

New Hope Sermon - Community

Our core value that is the focus today is community – the power of community, the need for community and the necessity to reframe our Christian walk in terms of community. The funny incident that happened at church last Sunday is a marvelous illustration.

Do you remember? The church had provided this lovely large birthday sheet cake for my birthday and had placed 2 candles at the 4 edges of the cake. You all sang happy birthday to me and to Dambudzo and first he blew out the candles on his separate cake. Then it was my turn. So I took a deep breath and blew right across the center of the cake and not one candle was blown out. Not one!! The PowerPoint says: “Every successful individual knows that his or her achievement depends on a community of persons working together.” Knowing that, I invited others to come and help me blow out the candles, and when we all blew together, all the candles went out. What a riot. Obviously I cannot manage life as it needs to be managed without community☺

The Biblical story that illustrates this principle is in Exodus. It is the story of the construction of the Tabernacle for the Israelites who were still wandering in the wilderness. The story starts off in chapter 25: 1 The LORD said to Moses,

2 “Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. **3** These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; **4** blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; **5** ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather ; acacia wood; **6** olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; **7** and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. **8** “**Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.** **9** Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.



Every furnishing and color and aspect of the tabernacle was a picture of the relationship the Israelites were to have with God. First of all, notice that the tabernacle itself was built to be portable. That way it could be taken down when the Israelites moved and set up in a new location. God was demonstrating that He was going to be with them throughout the journey.

Looking at the picture, we see ...

Altar of Burnt Offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bronze altar outside the Tabernacle used for the sacrifices - Symbolized how sacrifice restored one's relationship with God
Washbasin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large washbasin outside the Tabernacle used by the priests to cleanse themselves before performing their duties- Symbolized the need for spiritual cleansing
Table	A wooden table located in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. The Bread of the Presence and various utensils were kept on this table
Bread of the Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Twelve loaves of baked bread, one for each tribe Symbolized the spiritual nourishment God offers his people
Lampstands and Lamps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A golden lampstand located in the Holy Place, which held seven burning oil lamps the lampstand lit the Holy Place for the priests
Incense Altar	An altar in the Holy Place in front of the curtain used for burning God's special incense and symbolic

	of acceptable prayer
Anointing oil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A special oil used to anoint the priests and all the pieces in the Tabernacle • A sign of being set apart for God
Curtain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Curtain that divided the two sacred rooms of the Tabernacle – the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place -Symbolized how the people were separated from God because of sin

In the Most Holy Place:

Ark of the Covenant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A golden rectangular box that contained the Ten Commandments -Symbolized God’s covenant with Israel’s people
Atonement Cover	The lid to the Ark of the Covenant
Cover	Symbolized the presence of God among his people

(New Living Translation Bible Life Application notes Ex 3:6)

Building the Tabernacle was the task given to the community. You wonder how these former slaves from Egypt, now traveling in the desert, had all these valuables of gold and silver and fine jewelries and beautiful cloths. These are what was given them by the Egyptians as they left. All the plagues made the Egyptians willing (even glad) to give this gifts to the Israelites to get of them. God blesses us in so many unusual ways but the reason is so that we can share those blessings. And the Israelites did. They brought offering after offering after offering to Moses for the building of the tabernacle.

But there is more to the community story than just the offering of the people. Exodus 31:1-6 says, *“Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, 5 to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. 6 Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you:”*

So we read in **Chapter 36:** *2 “Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work. 3 They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.*

God’s promise was that in that tabernacle, built by His instruction, God would dwell among them (Ex 25:8). And it was so. We pick up the story in Exodus chapter 40. After each one worked with all the offerings of the people, finally the tabernacle was completed. Chapter 40: 34-35 says: *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

GOD CAME DOWN JUST AS HE PROMIED. HIS GLORY FILLED THE TABERNACLE. God’s glory came to reside among the people because they had all worked together to build the Tabernacle at God’s direction. That’s community. But there’s more. The presence of the Pillar of cloud over the tabernacle became a visible reminder to the Israelites that God was with them. Ex 40:36-38, *“36 In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; 37 but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. 38 So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.”* God was proving to the people that He indeed was their God and they belonged to Him.

With this model, let's look at a few principles of community: #1. The community value of teamwork. We come together (for a task, for a mutual goal). It is a beginning. Then we keep together. Our process of working together can lead to success. #2. If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. The image is of rowers in a skull, rowing in the same direction, at the same time, using their corporate strength to push their boat forward. #3. Mother Teresa said: "I can do things you cannot; and you can do things I cannot. But together we can do great things."

(pp) And so we have this calligraphy which pulls all these strengths of community together: Community is about connecting; it's about collaborating together; it's how people listen and support each others's ideas and hopes and dreams. It's combining our passions to approach the possibilities ahead of us as we are involved together. It's about choosing to create or focus or explore future solutions as we encourage one another, we grow together, we educate one another and learn from one another. As we do that and move from individualism, we can change the future.

This is what the Bible emphasizes in the New Testament. When Jesus ascended and sent the Holy Spirit to empower those who followed Him, He created the church. That is His body – we are many parts. Ephesians 4:15-16 tells us that when each part is working properly, the Body grows into maturity and into Christ's character and thus can fulfill God's purposes in the world. All together.

Beloved, the individualism that is embedded in the West is not a Biblical emphasis. Sure, we are each of value and each have gifts, but the gifts are given for the common good. We are here to serve each other together – be aligned with God's heart for the world together.

So, in application, what are we called to create as a church so God's shekinah glory can abide here? How are our gifts of exhortation, or prayer, or service or teaching or mercy or shepherding going to help us get where God wants us to be together? And, how can our model be replicated as you go back to your home countries?

The early church described in Acts 2 is a very counter-cultural model. Acts 2:44-45: **44** *All the believers were together and had everything in common.* **45** *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.* They cared for the widows and the orphans, who were throw-away people in Roman society at that time. They worshipped together from their different cultural and ethnic backgrounds; they ate together; they shared their possessions together. They called out sin and performed miracles by the power of the Spirit. They dealt with conflict and learned how to love one another. In all those ways, they demonstrated God's love for the whole world and for each other. Christians in community must again show the world not just family values but the bond of love in Christ – very practically.

And that's we want our community to be at New Hope. We are intentionally a church which is based on community – not on a group of individuals who come together to worship and return to their individualistic goals and lifestyle. We believe each one's value and voice is needed to help us all grow up into Christ's character and purposes. We belong together as an invaluable parts of the whole. "The most useful aspect of a person [in community] is not a head full of knowledge but a heart full of love, with ears open to listen and hands willing to serve." We are like the pattern on a quilt. A quilt can look messy from the backside with all the threads crisscrossing. Sin among us will strain relationships or good will from time to time. But our goal is that God's love is seen as the broad pattern from how we worship and interact together. We need each other – not just to blow out candles on a big sheet cake. But to each fulfill our role so we fit together like a large jigsaw puzzle -giving, serving, praying, demonstrating God's love.

I have staked my life on these principles because that is what I see Jesus did and continues to do around the world. Having a core value of community is our commitment to go forward on God's kingdom agenda together. We love as Christ has loved us and serve others as He commanded us to – with joy and humility and great grace. Let's pray. **Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson** **11/12/17**