

The Cruciform Life: Cruciform Community

Jan. 14, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: 1 Peter 4:8-11

(Here is an exercise to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Read 1 Peter 4:8-11 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

Share one of your greatest experiences in community?

Text for Discussion: 1 Cor. 12:12-27

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

"The Beloved Community," as Martin Luther King called it, brings together people of all different races, classes, genders, ages and backgrounds because they have two things in common. First, everyone is in desperate need of God, even though we may not always recognize or admit it. Second, what binds us together is Christ, believing that He is the meaning of our lives and the world. We are one body, strengthened by the diversity of its parts, each gifted for the sake of building up the whole. This is God's vision for the church.

This beautiful picture collides with our experience of the church, though, and it's easy to become cynical or disillusioned. This isn't a new problem. Paul's letter to the Corinthians addresses a community suffering from the same disunity. The deeper problem was that the values of their surrounding culture had seeped into the bloodstream of their church – living and acting more like Corinthians than Christians. And Paul seeks to remind them (and us) what true spirituality looks like, which professes Jesus Christ is Lord. But it doesn't just confess Christ; it reflects Him, because spirituality is nothing without love. God's Spirit unites us to Christ and one another, granting each of us a variety of spiritual gifts meant for the common good.

Unfortunately, we've gotten so caught up in figuring out what these gifts are that we lose sight of the bigger picture and fall into the very things Paul warns against: division and arrogance. These diverse gifts were never for personal use or self-promotion. As part of this beloved community we can find contentment in our limitations, celebrate that we need each other, and experience joy in belonging. The Spirit's presence in our lives will be reflected in our love and desire to serve others with our gifts. Although our spirituality will be tested, Christ will enable us to be kind and patient with others. When the Spirit of Christ lives in our hearts, we will be willing to endure disappointment – choosing to be part of the solution – using our gifts to serve the common good.

True spirituality is also marked by the presence and celebration of diversity in community. The image of one body made up of many parts emphasizes this: to be a healthy body, we *need* diversity. Each of us is needed and significant to the whole. The very people we might be inclined to overlook just might have the most to teach us about what it means to know Christ. There are no invisible or less important people in Christ's beloved community.

The only way the world will ever come to accept the Gospel is if they witness a community striving to live it out. The quality of our ideas will never be enough to convince others; it will be the quality of our lives. So we must have a firm confidence that God is in control and can always be trusted. This will give us patience. Living in an intentional, loving community marked by habits which reflect Christ will give us integrity. For nothing harms our desire for others to know Christ than our hypocrisy.

How then do we deal with this hypocrisy and recover God's vision for the church? We should not be surprised by it or quit because of it. This will continue to be an issue in the church, just as it was 2000 years ago. Disappointment is the soil for true community to be cultivated. Let's expect more from ourselves and others who've already

committed to following Christ. Integrity matters. Let's be patient with others. Remembering God's patient love for us, we can be patient with each other. We fight against homogeneity and exclusion. Let's be a loving church where all people are welcomed and embraced, where no one is invisible or excluded. Let's be gracious to one another. God's love for us is full, complete, overflowing and undeserved. So let us be a community of grace, empathy and compassion.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can we be a loving community that values diversity and inclusivity?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- Have you worked on a team with many different parts who were working toward a common purpose? How did the team operate?
- As you read through the list of gifts, are there one or two that you believe are present in your life (also see Rom. 12:6-8)? How have you seen them in action?

Digging Deeper/Application...

- Look at vs. 7. How have you used your spiritual gifts for the common good? How can we as a community group, use our gifts for the common good?
- How have your gifts colored your expectations about what the church should be? How has your attitude contributed to unity or disunity?
- Has there been a time when you have been disappointed by Christian community? How did you deal with it?
- How should the diversity of gifting lead to unity within the church? Have you experienced great friendship with a fellow Christian who is quite different from you?
- Looking at vs. 21-26, how can we make every part of the body feel special?
- Who is "invisible" in the church today? How can we connect with and serve them?
- How can we be a community of integrity, who is patient with one another?
- How can we as a community, fight against homogeneity and exclusion?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that He has given each of us spiritual gifts that we can use for the common good.
- Pray for one another – that we would be a community that values diversity and inclusivity.
- Pray for each other – that we would be gracious and patient with one another even when community gets hard.

Experiment of the Week

Make plans to serve in a specific way in the church for one month. After a month, report back to your group on how your service impacted you and others around you.