

National Siblings Day was about two weeks ago. On this day, which some may consider to be a made-up holiday, everyone posts pictures of their siblings whether they are present on earth or they have departed. They may even write kind words to express their love or gratitude for their brother, their sister, or their sibling. It is a beautiful moment for us to see the familial relationships. The folks who have shaped and built community together. As someone with a twin brother, a younger brother, three older brothers, and a sister, I know what the importance of community is and what community means.

For those who grew up being the only child, you may have formed your community with your cousins. There is a saying that says our cousins are our first best friends. I am certain many can agree with that statement. If you cannot reflect on siblings or cousins, maybe you can reflect on your chosen family. A chosen family is the community that is not biologically formed, but it is one formed from life's happenings. It is a dynamic where one can choose who they call family.

Building community is an act of care. This act of care, this longing to build a place where one can grow and thrive, a space for each other to get to know one another intimately is important. I would even venture to say that community is significant to the survival of individuals. I would hope that as I am laying this out, our mind traces to our own communities. Our siblings? Our cousins? Our friends from college? Our work buddies? Maybe even members of this church here at First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan?

Acts 2 offers a glimpse of what the earliest Christian association in Jerusalem was like. As verse 44 informs us, one of the common threads here was their belief in Christ. It was the act of those belonging to this neighborhood – who decided to heed to the sermons that they had heard from the apostles – this is also what brought them together. Believe it or not, commentaries and Biblical scholars might suggest that this is how the church was formed. It was a community. A group of people who cared for, loved on, grew with, and prayed for each other. The Divine, the Creator, the Source was the center of their village. I would suggest that when those in Jerusalem heard the sermons from the apostles, they heard a call to community. With this suggestion, I believe that Christ calls us to commune and dwell with one another. There are a few things that we can learn from this community.

First thing is that as Christ calls us to community, we must **consider the outsiders**. The marginalized – those who have been thrown away by society. Those that we might overlook because they have no community, or we deem them not worthy to be a member of our own communities.

A call to commune with Christ means ensuring that the most vulnerable have what they need. How many times have we been in a position to assist someone, but

we rejected them because of their race? their disability? their citizenship? their sexuality? Those who have been othered should be a part of our family especially because they are a part of God's family. We should model the early church presented in our text. Verse 45 tells us how those who joined together were providing for one another – being sure that they can be there for the one who has little or the one who is in dire need of assistance. When we neglect the disenfranchised then we have failed to answer Christ's call to community. Who are we leaving behind? I want us to think about this as individuals and as a collective church community – how are we welcoming the marginalized into our spaces? While some of us may hear this and think “Well, I am giving my resources to this group, or I am traveling to be of service to a country out of the U.S....is that not enough?” We, as followers of Christ, especially those who are privileged and economically advantaged, should never think that we have arrived at a point of ‘doing enough’ for the disenfranchised.

Christ not only calls us to commune together through caring for the vulnerable, but Christ also calls to community **through prayer**. How? 1 Thessalonians tells us to pray without ceasing. Luke 18 reminds us that we ought to always pray and faint not. Jesus prayed in the mountains often to strengthen himself and his disciples. As this church in Acts was being formed, they spent time in prayer together. Prayer is vital for us to learn of God and to learn about one another. It is important for us to ask one another about prayer requests. Checking in to see how we might care for those closest to us through prayer.

When I imagine Christ's call to community through prayer, I am reminded of the Dean of Chapel at Yale Divinity School. As she's walking through the halls or grabbing lunch, you can see the Dean of the Chapel, asking students “How might I be praying for you?” Through prayer, she is carrying out and embodying Christ's call.

Our text this morning also emphasizes how crucial it is to **spend time with those we call family**. That could look like sharing food, having a Facetime call, maybe doing an easter egg hunt with mimosas, or observing Scottish Heritage Day in kilts. Do any of these sound familiar? Spending intentional time with each other may look like sitting at one's house to watch a Netflix series. It could be meeting someone to walk our dogs together. It could be as simple as sitting outside on the porch catching up on life. As Christ calls us together to care for others and calls us to prayer, Christ also calls us to be joyful in community.

The final two verses mention that this particular group of people gladly broke bread together and it filled their heart with glee.

Last time I was here preaching Mary and Martha throwing a party, I mentioned that food is a way to communicate love, respect, and share cultural customs. That still applies through this text. We cannot be in agreement with others

or even living out Christ's call if we are not **intentional** about spending time with one another. Be intentional.

**Let's recap for a moment.**

**Christ calls to commune with one another:**

1. By making room for the marginalized
2. By praying earnestly for one another
3. By spending intentional time with each other

Am I saying that if we do these things that conflict won't arise? Not at all. When Christ calls us to commune with one another, there will certainly be conflict. While this community, the early church were bonded together through their belief in Christ, it does not mean that they did not experience conflict.

You know how we might love our sibling who does not always come around? Our cousin whose life has been detrimentally impacted by substance abuse? Or Our chosen family who might trigger us? Yeah, that happens.

Amidst conflict, we can be reminded of the words of Christ in Matthew 5 where it says that if we have an issue or an ought with someone, specifically someone in our friend group, then we should go to that person. Jesus mentions again in Matthew 18 that if our sibling, someone we share intimate space with causes harm or creates conflict then we go to that person in hopes that they hear us out. Jesus is letting us know how to solve conflict within the community.

Scripture doesn't say hold a grudge.

Scripture doesn't say avoid the problem.

Why am I stressing this? Because we can't desire to be of Christ or with Christ if we avoid or run away from conflict. The life of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection point us to both community and conflict.

The death and resurrection of Christ might also raise these questions for community:

Who will be praying for me when others are speaking ill against me? Who will be there when my life is celebrated? Who is going to be cheering for me when I finally

bounce back from a rough patch in life? Who is coming to mind? I hope that it is your beloved community.

I know there may be some of us in the congregation or even in the virtual space struggling to think of someone. Having difficulty visualizing our community. Even if it feels like you are alone and God has forgotten you, I want to remind you that God is with you and that God keeps God's word. God's promise to us in Hebrews states that God won't leave us nor will God forsake us. You may be wrestling now and seeking community, but you will find community – no better yet – the community will find you.

Beloved, we must know that if we follow the example of faith laid out in the scripture for us then we will see verse 47 manifest in our lives – and I am paraphrasing but the ending scriptures says “day by day the Lord added to their community...”

Will you answer Christ's call to community?

Amen.