

## **A DISCIPLE IS SAVED INTO COMMUNITY**

*ACTS 2:42-47*

Good morning everyone! My name is Ben, I'm one of the pastors here at Summit. So good to be with you here this morning church. I am so grateful for this body, and I know that I echo the other pastors and elders when I say how proud I am of you and what a privilege and an honor it is to lead you. Yesterday, here at the church, we hosted the memorial service for Judy Porter, and the effort that so many of you put into serving well was a demonstration of the grace and love of Jesus. And I think there were many who arrived yesterday not knowing Jesus, but left having heard him proclaimed and having seen him modeled through you, so I want to thank you.

Pastor Mike is in currently in Kenya. Be praying for them, I believe in just a matter of hours they will be starting their first pastors' conference. I put some itineraries for the trip out on the Connect Table, so be sure after the service to grab one of those and be praying for them over the next few weeks. Blog too.

Well, last week we started a new series looking at what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus. We are going to camp here for the next four weeks. And we're doing that because we want to be intentional about coming back regularly to the fundamentals of what it means to follow Jesus.

Last week Mike Stone set this great foundation for us of the identity of a disciple. And at the heart of what Mike said was that if you are going to be a follower of Jesus, somewhere along the way you need to actually be saved by Jesus. A true disciple is one who has been rescued from being an enemy, a rebel to Jesus' kingdom, and been made into a new creation.

And Jesus' method of rescue is the cross. Through the cross we are joined together with Jesus, united with him in this indescribable mystery that theologians call "union with Christ", where Jesus' death becomes our death, his life — our life, his glory — our glory. Where as Gal. 2:20 says, we die and he lives. And so the fundamental thing that can be said about a Christian, about a disciple, is that they are "in Christ." We who have believed in Jesus are "in Christ."

Now out of that identity flows everything else that we are going to talk about. Don't forget that - if you weren't here last week, go on the website and listen or watch that message because those truths are indispensable to everything else we are going to say over the next few weeks. That a disciple is saved into community, drawn into obedience, given a mission, and

glorifies God in all of life - all of those things are rooted in an identity as disciples in union with Jesus.

So having set that foundation, this morning we are going to turn our eyes to the reality that when Jesus rescues us, when Jesus calls us to follow him, he saves us into a new community. And that new community is God's primary mechanism for forming us as disciples. Authentic, deep, rich, gospel-formed and Christ-focused community is at the very center of a life that follows Jesus.

But you know, our tendency is not to think of the Christian life in communal terms, as a life following Jesus in deep fellowship with other disciples together. Our tendency is to think of living as a disciple, as primarily an independent, individualistic endeavor. Cause we're 'Murcan. Well, you're American, I'm Canadian.... but the truth is we suffer from the exact same sickness. We've overdosed on independence.

Recently my girls have gotten really into watching these old Disney cartoons. You see, in the 1950s Disney came out with this series of stories of American folk heroes, and their favorite to watch is Paul Bunyan. They love Paul Bunyan. Paul and his sidekick Babe the Blue Ox. Of course, you know Paul's story. Paul is this giant lumberjack, opening up the American west by single-handedly felling colossal tracks of forest. As the song goes:

*North America was a great big land  
With a great big job to be done  
A job that needed a great big man  
Paul Bunyan was the one*

But Paul is just one figure of the long list of American folk heroes we have. There's Johnny Applesed, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, the Lone Ranger. These legends are all stories that were birthed out of the formation of America.

These were great men in a great land, and what did these great men have in common? They were self-sufficient. Self-reliant. Sure they had their trusty sidekicks, Babe the Ox, Tonto, but they really didn't have a need for anyone else. They were independent. That idea, that understanding of independence has become the central, inerrant doctrine of what it means to be American.

Our country fought the war of independence after signing the declaration of independence, all of which we now celebrate on independence day while wearing emblazoned

across our chest the American bald eagle, the ultimate symbol of freedom and independence. If community was central to us we'd probably have gang of meerkats on our July 4th t-shirts instead of eagles. Do you think that in this cultural context we might have trouble getting the idea of community?

And for the Church, we've fully adopted this independent language into our own Christian lexicons. So we talk about "personal salvation," "a personal relationship with Jesus," "my personal faith," and doing my "personal devotions," all of which are phrases and even themes that the Bible never uses. Now I don't want to be too harsh, because there certainly is a significant aspect of the Christian life that is personal, but I think we've missed something, we've allowed something to get out of balance. We've forgotten about community.

We have been spoon fed freedom and independence since we were toddlers, but this American doctrine comes into direct conflict with Christian doctrine, especially when we start to talk about what it means to live as a disciple.

