

19 Feb 17 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

**Leviticus 19:1,2,9-18** Be holy - the Lord is God

**1 Corinthians 3:10,11,16-23** Built on Christ alone - God's wisdom

**Matthew 5:38-48** Loving your enemies

The Community of Christ, a relationship of loving connections.

We need to be connected. Not just members of the church, we need to be members of the family, one another's family.

We need to be aware, that, I am your brother, you are my brother, my sister in Christ, and that means that we are inextricably connected through the death and resurrection of the saviour.

Jesus has brought about a revolution within us and around us. We are new creations. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Therefore we have a new way of life.

This is not primarily living with new rules, -don't do this, don't do that, it is living a new life, a live with others. It is living a life of connection and a life of love. We no longer live as independent people, as the world views family and relationships, we live as interdependent people who are vitally concerned with the welfare and wellbeing of each other.

Too often, a church, that is a congregation of believers, not "The Church", but the local church, is described or thought of as a collection of people, maybe all different, who hold to the same set of doctrines. We have said that of our own church, we are a Lutheran Church, and we believe the Old and New Testaments to be the inerrant word of God in all their parts and the Lutheran confessions to be an accurate interpretation of the word of God, as found in the unaltered book of concord of 1530.

But this connection is a cerebral connection, a connection of wisdom, a connection of doctrine. It is not the connection spoken of in scripture.

In Acts 2 we find a description of the life of the early church.

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

This is the kind of connection that the early church had.

And this is the kind of connection that Jesus wants for His people.

<sup>20</sup>“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17: 20-23.

Jesus wants us to experience the same unity with one another that He experiences with the father and the Holy Spirit. If that is the unity that Jesus wants for us, and prays for us to have, surely that is the unity that is possible with us.

Let us cease to be individuals. Let us become the people of God.

Every member is a vital part of the connections with people. Each member needs to take responsibility for at least one other person in the church, to encourage and build them up and to be aware and active if ever they stop coming to church.

Too often people stop coming and no one follows up to find out what happened. Are we so disconnected that we cannot inquire after another’s wellbeing? Are we so internally focused that another member’s life is none of our business? “Am I my brother’s keeper?” protested Cain. “err well ..... YES!” is the implied answer!

Did the disciples gather together with Jesus for a period of instruction and then go home to have lunch? No they were with Him day and night.

Did the early church gather for an hour on Sunday and then go home? No. they would gather for hours, but when they did eat, they got together in groups and would fellowship with one another over a meal, and then help each other with whatever needed to be done.

I have said many times that we need to increase our connections with one another. That hasn’t happened to the extent that I would like. I want to see people growing in their relationships with one another. Why? Because it is only then that you can grow in your relationship with Christ, because that is the way He designed His church. The Holy Spirit connects us with one another and with the Father.

We are the people of God. Jesus affectionately refers to us as His sheep, with Him being the Shepherd. Sheep are herd animals, they need to be together. They are safer together and they are in danger alone. The devil, on the other hand is like a roaring lion prowling around seeking someone to devour. If we are not connected, or have loose connections with the people of God we are fair game. We see that time and again, where one of God’s people is isolated through some tragedy or offence, they start off OK, but they become more and more distant from the church until they declare themselves to be atheist or something similar.

Sheep need to be together, and so instead of thinking that by learning we can increase our faith, let’s try increasing our connectedness and see if we don’t discover more about Jesus through closer connections with His body.

It occurs to me that to form a new habit, sometimes you need to give up an old one. Old habits die hard they say, and so we need to work at this.

We need to give up individualistic Christianity, because it is not in fact true biblical Christianity, we have been hoodwinked! We need to reject the aloneness in our own faith and take up the true faith of unity and holy community. That is the church.

So we need to make it happen!

why not make a time with someone today. Even better, why not, after the service, during coffee, invite someone to your place for lunch. It doesn't have to be anything special, the more special you make it the harder work it is. No, just have a normal lunch together.

Can you do that? Can you connect?

If it doesn't happen today, when can it happen?