

Our Loudest Witness: Community

Intro:

2022 theme - Tell the Story, Live the Way

This sermon series called Our Loudest Witness....4 values that defined the early church, set them apart, defined them to onlookers

- provide a template for us....even in 2022
- These same values should be the foundation of how our witness is lived out....providing the DNA for how we should live

Diversity...our warmest welcome

Ministry...our best effort

Generosity....our boldest gift

Community...our strongest bond

As we go deeper in community our bond grows stronger and our witness grows louder!

How does being in community/living out community amplify our witness? Tell the story of Jesus?

As we go deeper in:

Loving

Caring

Encouraging

Partnering

Protecting

Praying

As our bond grows stronger, grows deeper...our witness grows louder...which makes Jesus easier to find in the 757...and when Jesus is found, we are then more readily able to reach people that are far from God!!

For City Life to have the witness we are supposed to have, we all need to ask: AM I COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY AS MY STRONGEST BOND?

**We need to be in community for so many reasons....listed above...but tonight I want us to unpack what I believe are 3 critical distinctive characteristics for our community to Tell the Story of Jesus!
(NOT THE GREATER CHURCH....THIS CHURCH FAMILY AT CITY LIFE)**

1. Loving
2. Inspirational
3. Invitational

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1. **LOVING: It takes a LOVING community to declare a loving message!!**

1Cor 13:1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

- what is true for one, is true for many....
- no one wants to listen to a noisy gong or clanging cymbal
- there is loud that attracts and loud that pushes away...we want to be loud with love so that we attract!

Early church was a loving place! The books of Acts is filled with phrases about the early church being together, sharing all things in common, caring for each other (Acts 1:14, 2:1, 2:42-44)

**READ: It was a place where we see the pursuit of relationships was an integral part of their lives! Connectedness was literally a definer of how they lived....and it was BOTH their love for Jesus and for each other that forged this strongest bond that made the world notice!
(NOT - miracles, casting out of demons or even raising the dead!)**

Jn 13:35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

Jn. 15:12-13 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. 13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends...This is my command: Love each other.

READ:

HOW ARE YOU LOVING...IN THIS COMMUNITY?

WHO ARE YOU LOVING...IN THIS COMMUNITY?

DOES YOUR LOVING IN THIS COMMUNITY MAKE JESUS LOUDER IN THE 757?

2. Inspirational: It takes an inspirational community to declare an inspirational message

Inspire - to fill someone with the urge or ability to do or feel something; stimulate, motivate, passion (not intellectual), connected to the soul

Greek word = creativeness, awakening

Heb 3:13 But **encourage** (INSPIRE WITH COURAGE!) one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Encourage = to inspire with courage (Jesus cheerleaders for each other)
strengthen

Example - parenting

Discipline with encouragement...inspiring courage in the heart of your child that they can make a better choice, that they can be kind to their brother, that they can learn to listen and obey, that they have what it takes...smart enough, brave enough, strong enough, etc...

READ: One of the primary activities of the early church in relationship with each other in community was to encourage each other daily; don't forget that many of the people in the early church were being shunned from families, disowned for their radical choice to be part of the "ecclesia" (the called out ones)....they needed to be strengthened and encouraged!!

Today following Jesus should at times be uncomfortable, values run counter to culture, completely different value system, Heavenly kingdom

HOW ARE YOU INSPIRING....IN COMMUNITY

WHO ARE YOU INSPIRING....IN COMMUNITY?

DOES YOUR INSPIRING IN THIS COMMUNITY MAKE JESUS LOUDER IN THE 757?

3. Invitational: It takes an invitational community to declare an inviting message

Welcoming, other's minded...making a place at the table!

More than ever before in history...and then with the pandemic of these last 2 years

- people are more disconnected
- people are more isolated

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- people are more lonely (don't have to be alone to be lonely)
- **experts believe that our generation is the loneliest society in human history**
- **Harvard study** in Feb 2021 found that 36% of US adults are dealing with serious loneliness...as a result of not having relationships where they feel that a person truly cares for them
- recently coined term in the field of psychology - "**FB depression**" = spend too much time engaging with other online to the extent that it limits one's ability to bond, connect and belong in real time

AS SAD AND TERRIFYING AS THIS IS.....

PERFECT SET UP TO TELL THE STORY OF JESUS....CHURCH TO OFFER SOMETHING THAT THE WORLD IS DESPERATE FOR....THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL AND THE INVITATION TO BE A PART OF GOD'S FAMILY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE RELEVANT, MORE NEEDED, MORE TIMELY!!!

By it's very definition the church is called the body of Christ....is a family, is a place of relationship, connectedness, exchange,, physical, emotion and spiritual!!!!

SUGGEST: YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEM MIGHT NOT BE SIN....IT MIGHT BE SOLITUDE!!!

Listen to me....solitude/loneliness was the very 1st problem encountered after Creation and BEFORE sin entered the world! Gen 2 gives us a complete overview of the world that God had just created...explains that God placed Adam in this amazing, pleasurable garden with instructions to work in the garden, care for it and that he could eat from any tree except for the one tree of the knowledge of good and evil

V. 18 (chap 2)...”It is not good for man to be alone...”

Isolation/loneliness was a problem...before sin, before evil, before wickedness, before brokenness, when all was still perfect and man and God had perfect communionloneliness was a problem that humankind had!

You are not lonely because you are broken or weak... you are lonely because God created you to be placed in His family and to be intimately known by Him and others!

Ecc1. 4:12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ps. 68:6 God sets the lonely in families...

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Romans 15: 6 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Our community, our table, our message must declare that there is a place for everyone....they are invited to be a part!!!

HOW ARE YOU INVITING....INTO THIS COMMUNITY?

WHO ARE YOU INVITING....INTO THIS COMMUNITY?

DOES YOUR INVITING IN THIS COMMUNITY MAKE JESUS LOUDER IN THE 757?

Read “Out of the Cave” by Chris Hodges (pastor of Church of the Highlands in Alabama). P.96

“There is no way to function alone and also to be fully alive. To function in healthy ways, we have to be fully connected and loved. To be fully connected and loved, we have to be fully known. To be fully known we have to realize that we need each other. Foundational to every human being is relational connectedness, with God and with others. This need never goes away.”

Closing:

READ: DO YOU SEE THIS STRONGEST BOND OF COMMUNITY AS PART OF YOUR CALL TO MAKE JESUS KNOWN IN THE 757?

1 Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Loving - how & who

Inspirational - how & who

Invitational - how & who

Trust the the Holy Spirit reveal to you next steps, ways for you to further grow in your championing this value of community in your own life so that as we come together corporately our witness is made louder than ever....reaching those far from God with the hope of Jesus Christ!

Practical....join a life group

Pray