

BECOMING A CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY 3

“SHARING LIFE IS THE BLOOD OF A C.C.C.”

This morning we continue with our third session of “Becoming a Contagious Christian Community. I’ll remind you that we began lesson one with the admonition that before we embark on this adventure of becoming a C.C.C., we might first have to stop being “the church.” Last week we spent some time considering that at the Heart of becoming a C.C.C.; is meeting, experiencing, and being changed by God. Today we continue by looking at the Blood of a C.C.C. In the OT blood was considered holy and sacred because it symbolically and metaphorically represented life. In our new C.C.C. the ‘life-blood’, if you will is “Sharing Life”. The pulsing symbol or metaphoric revealer that there is life in a C.C.C. is living life together, of sharing life together. Listen:

If we claim that we experience a shared life with God and continue to stumble around in the dark, we’re obviously lying through our teeth—we’re not living what we claim. But if we walk in the light, God himself being the light, we also experience a shared life with one another, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purges all our sin. I John 1: 6-7

I think one of the greatest tragedies of modern Christianity is that it has become so self-focused. I confess, I’ve been guilty of buying in, even perpetuating this mentality. Modern expressions of Christianity; and even church have become all about the ME. We’ve bought in or been sucked into the prevailing cultural idol that “I” is most important, that looking out for #1 “Me” is all that matters.

It has not always been so. In the OT, NT, and even former days of ‘the church’, it was more about family, it was more about community, it was more about a shared life, than a self-life. Now, if “I” don’t get fed from the sermon, or if “I” don’t get blessed by the music, then “I’m” out the door and down the street to find another ‘church’ that meets “my” needs. If “I” don’t get greeted, or invited or pampered to in “my” personal space, then “I’ll” look for somewhere else where they take “Me”, more seriously.

Maybe I'm exaggerating, but to make a point, I think it's high time we get over ourselves, and remember that our life, our family, our needs, as important as they are; are all secondary to GOD! Ultimately and practically, the Christian faith, the Spiritual Life Reality, even authentic Religious Expression is not about us but about God.

This is part of my dream for our becoming a C.C.C. that we might once again discover that the best Christian life, is a shared life. I'm talking about more than fellowship, I'm talking about more than hospitality, I'm talking about more than committees or meetings, or teams. I'm talking about even more than Bible Studies and small groups, and Sunday School classes. I'm talking about rediscovering the "Shared Life" that Jesus had in mind when He envisioned us as His Church. I think it had more to do with HIM than with US, and I know it had more to do with US, than it had to do with ME. Here is one great example and our basic text for this morning's message.

The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them. And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need. Acts 4: 32-35

We read two weeks ago a similar passage in Acts 2 that reported how this early church community shared everything; their worship, their communion, their money, their possession, their property...their lives. Sharing Life is the blood of a C.C.C. Let me tell you why I believe this is true.

1. IT'S CLEARLY A COMMAND

*"A new command I give you: Love **one another**." John 13:34*

I read that there are over 50 "one another's" in the NT. I didn't count them all but let me remind us of these: love one another, don't deceive one another, pray for one another, serve one another, encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, show mercy and compassion to one another, wash each others feet, (I like this one):

One sharpens another. (I really like this one): Greet one another...with a holy kiss (repeated at least 4 times in the NT). Agree with one another, accept one another, be patient with one another, forgive one another, be hospitable to one another, and maybe the hardest: Submit to one another, and think more highly of others...shall I go on? You get the overarching intent of these admonitions? They aren't suggestions, they are commandments!

I understand the folly of trying to 'command' anything to this generation of "have it your way" (Burger King) believers, but we deny this reality at our own peril! God commands us to love one another; even when we'd rather not, even when it's not comfortable, or neat and tidy, even when it's inconvenient, even when its costly. Here is the bottom line:

This is a command from God that flows from the character of God! God's Character is Community. "God said let US make humankind in OUR own image!" Did you see that? God exists in a community throughout eternity, and our existence today must recapture that community. Enough of living the solitary, stoic, macho, "I did it my way" life. Enough of going it alone, its time to get connected, and reconnected, at deep levels...because God told us to! Why is sharing life the blood of a C.C.C? because:

2. IT'S COUNTER CULTURAL

*"This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for **each other**." John 13:35 "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. NLT*

I'm not sure when exactly or how architecturally or why spiritually, but there was a dramatic shift in our American culture when we started eliminating front porches on our homes and replacing them with back decks! Have you ever thought of that? The decks are still next to each other, or across from each other; but this move created a different mentality. Front porches used to stand as open invitations, and back decks say...'don't bother me, I'm trying to relax.'

Used to be that people interacted across the streets and throughout the neighborhoods across the front porch. My sister used to live in Walt Hill Neb., in a huge old 1950's house. It was surrounded by a wide front porch. We'd go to visit, and be amazed at the neighborhood children playing hide and seek in around and under the porch, the neighbors who gathering on the porch, the project or two on going next to the porch. It seemed that the porch was the centerpiece of that great old house, and many in that community.

