

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
Septuagesima  
1 Corinthians 10:1-4  
January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Three weeks ago Dr. Joel Biermann taught a seminar on ethics at St. Stephen's Lutheran. We had six of our own members that attended. He made reference to a book I read years ago written by a man named Alasdair MacIntyre called "*After Virtue.*" He says that every ethic (or moral behavior) has a community around it. The community is defined by three distinctive things. A community has a creed, it has a narrative (a story), and it has a practice. Think of our community here at Christ Lutheran. Do we have a creed – a statement of what we believe? Sure we do. Do we have a story? We have a story that all of us are involved with here in this place from the very beginning 59 years ago until now. Do we have practices for our community? Yes, we have "a way" of doing things that we can call our own. We are a part of a community and that is a very good thing.

Our Lord shows us how important community is to individuals in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. Paul uses a "community" word five different times in these five verses. That "community" word is the word "All." "*For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were ALL under the cloud, and ALL passed through the sea, and ALL were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and ALL ate the same spiritual food, and ALL drank from the spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*"

The rock that the children of Israel gathered around, the one that kept the community together...the community that had a creed, a story, and a practice...the one that quenched their thirst in the desert, the one that kept them alive, Paul says, is Jesus Christ. The Lord that was Lord of their community back in the day, was still the same Lord that is the rock, the foundation for the community, in the day and age Paul lived as well. The same Lord and the same rock!

Nothing has changed. Jesus is still the rock – the stable foundation of the church – the means that gives us life in the desert of our lives – the center of our community. Jesus is the reason why we are here, the reason we have hope, the reason why we baptize our children, receive His body and blood for our forgiveness of sins, gather our youth and our adults together during the week for Bible study or an "extracurricular" event, the reason why we support Hillcrest, collect food and blankets for the needy, and the list goes on and on and on. But we do it, because Jesus is our rock. He is our foundation. He is what this community is built on. The "forefathers" of our parish-family knew this very well just as you do today. For that reason, they named this Church the most appropriate name of all – "Christ".

So, with Christ as our head – our foundation as a community together – like it or not – we are all in this together – even in the good times and the bad times. It's easy to be a part of a community when times are good. When times are good, we are usually all "getting along." When times are good more of the community participates, we all "pitch in" more, there is usually more time to "pitch in". When it's a good time for the community we are all smiles, people like each other, we are having fun. In a "going good" community it seems as though we get more done, more projects are getting accomplished, more progress in the right direction is taking place. We all like a good time community.

But what we don't like is a bad time community. When temper flare, when people are testy, when there is not enough money, when there is a controversy, when communication breaks down, when feelings are hurt, when times are tough, and whatever else you can think of – this

would give us an indication that we are a part of a bad time community. We don't like this kind of togetherness. That's why this kind of community is one we don't like to be a part of. It's hard to have community – it's hard to “be” community – during the bad times. Yet, there will be good and bad times. That's just the way it is. That's how it is in the community.

I hope you have been able to see how this community is really our family – no matter if we are talking about our family at home or our church family. These are the places where God has gathered His people. He gathers them at the dinner table, and at the altar. God is a “gatherer” of people into community – one with the other. We are not meant to be alone. God never designed humans to be alone. You don't begin life alone, you don't live life alone, and you don't die alone, though some would argue that they do. God has blessed us to be awesome individuals with talents and skills that are uniquely our own. But never are we to put those talents to use only for self. We were made for each other.

For example, why are you here today? Are you here because God needs your praise? Are you here because God just won't be able to function this week if I didn't sing to him, if I didn't pray to Him. Of course not. You are gathered here for a reason. He builds you up through the strength of His life-giving means so that you can live for your neighbor. Your neighbor needs you. Your neighbor needs your good works. Your neighbor is a part of “community” built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. This is why we are always more than “individuals.” We are put here – even in this very place – for a purpose that God has for you.

This world around us wants to accentuate your individualism. “Be yourself. Be who you are. You are you and that's okay.” We have said these things to ourselves and we have told our kids these things. And that is not wrong. We are who we are. We are special, the way we are. That is true – and I'm not trying to get all sappy. But we have a world that has taken this “Be who you are” idea and have emphasized it ten times too much. If it hurts your neighbor, so what, that's their problem. If it's at the expense of your family – they've got to get over it, I'm going to do my thing. If it takes me out of line with God's will for my life, goes against His Word, and damages the body of Christ we call community in this place, who cares. As long as I'm happy.” Beloved, there are sacrifices we make as individuals for the sake of the family. It's more than just about you.

Beloved, this Sunday we begin those funny Pre-Lent days where we have a little bit of Lent before we have Lent. It's almost like we have to prepare to be sad, before we are sad and then we get really sad during Holy Week. How sad. Who wants to be a part of such a sad community?

But do not despair. Our preparation and penitence during this season does not hold for us sadness. It is preparation for great joy. Within each of our weeks of Lent coming up, we have a mini celebration of the resurrection. That's what Sunday is all about. Jesus the rock, as Paul said, of our community is the stable foundation that all of this is about. And we know the end of the story. He does not stay dead. He lives. Our Easter is now. 1 Corinthians shows us how we are all in this together. We are a part of this wonderful life-giving community we call the people who believe that Jesus is not dead. We are the “alive” community.

You have a Creed. It's Christ. You have a story. That too is Christ. You have a practice. Today is all about Christ. He is the rock. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life. God be praised. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.