

Community Challenge - What About...?

As I read and take part in the "Being" challenge, something has been gnawing at me this week. Our author spends quite a bit of time talking about being in community with others who point to Christ. That is important- no doubt about it! Our Church family and "like minded" people are a key to our faith growth. However, it does not address part of what Jesus did in community- the scandalous part of Jesus' ministry. For example:

"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and the disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked the disciples, " Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

"On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." - Mark 2:15-17

There is no getting around it. Jesus spent time with people who were not pointing to God. In fact, church leaders were horrified to see some of the people he spent time within the community. We hear some of the Pharisee's words in Scripture, but can you imagine the gossip about him that is not recorded? He associates with "sinners" and tax collectors! "Sinners"- code for prostitutes, thieves, foreigners, gays, lepers, everyone who was cast aside in those times. Did any of them point anyone to Jesus prior to him choosing to be in community with them? Likely not. And yet, they had Jesus' attention!

As the disciples were in community with Jesus, they probably had some of the same concerns that the Pharisees did. Yet, Jesus guided them into dining with "the least of these", getting to know them and sharing God's love with them. After a while they started to see all people the way Jesus did- as dearly loved and precious in his sight. These outcasts were some of the first converts to Christianity.

As we explore Community as a habit of Jesus this week, let's be sure to remember that we need a community surrounding us to help nurture our faith AND we need to step out of our comfort zones to share our light with those who may see nothing but darkness. An offer to pray with/for, befriend, eat with and care for a non-believer is also a way to emulate the habits of Jesus.

Jesus, I want to follow you wherever you lead. As you lead me into my community, please give me the heart, the compassion and the words to share your love. Give me opportunity and courage to shine light into the darkness. Amen.

~ Eric Gerken | Director of Family & Youth

2.24.2021