Sharing life was the blood of the NT Church, but I'm not sure it is anymore, and I think it should be. We live rather insulated, buttoned up lives, we 21st Century individual/believers. We play our 'lives' pretty close to the vest, when it comes to opening up and sharing our deep secrets, fears, and even sins. I know Ernie shared with you a couple weeks ago about being honest when someone asks you "how you are doing." It's a risk worth taking.

What might it mean to "Share Life" like this in a new C.C.C? As before, I believe it starts in here (head), moves through here (heart) and flows out there (church/world). We must honestly, openly, and authentically live our lives with each other. It makes no sense and helps no one to come to church and put on 'airs' or 'masks', or 'bravado' or 'I'm all that and a bucket of chicken'. I don't know exactly how to say it...but we just have to be real with each other, we have to stop gossiping about one another, we have to give each other the benefit of the doubt, we have to speak the truth in LOVE, we have to go the second mile (maybe third) to encourage each other, we have to open our homes, open our hearts, open our minds, open our wallets to each other! We have to see our lives are connected, not through membership, but through the Blood of Jesus that becomes the Blood of the C.C.C. and that blood is sharing our lives with each other.

Tell me you wouldn't like to live in that kind of environment, where people are just people, not jobs, or careers, or targets, or competitors?

Tell me you wouldn't enjoy getting to know the people you worship with, or spending some time with the people who look interesting, or strange even! Tell me your life wouldn't be better, if you knew you could trust those around you today, to honestly care about you, your family, your needs, and you theirs? I'm telling you, that is my vision, a group of messed up people, just simply living their lives to the best of their ability, and knowing that the people in this community are just the same, on the same journey, bearing the same burdens, joys, yeah, and sometimes victories.

And tell me the world needs anything more? I believe this kind of counter-cultural life is possible, and will be the centerpiece...the front porch, the life-blood that God will use to make us magnetic to the world, as people open themselves, and share their lives! We'll have to beat 'em off with a stick! Hardly! Here is the third reason I believe Sharing Life is the BLOOD of a C.C.C. because:

3. IT'S CERTAINLY A COMMITMENT

*"This is my commandment: Love **each other** in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for **one's friends**. You are my friends if you do what I command." John 15: 12-14 "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our **brothers and sisters**." I John 3: 16 "As I have loved you, so you must love **one another**." John 13:34*

You know the key to making this happen? We all have to do something! (4X) We can't build or become an authentic C.C.C by expecting me to deliver it to you, or Ernie to provide it for you, or Peter or Suzanne or any Ad Team member to accomplish it without you. We can't magically anticipate this new community will emerge by expecting someone else will have to change. Each of us has to do something, and likely it will be something small, something smaller than laying down our life for a stranger, or even for a friend.

Making a commitment to act on every little prompting that may or may not be from God, is a good place to begin. You'll be amazed when you do, how soon and how often you'll be hearing from God.

You think of a fellow church member, give them a call, send them a personal email, write them a handwritten letter or note of encouragement. Pray for them, and then tell them you have done so!

Making a commitment to honor God with every breath you breathe, every thought you think, every dollar you earn, and spend, every choice or decision you make.

Making a commitment to think of yourself soberly; and others more highly. It's unlikely any of us will be martyred for our faith, or expected to die for another, but according to these 'commands' we have to live in that exact state of readiness, and willingness.

Making a commitment that instead of what you 'got out of church' today...what did you give to God at church today. Instead of how others are failing in their lives; how we might improve our own life. Instead of settling for the surface, pressing on to deeper relationships, holding fast to the hope of sharing all of life, not just the safe and innocuous parts.

I'm not saying that all our lives should be spent just with people in this community, and I'm not saying live our lives stupidly, being taken advantage of. What I am saying...hoping really; is that our lives might become more intertwined, more interdependent, more shared, and less selfish. Making a commitment to linger just a few minutes longer in conversation, or arriving a few minutes earlier, to seek out someone who might need to see you, or hear from you. Making a commitment to watch less TV and spend more "time" with those we love, and those we don't even know yet.

I can't tell you exactly how this commitment will look for you. You might want to start by choosing one from that list of "one another's" at the beginning of this message. I can, but won't tell you how I'd wish it would work for you, but I'm limited to sharing how this new priority in this new community will change me.

I will work harder to be honest. I will work smarter to go deeper with all of you who will let me.

I will continue to invest my life, and my time being faithful to my calling that you graciously allow me (and pay me) to exercise in your midst. Our home is your house; not just because it's your parsonage, but because our lives are open, and we wish to share them with you.

Our church building is a tool, a place where ministry happens, and our job is not to keep it neat and clean, but to clean it up after ministry has taken place.

Our new C.C.C. will be sustained; one pulse and heart beat at a time, by the Blood, of a Shared Life. Can I count you in? AMEN

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