

Life Together

Part 1 - What is Community?

Let's Talk about it:

1) What communities are you a part of?

- What binds that group together?
- How can this lead to what sociologists call "Tribalism"?
- What is the issue(s) with cliques?

2) What is the Church?

- How many communities, cliques, "tribes" exist within the Church?
- What is essential to being a church and not a social club?

3) What is so dangerous about the concept of self-sufficiency?

- Phrases like, "I don't need no man.", "If you want something done right, do it yourself", "I'm fine on my own", and "I'm a strong, independent man / woman" abound in our society
- How harmful is isolation / loneliness?
- Why do so many want Church / God, but only on their own terms (II Tim. 4:3)?

I) Community

A) A privilege to live with other Christians

- 1) How much "community" did Jesus experience?
- 2) How much isolation did Jesus experience?
- 3) Where is Christ's Kingdom (and its citizens) to be found?

- 4) What are some examples of Christians denied this gift of fellowship with believers?

- 5) How should we view the opportunity to gather together?

- 6) Do we see Christ in and through each other? How do we lose this gift?

- 7) What are some ways such a Christian community might manifest?

B) Through and In Jesus Christ Alone

- 1) What is the basis of *Christian* community?
 - 2) What three things are meant by “through and in Jesus Christ”?
-

- 3) What does it mean that righteousness is *extra nos*?
- 4) Why is their discord between men?
 - What often gets in the way of true community?
- 5) How is our fellowship external?
- 6) How are we “brothers and sisters in Christ”?
- 7) What is the issue with “Church shopping”?

C) Not an Ideal, but a Reality

- 1) Can you think of any Christian communities founded on a “wish dream”?
 - Is this a form of idolatry?
 - How / why do these communities always ultimately fail?
- 2) How can “the very hour of disillusionment with my brother become incomparably salutary”?
- 3) How is thankfulness a key part of community (see **Matthew 25:14-30**)

D) A Spiritual, not a human reality

- 1) What is the essence of a spiritual community? (**I John 1:5-7**)
- 2) What is the essence of human community? (**Mark 7:21**)
- 3) What “observation” shows this difference?
- 4) What is the difference between “winning over” and “overpowering”?
- 5) How can love be an idol?
- 6) How can Church get in the way of christian community?
- 7) How many of our fellowship activities are Christo-centric?

LIFE TOGETHER
PART 2 - THE DAY TOGETHER

Let's Talk about It:

- 1) Do you wake up, "Good Morning, Lord!" or "Good Lord, morning"?

- 2) Why does the Old Testament day begin with sunset and the New Testament day begin with the sun's rising?
 - Why do many cultures have a tradition of "hailing the morn"? (Greeting the sunrise)

- 3) What is the Christian Discipline of *Lectio Divina*?

A) By the dawn's early light...

- 1) Why is the dawn seen as a sign of hope or victory?

- 2) Why do many "fear" the night?
 - Why do so many not drive after dark?
 - What is the cultural understanding of night / darkness?
 - "From ghoulies and ghosties, and long-legged beasties and things that go bump in the night, good Lord preserve us!" (Ancient Scottish prayer)

- 3) To whom does the morning belong? Why?
 - what Biblical phrases emphasize the morning?

- 4) What is to break "the deep stillness of morning"?

- 5) Why should the child of God rise early?

- 6) How should a disciple's day begin?

- 7) What are "these elements of common devotion"?

B) Secrets of the Psalter

- 1) What is the role of the Psalter (book of Psalms) in our life together?

- 2) What makes the Psalms unique within God's Word?

- 3) Who is the chief One praying the more difficult / emotional Psalms?

- 4) How does this show Jesus as our Intercessor?

- 5) Why can we not pray all the Psalms as individuals?

- 6) Why are so many Psalms antiphonal or responsory?
- 7) How does the Psalter align with the Lord's Prayer?

C) The Daily Lectionary

- 1) Where can we find God's Word for the day (i.e. March 4)?
 - What's on page 299ff of LSB?
- 2) What are some "harmful prejudices" with daily Bible reading?
- 3) What is the danger of taking only "snippets" from God's Word?
- 4) Are the Scriptures "still largely unknown to us"?
- 5) What does it mean that Scripture is a *corps* or *lectio continua*?
- 6) How are we to "lose ourselves" in hearing Scripture?
- 7) /what is the "complete reversal" in Scriptural immersion?
- 8) Why do we grapple with ALL of Scripture for the sake of our brother / sister?
- 9) Why should Scripture be read aloud by various members of the community in turn?
 - see Romans 10:17

D) Singing a new song

- 1) How are shared songs a sign of community?
 - Can a song unite a generation or a tribe?
- 2) How can a hymn be more powerful (emotionally) than God's Word?
 - n.b. in *most* pagan Creation stories, the world was *sung* into being.
- 3) Look at Job 38:7. How does this fit with Bonhoeffer's words that, "God has prepared for Himself one great song of praise throughout eternity, and those who enter the community of God join in this song."
- 4) How is this same song different on earth than it is in heaven?
- 5) From whence does this new song spring forth? (See Ephesians 5:19)
- 6) Why is unison singing to be preferred in the Christian community (Romans 15:6)
- 7) What are some "impediments" to singing together?

