

Kamikaze Community

God's Heart for Bringing Together the People of God

Introduction

This is our final week in our Sermon series – *Kamikaze Hearts for God – How Faith and Action take us to the Edge*. I want to just take a minute and thank you for the privilege of opening God's word with you these past 8 sermons. You have been wonderfully attentive and very gracious in your feedback. I also want to thank the Worship Design Team and their thoughtful and creative suggestions that have helped make this series what it is.

Together we have touched on just a few of the saints mentioned in Hebrew's 11. All of them are honored – not just for what they did – but for what they did by faith. We have seen how God can do more than we imagine – leading us places – even when we don't know where we are going – honoring us – protecting us – taking the gifts we have dragged through the mud and using it for His kingdom. Hopefully we have learned some new definitions of faith like

- Faith is acting like it is so – even when its not so – in order that it might be so – just because God said so
- that God isn't interested in our wallets but in growing our faith through Kamikaze giving. I have repeated this theme over and over – that God is on a mission to grow our faith.
- that in spite of our sins, with faith it is possible to please God
- that God is making a name for us and we need not build our own reputation
- that by faith we can actually enjoy the journey into the unknown
- That a 2 of faith trumps a king of doubt, of fear and of sin– every time

Let's Pray

Our topic this morning as we close this series is Kamikaze community. Instinctively know that community is a good thing – something to work for – something to be found in the Church. But a lot of times our community in the church is elusive - we talk about it more than we experience it. A lot of time, our community looks like this.



"Maybe we need to define 'community.'"

Let me define how I am using the word community this morning – because there are several ways its used. I am defining it

Not as place – (the community of Simsbury)

Not as collective of people (on-line community)

But as a description of an experience

– the interactions of an interconnected group of people – where relationships are important – where being connected to others plays a vital role.

In the America there is so much emphasis on the individual that we miss God's heart for a community of believers. God made us for community. Bill Hybels captures this when he told his congregation at Willow Creek:

God made your heart to yearn for community.

You long to know and be known

To love and be loved

To serve and be served

To celebrate and be celebrated

I struggle with the elusive nature of community. As a man – like most men – I'm not very good with relationships. – as a group let's just say that we are relationally challenged. But I want to tell you that if you think men are relationally challenged – male engineers are even more so. We're

Just the facts

kind of people. If you want to get into the male engineers mind set – read Dilbert.

I love the one where



I cannot tell you how many times I have spent time with someone – and when I get home Barbara asks me an obvious relational question “How are they doing?” “What’s going on with so and so.” – and I answer – “It didn’t come up.”

But in spite of the fact that I am relationally challenged – I believe that God has given me a heart that longs to see God’s people experience rich community life. And that heart has come from soaking in the scriptures. I believe that God’s heart for community is expressed everywhere in the Scriptures.

But its not just men who are relationally challenged. True community in our culture is rare and getting rarer. In very short order our nation is unraveling relationally / we’re becoming more isolated. Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone* does a great job documenting this slide.

A 2006 study conducted by the University of Chicago:

- In 1985, the average American had three people in whom to confide matters that were important to them. In 2004, that number dropped to two.
- In 1985 10% of Americans had no close friends rose. When the same question was posed in 2004 - 24.6 percent reported having no close friends.

And as the church we are not immune – the statistics are better in the church – but we are long way from experiencing true community.

Eugene Peterson (long time pastor and translator of *the Message*) has said

Getting [people] saved is easy; becoming a community is difficult.

The stakes are high – Jesus said that world would know He is who He says He is by our love for one another - by our unity.¹ God has called us in this place to be involved with Him in transforming those separated from God into fully devoted followers of Christ. Jesus tells us that the drawing card is our unity and our love for one another. I would paraphrase Jesus statement and say:

The world will see Jesus when they see the church as a place

To Know and be known

To Love and be loved

To Serve and be Served

To Celebrate and be celebrated

Without the church being a community of people who are loving and being loved – the world isn't going to know who Jesus is. - Let's see what insight the Holy Spirit can give us from His word today – to give us a little better understanding of God's heart in this area.

