

Sermon: Created for Community

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Scriptures: Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:2-16

When I wrote this sermon, Hurricane Ian was making landfall in Florida and Fiona had already violently made its sweep through the Caribbean and up to Canada, marking Canada's worst natural disaster in 19 years. As I thought ahead to when I preach this sermon, I realized we would be getting hit by some of the remnants of Ian as I speak. Hurricanes, vicious storms with straight-line winds or tornados, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters remind us, as humans, just how fraught and frail life can be. And yet, as we think about the aftermath, the devastation left in the wake of Ian, Fiona, and the myriad of both named and unnamed storms, we may see cause for hope, because it is in these moments that we see the helpers begin to emerge. It is after the fall, so-to-speak, that we begin to see the rising. And it is at these times that we are reminded of one very clear fact: we are made for community. And this foundational principle of our being is not one that is fabricated by humans already living together, but was done by the design of the One who made all that is and was and ever shall be.

Consider for a moment, the beginning of time, when loving creator brought all things into being. Imagine the creation of night and day, water and earth, plants, trees, the sun, and the moon. Think about when God created all the animals of land, sea, and air, placing them together on this earthly plane. And then recall God's most gracious life-giving gift had more work to do, in Genesis 1 God said, "Let us create humankind in our image, in our likeness... so God created humankind in God's own image. In the image of God, God created them. Male and female, God created them. We are made for community.

Consider for a moment, that in the second story of creation in Genesis 2 we get a retelling of the creation of the first humans. Imagine the dust swirling as humankind is brought into being, breathed into life by the still-speaking God. Think about the garden God had planted in the east, a place of goodness and harmony, which would provide for

this Adam. And then recall that God's most gracious life-giving gift had more to do because God made Eve, knowing no human should not be alone. We are made for community.

Consider for a moment that we are witness to Jesus being tested by the authorities (Mark 10). Imagine that we are gathered in that house, listening to this great teacher as he turns the unfair question back on these learned religious men certain they will catch him in a lie. Think about how, as the Pharisees tested him, Jesus took the righteous religious all the way back to the beginning... to the objectives at the foundation of the good and gracious Creator. And then recall that Jesus pointed out to them that God has joined us together in community not individualism. In union, not division. In compassion, not hard-heartedness. We are created for community.

God's vision is, at its core, that very prayer Jesus prayed, the one we talked about last week: "that they all may be one" (John 17). Jesus showed us through his life, death, and resurrection that every life has, in the words of the great theologian Howard Thurman, "inherent worthfulness and dignity." No one should be discarded. Not women, as Jesus mentions in the discussion about divorce. Not children, as he will mention mere moments later. Not the poor, not the widow, not the sick, not the refugee as Jesus showed us through his interactions with the public as he travelled to share the Good News of God's Kin-dom. God so loved *the world* that God gave of himself on the cross so completely that death could no longer rule over us.

It's no accident that our Maker placed us in community. God, godself, is in community as three-in-one, Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What these illustrations in our holiest books show us, what the aftermath of every single natural disaster shows us, is that we were not made to be lone wolves. We weren't brought into being, sent out to live our days as solo missions. We weren't meant to do life by ourselves. We were called into being as partners with God and with one another. We were created *in* and *for* community. We are meant to do life together. And when we honor that blessed duty, that sacred call to community, then we are truly doing the Lord's work.

Recently, the consistory of this very church voted overwhelmingly to expand our mission to serve local children. For years, we have been donating bags of food to students at Manchester Elementary whose families find themselves in greater need. Robert received a note explaining that sometimes, the kids lunch schedule has them eating lunch as early as 10am or as late as 2pm and that in those cases, the children may need an early or late snack so that their still forming brains and bodies have nourishment. Some students, like those on the Free and Reduced Meal program, cannot afford to bring in their own snack. Imagine for a moment that you're 5 and hungry and every other kid in your class pulls out a snack at snack time... but you have nothing. All of your friends are crunching on some goodies, while your belly growls, knowing that you won't eat again until the evening. The school wondered if we would be willing to provide boxes of snacks to help fill the bellies of these little ones who, through no fault of their own, would otherwise have nothing to eat. Instead of merely providing "food bags for backpacks," we've found a way to provide kid-sized munchies for mid-day.

When we step out in faith to fill needs in our society, we are being the hands and feet of Jesus who fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and some fish. This is what it means to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. And without a recognition that we do life together and not alone, it could not happen. Without a willingness to extend the hand of compassion to others who are not us, it could not happen. Without hearts full of goodness and a desire to serve, it could not happen.

So say it with me: We are created for community!

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Amen.