

24 April 2005
Our Church's Values - Community

Community

Recognising we cannot be effective unless we live with those we hope to reach, our aim is to be a part of this community, to build relationships and so to have an awareness of the needs of the people in the community. As a church we will, as much as in our power, endeavour to meet those needs and offer hope in place of despair. We will be a place where people can believe and belong.

Some Scriptures: Philippians 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7;

Jeremiah 29:11-14a; Romans 12:4, 9-13

What Is True Community? I have been in many places where people talk about community, but don't experience it. Perhaps you have shared that experience. A community organization, a workplace or a family situation where the talk didn't match the experience. Community is not a social club, although there might be many very good times there. Community is not a local service club, although a great deal of good and valuable fun work may be achieved by that group of people. Community is not something that can be manufactured in a new housing development or waterfront precinct just because the advertisement on TV paints a nice picture.

Community is believing in something and having a very real sense and experience of belonging to it. For many people that is their local pub, their group of fishing mates, the group they meet at the coffee shop.

A number of years ago; when I travelled into the city for work on the train. I observed a group of people who every day sat in the same seats with the same people and shared their lives, their stories and played cards or other games together. They got on at different stations and didn't all get off at the one stop but somehow they had formed a community. A group of people who cared for each other; who obviously shared their good and bad times together. And they weren't Christians.

Yet it appeared to me that they had all the characteristics of what church should be like.

A Biblical Community Is Different!

Consider the time when a person is in the wrong. Listen to Mark Twain, "The proper work of a friend is to side with you when you are in the wrong. Nearly anybody will side with you when you are in the right." I cannot think of many persons who have been more publicly disgraced and held to be in the wrong than Jim Bakker. Bakker and his wife, Tammy Faye, were television evangelists. In October 1989, Bakker was convicted of 24 counts of mail fraud. He was accused of defrauding followers of his PTL television ministry. These followers had sent \$158 million for partnerships in a vacation park (Heritage USA) in South Carolina. While he was in prison, his wife, Tammy, divorced Bakker. A few years ago Jim Bakker was released from prison. He was in the wrong. However, friends give you a lift, even when you are in the wrong! Jim Bakker is a friend of Bob Gass.

Gass came from Ireland when he was 18 years old and has become the author of a daily devotional booklet, *The Word for Today*. He wrote this: "Jim Bakker told me that when he got out of prison one of the first people to befriend him was Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham. Franklin provided him with a home and a car and a guarantee that he'd be there for him. That Sunday, Franklin's mother, Ruth, took Jim to church, sat him in the family pew beside her, and introduced him to all their friends. Afterwards she took him home to join the family for dinner. It moved Jim deeply because many who sought his favor and friendship in the days of his fame ran for cover when trouble hit him." Friends give you a lift. (Bob Gass, *The Word for Today*, March 15).

Friends carry us when we are down. The difference between a true friend and a false friend is this. When you are down, a true friend gives you cheers; a false friend gives you sneers and puts you down even further.

What Does It Mean To Believe & Belong In A Biblical Community

So what does it mean to belong to the Biblical community that we are going to build here at Stanley River Valley Community Church. One of the Core Values we are seeking to establish as a church is Community. Recognising we cannot be effective unless we live with those we hope to reach, our aim is to be a part of this community, to build relationships and so to have an awareness of the needs of the

people in the community. As a church we will, as much as in our power, endeavour to meet those needs and offer hope in place of despair. We will be a place where people can believe and belong.

Read Philippians 2:1-11; What grace! From heaven to earth, from glory to shame, from Master to servant, from life to death, "even the death of the cross!" He willingly humbled Himself that He might lift us up! So what does it mean to have the same attitude as Christ. It means to grow into the likeness of Christ - Humility; Service; Sacrifice; Love

Paul knew what some church workers today do not know, that there is a difference between unity and uniformity. True spiritual unity comes from within; it is a matter of the heart. Uniformity is the result of pressure from without. This is why Paul opens this section appealing to the highest possible spiritual motives (Phil. 2:1-4).

Since the believers at Philippi are "in Christ," this ought to encourage them to work toward unity and love, not division and rivalry. In a gracious way, Paul is saying to the church, "Your disagreements reveal that there is a spiritual problem in your fellowship. It isn't going to be solved by rules or threats; it's going to be solved when your hearts are right with Christ and with each other." Paul wanted them to see that the basic cause was selfishness, and the cause of selfishness is pride. There can be no joy in the life of the Christian who puts himself above others.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7;

It means recognising and valuing the differences that God has given us. Some will be good at some things, others at others. God has made us and gifted us all differently. Yet we are all part of the one body, no one more important than the other.

Read Romans 12:4, 9-13

It means to be loved, valued and looked after.

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14a;

We need to know and understand that in spite of all that we go through; God intends it somehow for our ultimate good. Community is walking through the difficult times together.

Now we will not completely achieve this goal here on earth, but it is our responsibility to seek to live it out. There will be times when all of us won't live up to the value. And that is when we are called to lovingly walk the journey of restoration with each other.

But in so far as it is within our power we are called to live in community. Building trust, building respect, building a commitment to believe and belong. Because it is these things that set us apart from and make us attractive to the people who live in the Stanley River Valley.

There was a man named Joe, who was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1819. In 1842, when he was 23 years old, he graduated from the University of Dublin. He was to be married to a lovely young girl. The evening before the wedding ceremony, there was a knock at his apartment door. He opened the door and saw a policeman standing there. The policeman told him that the woman he was to marry the next day had been drowned. Joe plunged into deep grief. He could hardly think clearly. He could not work as a teacher. After several months of such grief, Joe decided that he had to leave Dublin, even though his mother lived there. Joe went to Canada and arrived at Port Hope on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Joe became a private tutor to the children of a family named Pengelley whose estate was ten miles north of Port Hope. Late one night in 1855, Joe wrote a tribute to a friend. This friend had given Joe a lift when he was weighed down with loneliness and overcome with sadness. You know this tribute that Joseph Scriven wrote to his best friend.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

You have a Friend who wants to give you a lift. This Friend is Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity is the friendship of Jesus, and in this friendship is the offer of God's friendship and the friendship of his people. Community is that friendship in action

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