So this morning, what I want to do is hit the reset button on our understanding of community. And my prayer for us this morning is that we'd come away with a renewed vision for how God sees community. How the establishment of a new community of Jesus-followers, of those who have been saved by Jesus and sent out by Jesus, is the center of gravity for God's redemptive plan in our own lives, and in the world he's created. I want us to understand that the formation of a new community of disciples is at the very center of all that God is doing in history. Now I know that's a huge task in the next 30 minutes, but I hope to throw a lot at you this morning, and we'll see what God allows to stick. Alright?

So here's how we are going to do this. I want to start at 40,000 feet and then move downward from there. So we're going to begin by getting a wide-angle on how community fits into God's story, where is community in God's purposes from Genesis to Revelation. Then we're going to zoom in on Acts 2 and see that God is creating not just a new community, but a new kind of community. And lastly I want to look at how this new kind of community gets formed - what this new community is built on. So to make it easy on us we're going to call these three - community from the air, community on the ground, and community under the ground.

#### 1. So let's begin with community from the air.

I want to submit to you something. I've already in some ways alluded to it, but I want to submit to you this: that the primary purpose of God's salvation is the establishment of a new human community. OK? You need to think on this, because what I'm saying is probably more

outside your box than you first think, OK? So let me say it again. The primary purpose of salvation is the establishment, the formation, the creation of a new human community. A lot of you are like, "OK, well that is new. I thought the purpose of salvation was to forgive my sins so I could have a personal relationship with God and have eternal life?" And of course, that is a part of salvation, but it is not its ultimate purpose.

How do I know that? Well it's because the Bible begins and ends with two human communities of disciples loving, worshipping, and serving Jesus.

Think about the beginning of Genesis again. Genesis 1 and 2 are the pattern for the way things are supposed to be. God creates everything that is, and he says everything is good, but there is one thing that is not good. And what is it? It's that Adam is alone. Even though Adam in his sinless state has the greatest personal relationship God that anyone has ever known, there is something that is incomplete, something that is lacking, and its horizontal human community.

And so God creates Eve as Adam's helper, and as much as we look to this passage over and over as the foundation of human marriage, God is doing something even deeper here than establishing human marriage, he is establishing human community. And that human community is the foundational purpose of his creation. And it's a human community whose mutual love, and honor, and unity reflects and brings glory to the Creator who exists eternally in the perfect community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this human community together loves God and worships him and serves him.

They may only be two, but they show us God's original purpose for his creation: a human community of disciples given life by God, and sent by him into the world with a mission. And here's that mission, Gen. 2:28, "And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...' Be fruitful and multiply. Have babies, God is saying, but what he is actually saying is fill up my creation with the new human community that I've started with you. As you reproduce, multiply communities of God-worshipping, God-serving disciples.

But that isn't what happens right? Adam and Eve sin and reject God as their King, and so instead of reproducing communities of God-worshipping disciples, they reproduce idol-worshipping sinners.

But God isn't content to leave the human community he intended in shambles.

In Gen. 12 He comes to Abraham and he says to him, "I will make of you a great nation." Starting with Abraham God has intervened into humanity's sinful trajectory, and he's going to begin establishing again the God-glorifying human community he intended. And it's a community, like the one in Eden, that doesn't just exist for itself because God says to Abraham,

I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. The human community that God is forming doesn't just exist for itself, but for the world.

Then, a few hundred years later, God shows up at Mt. Sinai with Moses and reaffirms his promise of a God-worshipping, God-serving, community of disciples. Israel has been saved by God out of Egypt and then sent by God as a light to the nations — that their life together as a community, living under God's perfect law, would reflect the God who is King over them, to the people around them.

Do you see that God is working to re-establish what was lost in the Garden?

But all through the Old Testament there is always the promise of something greater. A God-worshipping human community that isn't limited by family ties, or by nationality or by ethnicity.

And so Jesus shows up on the scene, and he begins calling people to follow him, and Matthew 5 we see that Jesus, just like Moses did, goes up on a mountain, and Matthew records that his disciples came to him. And Jesus begins teaching them. And he tells them that they are a city on a hill. They are the light of the world. Both terms that echo God's intention for Israel as a community. That at the heart of following Jesus is becoming the human community that God has always intended. A Jesus-loving, Jesus-worshipping community of disciples, on a mission to shine as lights in a dark world.

Jesus, of course, goes to the cross, through his death paying the debt that we owe for our sin and rebellion. But after his resurrection he meets his disciples and he gives them this commission: He says to them, "Make disciples" Does that sound familiar? Be fruitful and multiply. Fill my creation with the new human community that I've started with you. And the rest of the NT records this multiplication, always emphasizing that these early believers weren't just multiplying converts, weren't just doing personal evangelism increasing the number of personal decisions for Jesus, but multiplying churches - establishing new communities of disciples.