- 8) Is singing God's Word together a musical or a spiritual activity?
- 9) Comment on Walt Whitman's "O Me! O Life!" where he wrote, "The powerful play (song) goes on and you may contribute a verse."
- Does this apply to the Church's song as well?

E) Say your prayers

- 1) How is prayer intimately personal yet also always corporate?
- 2) Why do so many fear to pray out loud with and for others?
- 3) Why is it best to have 1 person as the chief pray-er?
- 4) How does prayer foster fellowship?
- 5) How is prayer to be liberated from "the caprice of subjectivity"?
- 6) How can the use of formal prayers (especially those known by rote) become an evasion of real prayer?
- 7) What can be the problem with "prayer vigils" and the like?

F) Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest

- 1) What three kinds of table fellowship are there?

- 2) What three meanings are there in Jesus' presence at our tables?

- 3) Why is "breaking bread" a fit metaphor for table fellowship?

G) Get to work!

- 1) How do work and prayer go together?
- 2) What does Paul mean by "Pray without ceasing"? (I Thess. 5:17)
- 3) How does neglect of morning prayer affect our workday?

H) High noon & Eventide

- 1) How is lunch break "a consolation of the afflicted"?

2) How is the Christian's day to end as it began?
- What's different about evening prayers?

3) Why do we pray for safety, especially at night?

Next Week: The Day Alone

LIFE TOGETHER
PART 3 - THE DAY ALONE

We need to talk:

- 1) How much of your day is spent alone? (Pets do not count)
- 2) Why do many fear being alone?
 - Can you ever escape from yourself?
 - How can isolation lead to unhealthy activities?
- 3) Is “meditation” proper for a Christian?

III). Alone time

A) Solitude and Silence

- 1) Why was “solitude” a major discipline in some branches of Christianity?
 - 2) What lies behind the monastic vows of silence?
 - 3) Explain the paradox of being able to be alone only as part of a fellowship.
 - 4) How is silence different from dumbness?
 - 5) What does silence have to do with hearing God’s Word? (See Psalm 46:10)
 - 6) What does Thomas a Kempis mean by “None speaketh surely but he that would gladly keep silence if he might.”
 - 7) What are the three reasons to spend some time alone each day
-
-

B) Meditation

- 1) How have Christians lost this centuries old divine practice? (Esp. since the 1960’s)
- 2) What are the components of *Christian* meditation?
- 3) Are we “alone” when meditating?
- 4) What is the depth of meditation? (See Ephesians 3:18)
- 5) How is the Word “working” as we meditate on it?
- 6) How are periods of spiritual “dryness” beneficial for us?
- 7) What are some of the dangers of meditation?

C) Individual prayer

- 1) How is prayer the natural outflow of meditation?
- 2) How do these prayers differ from corporate (esp. worship) prayers?
- 3) How does prayer “break” meditation?
- 4) Why will some people always be “skipped” during the prayers of the Church?

D) The test of meditation

- 1) How are we tested daily?
- 2) What is the “test” to see if meditation was true meditation?
- 3) Why is the image of our fellowship being a body a truer metaphor than we realize?

For next week: Chapter 4; Ministry

LIFE TOGETHER
PART 4 - MINISTRY

Let's Talk it over:

- 1) What is the chief enemy of community?
- 2) What has been called "The Thief of joy" and why that?
- 3) What are some outward signs of an authentically humble person?

A) Holding one's tongue

- 1) What is "foot-in-mouth" disease?
 - is Grandma's advice to "think before you speak" sage advice?
 - Can our thoughts be changed simply by not putting words to them?
- 2) What does James 3:1-12 tell us about holding your tongue?
- 3) What kind of speech should we have according to Ephesians 4:19?
- 4) How is *not* speaking about a brother or sister a mark of freedom?
- 5) Consider this starter question from marriage counseling 101:
 - "Are you trying to understand or are you trying to win?"
 - Would that question work in non-marital discussions?
- 6) Are there "important members" in congregations?
 - What does this say of the other members?
- 7) How do grace and service go together?

B) The ministry of meekness

- 1) How do Romans 12:3 and 12:16 define "meek"?
- 2) Consider the following oft spoken statements
 - "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" - Jesus
 - "It's not the earth the meek inherit, it's the dirt" - Mordred (Fie on Goodness)
 - Which have these have you found to be true most often?
- 3) How does God's Word (both Law & Gospel) aid us in being meek?
- 4) Does "the desire for one's own honor hinders faith"? If so, how?
- 5) What is "the sin of resentment"? I don't recall that Commandment
 - How prevalent is that sin within Christian community?
- 6) How does Paul (I Timothy 1:15) give the key to staying humble?

- Are some sins worse than others?
 - Why then do we have so many rankings (7 deadly, etc) for sins?
- 7) Are meekness (humility) and service linked? How?

