

Finding Community

Colossians 1:11-23a

Hebrew 13: 1-8

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Colossians 1: 11-23a

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard.

Hebrew 13: 1-8

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Lightning McQueen, a slick, shiny, ambitious, famous, rookie racecar is cocky, arrogant, fiercely independent and adored by fans. He has no need for anyone, no friends, no pit crew. He is going places, going all the way to the top, and no one is going with him. Well, that is until a freak accident leaves him on a barren stretch of road in the little town of Radiator Springs, and he comes to learn what community is really all about. He learns that being a talented superstar does not make you better than everyone else, that we all have talents, gifts and skills. He learns that getting into a difficult

situation can be made worse when you try to go it alone, that moving too fast and by yourself only makes the road bumpy. He learns about the gift of friendship.

Community quickly becomes something vital, important and healing in Lightning McQueen's life. Community overcomes the driving ambition that been so important. He discovers true friends, true family, with no strings attached, and that everyone belongs. All are welcome. Lightning McQueen learns to see himself as someone who was in need, yet also as someone who can give. He is able to graciously accept a tow ride from Mater, a cleaning from the fire truck, Luigi's new tires, Ramone's paint job and Flo's best can of oil, and he in turn opens his new friends to his world of racing, giving them all a renewed vitality and purpose.

Lightning discovers a community drawn together in mutual care, support and respect, a community that shares its resources and individual gifts. A community not unlike our own.

Over these past 5 pandemic months I have thought often about the idea of community, of how we have had to become community in so many new ways. Even our language is different, as we live out being together while we are safely tucked away in our many scattered places. Although we have been separated, isolated, from one another, we have not lost our connections, our shared faith story, our vision, or our ministries. And in fact, we have even grown.

Our worshipping congregation, suddenly forced out of the sanctuary in March, has grown in the online world. Our virtual sanctuary allows us to worship with those who no longer live nearby, with snowbirds who were unable to return this summer, with those who have health or mobility concerns, or who feel more comfortable being at home until there is a proven vaccine for the virus that has turned our world upside down. We have learned new ways to be together in community through new technologies that have been both a blessing and a curse.

Yet as the cliché rightly says, 'the more things change, the more they stay the same.' All the things that make a church a Christian community have not changed. The timeless teachings in the letter to the Hebrews, the early Jewish Christians, are just as true for us as well and have not changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Being in Christian community is not a physical presence as much as a spiritual presence, as Christian community is sharing a common life in Christ. It has been said that "community is the world as God wants it to be. It is the gift of a rich and challenging life together, one that we need and can receive with joy. The biblical ideal of community challenges us to commit ourselves to life together as the people of God." Committing ourselves to life together as the people of God is a spiritual presence, unbounded by physical limits.

One of the most important ways the community acts is by embodying, living out, Jesus Christ's continuing presence on earth. Jesus, the image of the invisible God, is the firstborn of all creation who holds all things together. He is the head of the body, the church; the one who first showed us how to be in community.

I recently read a small piece that so eloquently expresses what a Christian community is, and while I could not find the author's name, I want to share his or her words with you:

"The practice of Christian community, quite simply, makes the gospel a lived reality. It embodies a specific, personal way of life together in Christ. It strengthens us to

live the life to which we are called; it conveys God's life and power to the world at large. And it is necessary.

When we imagine that we, as Christians and humans, can live in total independence and self-sufficiency, we are deluding ourselves. God, from the beginning, never intended that we should go through the world alone. We simply cannot experience fully the power and delight of life with God without also being drawn into life together with our sisters and brothers in Christ. Without experiencing such life together, we will not discover how wonderful the news about Jesus really is.....(We are called to) teach and correct each other, encourage each other, pray for each other, and bear each other's burdens. Be friends with one another, kind, compassionate, and generous in hospitality. Serve one another and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This list just scratches the surface, but it is enough to remind us that we need the community of faith to grow up in Christ."

It is in community that mutual love continues, it is how and where we remember and care for those imprisoned by events and circumstances that prohibit them from living a life free to do and be who they want. It is where we know we are cared for and remembered when we are imprisoned. It is where we find accountability and guidance so that relationships are honored, money is not worshipped, and we learn to find contentment with what we have, while being confident of Jesus' help, encouragement, hope and care. It is in community that we move out of our lives, our own heads, our own interests, so that we may show hospitality to strangers, and perhaps unknowingly entertain angels.

It is where we not only serve, but learn to be served. Like Lightning McQueen we can find it so much easier to give, and are challenged to learn to gracefully receive.

We are reminded by the citizens of Radiator Springs about the powerful grace of connection, acceptance and encouragement as bear one another's burdens and lighten our loads. We are reminded by our faith ancestors to love in mutual relationships, to trust that God will not leave us but remain present to help, and to imitate the faith of the leaders among us.

Community is changing, evolving, from what we knew just a few short months ago, yet these connections, relationships, remain a gift of love from God, and how God created the world to be. The road before us now is bumpy, but together we move ahead where God is leading us. Amen.