Going into ministry" ≠ working for a church. You are in ministry.
- When you show up to group, help each other become more like Jesus
- This focus puts to death two things:
 - Consumerism: *community exists to serve my preferences*
 - Overreach: *this community can't exist without me*

IV. Christian community is a body

Ephesians 4 ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

- The idea of a group as a "body" is not unique to Christianity | body politic or corporation
- But the body of Christ is different: Jesus is the head | authority, source
 - You can't live without a head
- Beautiful balance between individualism and togetherness

Dr. Paul Brand The community that the New Testament calls the Body of Christ differs from every other human group: unlike a social or political body, joining it requires an identity transfer, analogous to an infusion of DNA. Jesus described the process to Nicodemus as being "born again" or "born from above," indicating that the spiritual life requires an identity change as drastic as a person's first entrance into the world...The process of joining Christ's body may at first seem like a renunciation. I forfeit autonomy. Ironically, however, renouncing my old value system—in which I had to compete with other people on the basis of power, wealth, and talent—and committing myself to the Head abruptly frees me. My sense of competition fades. No longer do I have to compete through life, looking for ways to prove myself. Instead, I have the singular goal of pleasing

God, of living for an audience of One. What's more, I can partner with other cells in the Body to accomplish God's work in the world.

Living in Community

1. Get involved in community
2. Make Christ the center
3. Have realistic expectations
4. Help others grow nearer to Christ