

“Can’t Miss a Sunday: Community Center”

Galatians 6:1-3 (NLT)

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One day an out of work mime was visiting the zoo trying to earn some money as a street performer. However, as soon as he started to draw a crowd, the zookeeper grabbed him and dragged him into his office.

The zookeeper explained to the mime that the zoo's most popular attraction, a gorilla, had suddenly died. The keeper feared that attendance at the zoo would fall off. He offered the mime a job to dress up as the gorilla until they could get another one. The mime accepted.

The next morning, before the crowd arrived, the mime put on the gorilla suit and entered the cage. He discovered that it was a great job. He could sleep all he wanted, play and make fun of people, and he drew bigger crowds than he ever had as a mime.

However, eventually the crowds tired of him and he became bored just swinging on tires. He began to notice that the people were paying more attention to the lion in the cage next to his.

Not wanting to lose the attention of his audience, he climbed to the top of his cage, crawled across a partition, and dangled from the top to the lion's cage. Of course, this made the lion furious, but the crowd loved it.

At the end of the day the zookeeper came and gives the mime a raise for being such a good attraction as a gorilla.

Well, this went on for some time. The mime kept taunting the lion, the crowds grew larger, and his salary kept going up. Then one terrible day when he was dangling over the furious lion, he slipped and fell. The mime was terrified. The lion gathered itself and prepared to pounce. The mime was so scared that he began to run around and round the cage with the lion close behind.

Finally, the mime started screaming and yelling, "Help! Help meee!!!", but the lion was quick and pounced. The mime soon found himself flat on his back looking up at the angry lion.

The lion slowly lowered his snarling mouth towards him and said: "Be quiet!!!! Do you want to get us BOTH fired?"

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Oh, a great pretender only to find out that he was not the only one pretending. This morning I'm afraid there are some great pretenders here. And I don't mean that necessarily in a bad way. You see what we need is a place where we do not have to pretend, we can be who we are. We can be genuine and authentic. Not putting on our special church face, but simply being who we are with out pretending. Be real.

I feel sometimes we act like we got it all together when people know you don't have it all together. We smile and act like everything is okay when it is not. Now in order to be real there must be community. There must be trust. There must be real community. Today we continue the series “Can’t Miss a Sunday: Community Center.” I need to be in church on Sunday to be with the community of believers.

Before we get too far let's look at definition of a Community Center. **Community centers are public locations where members of a community tend to gather for group activities, social support, public information, and other purposes. (Wikipedia)**

Group activities. Check. Social support. Check. Information. Check. Other purposes. Check Check.

**Definition of COMMUNITY CENTER: a building or group of buildings for a community's educational and recreational activities (Webster's Dictionary)**

It is at this Community Center at 1551 Belcher Road that we have Christian educational activities. And recreational...that is re-creational activities. Yes, a community center for re-creation.

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)**

Through the Community Center we can be a new creation.

Notice the very word **COMMUNITY**.

First of all, there is no community without "u!" You make up this community. Also, no community without "unity."

Church is a community center because there is unity here. Oh, not that we all think alike, act alike, but there is oneness. There is a unity that we agree upon that Jesus is our top priority. Amen?????

We can agree to disagree about politics, certain aspects of Biblical interpretation, but still be in unity that at the center of this community center is THE CROSS.

**Galatians 6:2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.**

Now let me say that the phrase "the law of Christ" is only mentioned twice. The Apostle Paul write of Galatians mentions it here and then he mentions it again in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:21).

Most would agree that what Paul is referring to as the Law of Christ is known as the Great Commandment. **Mark 12:28-31 New Living Translation (NLT) 28 One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"**<sup>29</sup> **Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD.**<sup>30</sup> **And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'**<sup>31</sup> **The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."**

The statement that Jesus makes about Loving God is actually found in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Loving neighbors is also found in the Old Testament in Leviticus 19:18. Jesus is reiterating and emphasizing these profound words. In fact, He says no “other commandment is greater than these.” Oh, our vision statement is.... Loving God!!! Loving All!!