But there is still a sense, and we see it especially in Paul's letters, that these earthly communities of disciples - these authentic, deep, rich, gospel-formed, Christ-focused communities... are only a foretaste and a sign of what's to come.

And when we turn to the end of God's story we find out what that is. Here we see the end that all of history has been working towards. Rev. 7:9-10.

And we see later in Revelation that the end of history which God is working toward is not individual disciples escaping this messed up world to be with Jesus in heaven out there

somewhere. No, it's that God's city, the heavenly Jerusalem, comes down. God comes to us. God comes down to dwell with his redeemed human community, a community finally consummated in perfect peace with God and with one other, living as God's people in the new heavens and new earth, under his perfect rule forever.

Do you see that Jesus' death and resurrection was about more than bringing you into a personal relationship with him? That that's simply a means to a much much greater end. All that God is doing in me, in you, in our church, and in the world, is centered around the formation of this new human community of Jesus-worshipping, Jesus-following, disciples from every tribe, and tongue and nation.

And so our little earthly community that gathers here at 84th and Vickery on Sundays and scatters throughout the week into Tacoma and Puyallup and Auburn and Lakewood. This community with all its imperfections and idiosyncrasies, in the midst of our ongoing sin problems and selfishness, in our weakness and our worry, has been saved by Jesus together to point forward to that great future community.

Our life together, as puny as it seems when we consider it in light of God's epic redemptive program, actually serves a gigantic God given purpose of being a foretaste of what's coming. So when others who don't know Jesus are in our midst whether it's a Sunday morning worship service, or a Wednesday night dinner with friends, they should taste something of the peace and joy and unity and grace that God is bringing in forming a new human community.

So do you see how central the formation of community is in God's redemptive plan? But what we see is that God is forming not just a new community, but a new *kind* of community. A community that looks different from every other brand of human community. And so let's take a look at the book of Acts and see what this ***community looks like on the ground.***

Acts 2:42-47, let's read it again. You remember where we're at in Acts. God has shown up in a big way, pouring out his Spirit in Jerusalem on Pentecost, and Luke has just summarized this amazing day where the church is established with 3000 believers, and he says this about them: v. 42

You know there is so much that we could say about these six verses. When we start talking about the culture of community that points toward God's future kingdom, there is so much here, but this morning I just want to quickly go through six marks of community on the ground that stand out to me. And the **first** is this:

a.) Jesus' community is a worshipping community v. 42

The priority of these disciples lives was the gathering of the church together to worship. You see worship is much more than the five or six songs that we sing on Sundays, worship involves all of life of course, but in a special way when the church gathers worship, includes all that we do in our time together.

And there is a spiritual reality that goes on when we come together, God does something within us, that is actually much deeper than we even know. You see, there is a human foolishness to this. That we would take the time to sing, and that you'd listen to the the very average preaching of our pastors, and that we would pray together, and take the Lord's table together. I mean the truth is you could get much better music and better preaching in the comfort of your living room on a hundred other church websites around the country. But God is doing something when his community gathers, that disciples sense deeply and can't help but want more of. Sunday shouldn't just be another event to check off your weekly to do list, there is life here. And sometimes we need to hold onto that by faith. We don't always feel that, and so when we don't we need to remind ourselves that God is up to something that is bigger than we can even see.

**Secondly**, we are a supernatural community. v. 43. If our life as a community of disciples together only exists to do what any one of us could do in our own strength and skills, we don't really need God. But Jesus' community is supernaturally formed and it should be supernaturally sustained.

Are our lives marked by a prayerful expectancy of God's supernatural action? Summit, are we captured by this God-sized vision of community and following Jesus with faith and courage and expectation that God will use us in the building of his kingdom. When is the last time you stepped out in faith knowing that if God didn't show up you were in trouble? Let me ask you this question that convicted me only a few weeks ago; "If God answered all your prayers for others the past month, if God answered everything that you prayed for his kingdom to advance in this world and in people's lives, what would happen?" My answer, to my shame, was not too much. We are a supernatural community. Our lives shouldn't make sense without God.

**Thirdly**, Jesus' community is a unified community. v. 44.

I'm grateful for the unity that God has given us here, but that unity is always tenuous because it is our enemy's favorite to attack. And so we need to be intentional about proactively

cultivating a culture of unity by honoring one another, choosing to not be offended, determining not to assume others' motives, and intentionally being a people of grace.