The Scriptures – Hebrews 11:9-10; 13-16; 39-40

Our text is taken from Hebrews 11. Every week Jim LaMontagne has provided great help to me in preparing my sermon. This week when he reviewed it he lovingly said that it was a good sermon looking for a text. But you have to understand I'm a lot like that the person who only has a hammer – so everything looks like a nail. I have such a longing to see deep and rich community in Jesus' church - that I see community everywhere in Scripture. And I see it integral to our text this week. Hopefully by God's grace – you will too.

People of God hear the Word of God

⁹ By faith he [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. .. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

³⁹ And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

We see community in a number of places in our text - a holy and unfulfilled longing described.

- living as an alien in the land of promise – talking about not being connected
- looking for a city – talking about the longing to be connected – in God
- seeking a country – talking about the desire to belong
- desiring a better country – talking about the fact that our community here is incomplete
- He has prepared a city for them – talking about the promise of future community

“Apart from Us”

But then there's a most curious phrase:

[They] did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

They didn't receive what was promised? “Apart from us?” How are we connected to these great giants of the faith? How is their destiny some way dependent upon us?

Let's see if I can answer this by paraphrasing the context of all of the scriptures we have been looking from the end of Chapter 10 to the beginning of Chapter 12 saying to us in the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Church – I want you to think about, consider, ponder, and brainstorm how we can stimulate one another to love and good works – how to encourage one another. I want to do that now by having you look at these men and women of old. They did everything by faith – some conquered kingdoms – received promises. Yet many suffered immensely – were scorned and mocked and even killed. All the time they had a longing to be part of something bigger than themselves. They had a deep longing for a God centered community. You might be feeling that too. But guess what – They did not receive the big two promises

My promised Messiah and resulting forgiveness of sin through the cross AND
My promise of the Holy Spirit

But you received them. You have received all that Jesus brought – including the Holy Spirit. They didn't receive either promise.

I've spent this whole book showing how Jesus is better in every way than the Old Covenant.

And that means what you have is better than what they had.

But here is the secret - And they aren't going to receive it apart from you. Then need to wait for you. Soon I will be drawing both groups together. I am preparing a city for both of you.

I am on a mission to bring together My people in one holy community.

These Old Testament folk have pointed the way.

Your job is to be free of everything that keeps you from running that race to that city.

I want you to do it together with your brothers and sisters on journey. Spend time together.

Help each other to stay focused on Jesus – all faith comes from Him and is towards Him.

Don't leave anyone behind.

As Americans this is how we hear text from Hebrews 12:1

¹Therefore, since ~~we~~ **I** have such a great a cloud of witnesses surrounding ~~us~~ **me**, let ~~us~~ **me** also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles ~~us~~ **me**, and let ~~us~~ **me** run with endurance the race that is set before ~~us~~ **me**, ²fixing ~~our~~ **my** eyes on Jesus,

Do you see the difference - God's heart is that the church is an "us thing" – not a "me thing."

God made you with a longing for a city – yearning for a heavenly country. There is a major misconception in the body of Christ these days – That we are supposed to be content with "God alone." That sounds so spiritual. When we experience loneliness and isolation – we are supposed to find fulfillment in our relationship with God alone – He is everything. That is contrary to the Word of God. In the Garden, Adam without sin had deep fellowship with God. God walked with him in the cool of the garden. Yet God said "It is not good for man

to be alone." God made us not only for relationship with Him – but with each other. Both are essential.

That doesn't mean that there aren't some people who make people their God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's warning is applicable here "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community," and, "Let him who is not in community beware of being alone."

So if this concept that God is on a mission to form His people into a community – that apart from us – His purposes aren't fulfilled in the lives of others - where else do we find this in the scripture – remember I have a Hammer and everything looks like a nail – so be careful. Make sure I'm not stretching these out of context.

When the high priest Caiaphas prophesied Jesus death – John describes one of the purposes of Jesus' death. His death was

not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. John 11:52

One of the least talked about reasons (and there are many) for Christ's death – is that God wants to bring together a community of believers. Jesus died "in order that" this might happen.

Previously Jesus had told his disciples that ...