At the community center we have 2 types of community. We have the community that surrounds us. We should never stop inviting. (Invite cards at the Welcome Center) We also have the community of faith. Because of that community of faith, we are to share each other’s burdens. Yes, Jesus said love others that means helping them. You may be saying, “What?” Me helping someone.

I just got to repeat this verse because I like how the New Living Translation phrases it:

**Galatians 6:3 If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.**

We need each other’s help---that’s what a community does.

Unfortunately, many of us like to wear a mask. We like to hide behind a certain fence, a barrier so that people don’t get to see all of you. We can’t love people authentically if they remained fenced in.

Many may remember the sit-com “Tool Time” with Tim Allen. The show ran from 1991-1999 and is still seen in syndication. The Tim Taylor family had a next-door neighbor, Wilson. “Hidy-ho neighbor.” His full name in the show was Wilson Wilson, Jr. The actor was Earl Hindman. His character lived next door to the Taylors for years and yet you never saw Wilson’s full face. **(image)**

When he was not behind the fence, he was behind a shrub, plant, a menu, or an object never completely revealing the bottom part of his face. Always somewhat hidden. Never full disclosure.

I believe God’s desire is that we live in community with one another so you can be fully known.

The entire 8 years of the show’s run you never saw Wilson’s face. It wasn’t until the curtain call of the finale that his full face was revealed. Friends, don’t wait until the curtain call, the finale to be fully seen. Allow others into your ‘yard.’

How do we do that. I certainly don’t expect you to open up your darkest pain to someone you don’t even know. But at a community center, relationships are critical. Develop relationships.

It is so easy to pretend, wear a mask, put on our “religious wear face” and hide behind our ‘fence.’ Yet how are we to bear one another’s burdens if we don’t know what those burdens are.

The great part of the Church as a Community Center is that you don’t have to go through your problems and struggles alone. You have those around you that love you.

Oh, we wear a mask so no one knows the real us.  
 We wear a mask that even though we are hurting badly we wear a smile.  
 We wear a mask to hide hurt.  
 We wear a mask to have people think we are strong when we are actually weak.  
 We wear a mask saying I've got it all together when we don't.

What group are you in? Have you developed relationships? Pew buddies. If we gather for worship and then all go our separate ways, I'm not sure that is true community. At a community center we spend time with each other. You see the community center we're talking about today helps us realize that we are not alone. We are all in this together.

I want everyone who does not have any problems or concerns to raise their hands? XXXX

Yes, we are a community that has different backgrounds, different ages, different stages of faith and yet everyone has something to teach each other. All Ages! All In!

In an old article (2015) in Relevant Magazine, Shaun Stevenson wrote: "3 Ways the Church Can Build Better Community... Talking about Community is Good, Practicing it is Better (Shaun Stevenson, March 19, 2015, Relevant Magazine)

"Church should be a place where people feel safe and comfortable and secure and ready to share life with others. But if no one ever initiates that conversation, how much of a community do we really have? Should it always be the outsider's job to try and connect? Or should the insiders be more intentional about looking beyond their own cliques?

Are they safe to engage in their current environment? Will they be judged for any one of a myriad of daily choices? Will this group turn on them as soon as they say or do one thing wrong?

---Let me pause and say the 3 ways he identifies the church can build better communities are, "Put yourself aside, Be willing to put in the time, Walk alongside people not at them."-----

"Many people (in) church communities have a reputation of walking at people with a finger raised and shaking in disgust. Our churches need a reputation of arms around shoulders, walking together to face the challenges of life. If people feel they're going to be judged or ridiculed or ignored because of a life choice, they're not likely going to engage in any community. Instead they'll be walking to the door, grabbing their purse, and never coming back.

This doesn't mean that we excuse poor life decisions or make light of sin. This means being willing to recognize the world is broken, people are broken, and we all have issues in our lives to work through. Community is a place where those issues can be explored safely and in context of loving relationships."

Amen??

Community Center...a place of fun, a place for all ages and stages, a place where we are loved, a place where we get from behind the fence and allow people into our yard, a place where we can develop relationships and take off our mask.

I don't want to miss a Sunday. I want, I need a place where I can be...just as I am and allow God and others to love me, share my burdens and help me along this life's path.