C) The ministry of listening

- 1) What's the difference between *hearing* and *listening*?
- 2) In Scripture, how often are we *commanded* to:
 - Listen
 - Speak
- 3) Why is it hard to find a listening ear among Christians?
- 4) What is "clerical condescension arrayed in pious words"?
- 5) How does one listen with "half an ear"?
- 6) How has "secular education" (1944) grasped the power of truly listening?
 - Is this not the birthright of all Christians?
- 7) What does it mean to "listen with the ears of God"?

D) The ministry of helpfulness

- 1) Why must active listening precede helpfulness?
 - How does the Church often "put the cart before the horse"?
- 2) "Santus Interruptus!" - what is a holy interruption?
- 3) How can our schedule get in the way of our discipleship?
- 4) What is of greater importance than helping my neighbor in even "trivial" needs?
- 5) How was this seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)?
- 6) How do the needs of the members of one's fellowship display the cross?
- 7) Why do acts of service need to precede sharing God's Word?

E) The ministry of bearing

- 1) What does it mean to "bear with one another"?
- 2) Why are Christians a "burden" only to other Christians?
- 3) How does the word "bearing" sum up the Gospel?
- 4) How is this "bearing with one another" (Gal. 6:2) a mark of true fellowship?
- 5) What does bearing have to do with freedom? differ

- 6) How do we “bear” the sin of another person?
- 7) How does bearing require attachment to a community?

F) The ministry of proclaiming

- 1) Given our earlier discussion on meekness, what does Bonhoeffer mean by “the highest service one can render”?
- 2) How does “the communication of the Word” differ between clergy carrying out the duties of their office and individual Christians?
- 3) Why is the Word often suppressed among Christians?
- 4) How does Ezekiel’s call (Ezekiel 3:16-27 esp. 18) show the peril of remaining silent as opposed to speaking God’s Word to another?
- 5) The great *dictum* of the United States is that “all men are created equal...” How does this manifest especially within Christian community?
- 6) What is the ultimate cruelty one Christian can bestow upon another?
- 7) How does James 5:20 show our duty to one another?

G) The ministry of authority

- 1) What poisons Christian community?
- 2) Why is there “this hankering for false authority”?
- 3) What should be the chief character trait of a servant of Christ (esp. pastors)?

Next week: Wrapping up with Confession and Communion

LIFE TOGETHER
PART 5 - BREAKING THROUGH

We need to talk:

- 1) How does the Church, as practiced today, keep one from truly confessing one's sins?
- 2) What is the cause of being "utterly alone"?
- 3) Why is it difficult for "good" people to accept the Gospel?
 - is this a (or even THE) reason for denominational decline today?
- 4) Why did God take on flesh in Christ Jesus?
- 5) How does John 20:23 show the purpose for which the Church exists?
- 6) How is our brother, a fellow sinner, Christ to us?
- 7) What does confession have to do with community?

A) Breaking through to community

- 1) How does sin isolate us?
- 2) How is confession a "come to Jesus moment"?
- 3) What's the difference between private, individual confession and corporate confession?

B) Breaking through to the cross

- 1) What is *superbia*?
 - How is it both root and result of all other sins?
- 2) What are some signs of *superbia* in our culture today?
- 3) In what way(s) does confession imitate the cross?

C) Breaking through to new life

- 1) How is confession conversion?
- 2) How does Paul sum this up in II Corinthians 5:17
- 3) How does confession bring us back to baptism?

D) Breaking through to certainty

- 1) Why do we find it more difficult to confess to a brother than to God?
- 2) What is self-forgiveness? How is it different than forgiving one's self?
- 3) Why can I trust in a personal, *spoken* word of forgiveness more than a general corporate absolution?
- 4) Why is it important to be specific when confessing sins?

- does this mean we can ever enumerate all our sins?
- 5) Should we therefore do away with corporate confession and absolution? Why / why not?
- 6) What question must be answered before confession? (See Mark 10:46-52, esp. 51)
- 7) Is private / individual confession necessary or commanded by God?

E) To whom should we confess?

- 1) Who is best equipped to hear the confession of another?
- 2) How does modern psychology fail when it comes to sin and confession?
 - Does this mean psychology is of no value for the Christian?
- 3) What is “the spirit of human censoriousness”?

F) Two Dangers

- 1) What is / was the role of a “Father Confessor”?
 - How and why did this develop within monastic communities?
 - How does the revived practice of the *Anam Cara* (Soul’s Friend) practice this?
- 2) What must a confessor do to be “worthy” of hearing confession?
- 3) How is confession as an obligation or duty a spiritual death sentence?

G) The Joyful Sacrament

- 1) Do you remember the days when one announced for Communion or went to private Confession the day before receiving the Lord’s Supper?
- 2) How does the Sacrament make forgiveness more certain?
- 3) Explain how “The fellowship of the Lord’s Supper is the superlative fulfillment of Christian fellowship.”

Thank you for joining me in Life Together and I wish you a blessed Easter and joyful spring break. We will resume our Zoom studies on Wednesday nights beginning April 22nd.