"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." John 10:16

Paul told the Ephesians 2 ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵..., so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

One of the purposes of the blood of Christ is to bring near those who are separated from Him – but not just bring them near – to make them one with us. Just as the Old Testament saints are not complete apart from us – there are those outside the faith today who God wants to draw into our community. God's purposes are deeper than just getting us to heaven. He wants to form a community.

Is this community for now or for the future? The answer is Yes and the question is reminiscent of the disciples asking Jesus about the coming of the kingdom – "Is it time Lord." ⁱⁱ Jesus pointed them to Pentecost. Today is Pentecost – Most of the time on Pentecost we concentrate on the power of God – "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." – and that's extremely important to Pentecost. If you want a Pentecost sermon about the pyrotechnics of the Power of the Spirit – check out my Sermon on Pentecost from last year – in that sermon there is a tremendous testimony from Kim Nelson about how the Spirit moved in power in her life. I believe that a major part of Pentecost is supernaturally empowering the church.

But just as there is an overlooked purpose of the coming Messiah and the Cross - there is a dimension of Pentecost that is often overlooked. And that is that Pentecost birthed a community – the church – it brought together people from far and wide. Pentecost brought Jews from all the surrounding countries. They all spoke different languages. The gift of tongues – supernaturally speaking in all of these languages - was a symbol of God reversing the curse of the Tower of Babel. God divided mankind at the Tower of Babel – and now at Pentecost He is telling us that this is the beginning of bringing us back together.

Peter's words at the end of sermon were:

³⁹"For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." Acts 2:39

God was saying through Pentecost – I am going to give you the supernatural power to bring together those who are far off – who are separated – who don't speak the same language. Because that's my heart. And apart from you who have received the promises – the others won't be complete. The two great promises – the Messiah and the Holy Spirit are now yours. But they are ushering in an ingathering – where I am building a city – a community – a country – to make my people One.

Community is elusive – it's difficult – relationships are full of land mines – But God is showing us that His power is available to bring us together.

Our Response

God is saying to us – that it is His heart to bring together a group of people – both in the future and now in this present age. That individualistic Christianity is not in His plan. And that apart from us – there is not fulfillment for others – for the all who are separated from the promises.

What are we to do in light of this?

Well – we've taken the first step – the recognition that God is on a mission to bring His people together – to build a community. The recognition, that "apart from us" others will not receive what God has promised.

But a second and very important step is to accept the incompleteness of this age. Pentecost is just the beginning – Even the Holy Spirit is but the down payment / 1st first fruits of what is to come. Our community will still leave us longing. But don't give up on that longing for a city – though unfulfilled – Come on church – run the race – the Old Testament saints did it and you have much more at your disposal.

Another step is to recognize that one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit – is to bring unity - to bring people who are separate and make them one – learn to watch for that. It's the work of the enemy to divide and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring together. Paul said to the Ephesians:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (NIV) Eph 4: 3

What would it look like if The Barn got it – If we said – Jesus I see that it is your plan not just to get us to Heaven but to draw us together – to bring those in who are different – I see that we cannot be complete – without that. You see – it is an artificial division that says we are outward focused and they are inward focused. In God's heart – the church is called to both. Those who are separated from God are being called into something – they are called into a community and apart from us –they are not going to receive the promise.

What would happen if this truth sank in and we got it? Jesus gave us the answer in John 17 – that the world will believe that the Father sent Jesus to save us and to bring us together.

Confession / Reflection – call up the Worship Team

Let's close with a time of Confession and Reflection. The Holy Spirit was given both to give us power to be witnesses and to bring us together. How is the Holy Spirit stirring in you this morning? Who is God calling you to run the race with? Are you running it alone? Just you and God? God put a longing in you for community? What is He calling you to do about it? Who are the people that God is saying to you – Apart from you – they are not complete – we have received something better – we have received the promised Messiah and the promised Holy Spirit – apart from us they are incomplete – who is God calling you by the Pentecost power of His Holy Spirit to reach across the divide – and allow God to give you the ability to communicate to them to invite them into our community here at The Barn. Not to just to evangelize – but to invite them into community with you – to be part of the move of God – bring together all who are separated from God.

Because Church - that's His heart.

Father – speak to us now in this Silence

ⁱ John 17 ²⁰"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

ⁱⁱ Acts 1:6-8