Last weekend we went down to Oregon as a family with Mike and Kim, and our family, Eli's two sisters and their families, and we all stayed in one house. And man, it was such a great time - we really had an amazing weekend, but all of you know what family vacations can be like. I mean there were times you could cut the tension with a knife. You throw together a family with a two-week old newborn, another family whom I won't mention trying to corral four girls under the age of ten, and a couple without kids with their own patterns and expectations, and then of course two stuck in their ways old folks.... well, maybe we'll just say one :-) I'm giving you a little peak behind the curtain when Pastor Mike isn't here. You throw all that together in one house you're bound to have some problems. But does family do? Good family at least, healthy family, talks through that stuff. Chooses not to be offended, determines to offer grace.

Even the little breakdowns in unity will kill the new kind of community God wants to create. Francis Shaeffer puts it this way, he says: "if we do not show beauty in the way we treat each other, then in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of our own children, we are destroying the truth we proclaim." And so we need to fight against disunity in even the little things as we'd fight them in our marriages and in our families. Go to one another in grace....

**Fourth**, we are a dependent community v. 45. We simply recognize that we need each other. And not just materially, but there is a principle here that goes beyond that. Did you guys know that I need you as much as you need me? And I don't mean that in a weird co-dependency type of way. I mean that I'm not Paul Punyan. I not self-reliant or self-sufficient. I don't just need sidekicks on my personal journey of discipleship. I need people around me who are going to encourage me and challenge me. Who are going to say the hard things to me when I need to hear them. People whose example is going to spur me on. Who are going to model the gospel to me when I need it most. Who are going to pray for me, and call me, and be there for me. I can't grow without that. And neither can you. Can we do that for each other? Can we be more dependent on one another? Can we actually say to our brother or sister in Christ - you know I need you to pray for me because I'm really struggling. Can we get over our American doctrine of independence and really admit to one another our need of Jesus in them?

This aspect of dependence to me is one of the most counter-cultural aspects of the new kind of community God is making. It's also one of the most attractive. When a culture of healthy dependence on one another grows, lives change. And something reverse of what we think



happens. The more aware we are of our own needs, the more we recognize the needs of others and make ourselves available to meet them.

**Fifth**, we are a celebratory community. v. 46. In our culture we've forgotten how to feast. Jesus loves a good party. Think of Jesus' first miracle at Cana. The joy had been sapped out of the feast, the wine was gone, and Jesus miracle breathed life back into the party.

You know, we eat 3 x a day, 7 days a week which means 21 meals a week, 84 or more meals a month. And in a meal is an opportunity to celebrate together.

Tim Chester "A Meal w/ Jesus"

"The Christian community is the beginning and sign of God's coming world—and no more so than when we eat together. Our meals are a foretaste of the future messianic banquet. Our meals reveal the identity of Jesus. Our meals are a proclamation and demonstration of God's good news" (61).

Mission (talk about more in a few weeks), multiplying disciples depends on this. Meals w/ disciple/disciple/unbeliever. Colson's example. The wine and cheese neighborhood party should be us.

And **lastly**, we're to be a growing community v. 47

- talk here about growth/new community groups maybe/ fall upcoming.

Church planting and growth.

This is a new kind of community. But what forms this new kind of community? There is something underneath all of this that forms it and is the power driving it. I'll wrap up with this, this look at:

### 3. Community under the ground.

Ray Ortlund in his book *Gospel* says this: "The gospel doesn't hang in midair as an abstraction. By the power of God, the gospel creates something new in the world today. It creates not just a new community, but a new kind of community. Gospel-centered churches are living proof that the good news is true, that Jesus is not a theory but is real, as he gives us back our humanness. In its doctrine and culture, words and deeds, such a church makes visible the restored humanity only Christ can give."

The reality of the gospel is the catalyst in this recurring cycle. Disciples are birthed into community through the gospel, and the power and example of our dying and risen Lord

energizes this new kind of community we're talking about, which in turn points the spotlight back to Jesus as we reflect him to the world around us. And through all of this the gospel is the life giving spring running just below the surface that shows itself as life explodes above it.

God doesn't create this new kind of human community apart from a deep and abiding understanding and trust in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus.

I know some of you are fearful of this type of community, depth of relationship, opening up, trusting and depending on others. It's messy. It's much easier in a lot of ways to do your own thing. But if we've really been capture by the gospel, that changes everything. We know that we're exposed already, but we're so secure that we aren't going to be dependent on others for what they can't give because we know we can ultimately only find those things in Jesus.

You see this human community of disciples is Jesus' community. We've been made for him. Made to be his bride, his people, to dwell with and worship him forever. And to the extent that we do that now, in this age, we taste in small measure what we'll feast on in full in the future.

Communion lead in