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Scripture: Ethos – Core Value #1 Community

The other day, Yvonne and I were driving up the street in our neighbourhood, and we noticed a family moving out of a house. The moving truck was there, and we instantly felt sad. I guess the reason we felt sad, is that Yvonne and I kind of detest moving. And the reason is, in the 22 years that we have been married, we have moved 16 times. Yup, 16 times. We kind of strongly dislike moving. Uhaul has seen more than a few dollars from us. It is no wonder that our fight or flight response goes into high alert, whenever someone in our family sees a Uhaul truck. No shade meant, if you work for Uhaul.

It's hard to think about community, when you've moved 16 times in 22 years. So, when I think about community, I think about people who know each other and are looking out for each other.

I go back to the place where I was raised, a (small town in Newfoundland, where I spent the most formative 17 years of my life. This is the house that I was raised in. I worked through many significant issues here as a child and a teenager. Mostly, whether to have a perm or a mullet. I chose mullet.

But, just steps away from my house, was the Pilgrim family—the boys, Hank and Seymour, were a little older than me, but I'm pretty sure if I got in a whole heap of trouble, Hank and Seymour probably would have stepped up and put a little "smack down" on some people if you know what I'm sayin...

Then, just a hop/skip, jump from them, was another Pilgrim family. Sometimes I'd hang out with Brad. One night, I broke my wrist behind his place snow-sledding on a GT snow-racer.

Then, less than 15 seconds from there, was the Hillier household. I got in lots of trouble with their son Mike—back in the days when you could call people and say, "is your refrigerator running", and then, they'd say, "yes", and then you'd say, "then you had better go and catch it". Then they invented call display, and ruined everything. I don't think people even answer telephone calls anymore.

Then across the street was the Patey family, and there I would hang out with their son Shane. Shane and Shane. We'd hang out behind his house. On his little backyard rink, I literally won the Stanley Cup a 1000 times as the best goalie on earth. Victory is sweet.

This was the community, this was the hood. And it was so small, and tight, and I could still hear mom's voice, as she would open our patio doors and yell out at 4:55 PM, "Shanie (you can't call me that), it's time to come for supper. Get home!"

Then, when I was older, I became a follower of Jesus. And now, I didn't know how to navigate the community I had been a part of my whole life. So, I embraced a new community—the Christian community. The first family to take me into their Christian community, was the Hillier's. That family, along with their son Brent, taught me a lot about the cultural expectations of the Christian community. In this culture, it was about taking a lot of the money I used to spend on beer, and now spend it on food. And, that has been something that has been catching up to me, ever since.

And then, I went to Bible School, got married, had a family (still have a family), and spent 20 years pastoring churches in various places, and always wondered what it really meant, to have...true community.

As we look at the Ethos, the atmosphere, the climate, the culture, of this place we call North Park Community Church, we probably need to understand this now, more than ever before, as we are growing our influence in more neighbourhoods, to impact more lives for Jesus.

2 years ago, in August, we planted North Park Huron, which is where I spend my time, and there are people connecting there that are new to North Park and who we are.

Last year in August, we planted North Park Stratford, and you will hear from Kirk later in this series, who is site pastor there, and there are people there who are brand new to North Park. And maybe you are connected here, to Fanshawe- maybe you have been here for years, or maybe you are new and are just learning who we are, who we aspire to be. So yeah, this is important.

One of the core values of North Park Community Church, is...Community.

Community can be defined in lots of ways—growing up in my little town, we had a sense of community—everyone knew everyone. At your work place, you may have community, people on your street probably kind of look after each other, and you may even have a neighbourhood watch. That's all good. But what does it mean, to have Christian community? What does it mean to be part of a Jesus community? And the only place I can really turn to answer that, is to Jesus' book. Let me take you there for a moment.

The book called "Acts", talks about the acts of the Holy Spirit, in the life of the early church. We see how the church acted, in response to the acts of the Holy Spirit in their midst. So, this is a good place to start. Let me just read a couple of passages, maybe they're familiar to you. Or, if this is your first time ever looking into a bible, don't leave now, I will make this make sense for you. That's my job :)

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper^[a]), and to prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity^[b]— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

So, this is like the first church, the proto-type church, maybe even, the "ideal church". And before we look at this quickly, I just need to say something, a disclaimer. The ideal was ideal in that culture, and there are some things that "carry over", and some things that don't.

Sometimes, "well meaning" followers of Jesus say things like, "we just need to get back to what the early church was", or we just need to be an "Acts kind of church". And they are partially right. But in the Acts church, the believers were persecuted, scattered, and often times killed. Usually when I explain that, many people become more thankful that they are part of the modern day North American church, while still knowing there are some aspects of the "Acts church" that should carry over- some of those "carry over things" are seen here.

Let me explain it this way .The bible says this first church community, was "devoted to" a few things...there were a few things they wouldn't budge on.

- The apostles teaching
- The fellowship
- The breaking of bread
- Prayer

Then, there's this part about wonders and miracles that the apostles did in the community—Sermon for another day—people around here a lot smarter than me who can talk about this

All the believers were together and had everything in common (sold all their goods and shared). Something else I'm not going to talk about, but they had:

1. Possessions in common, and they had
2. Postures in common.

There was community around the possessions and the postures. There was common-unity, around the postures, of this Christian church. That's what Christian community looked like—these are some of the things, the major things, that "carry over" into Christian community today. That's the foundation of community, which North Park aspires to be—at

North Park Fanshawe, North Park Huron, and North Park Stratford.

At North Park, we aspire community, common-unity, around the same core things. And you would hope, that any church, would say that there is “community”, that there is “devotion”, around the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. But here at North Park, we take the community value, a little deeper. We define it like this: we say,

Community—“being deeply connected to one another in caring and truth-telling relationships”.

So, let me ask you the question, are you “deeply connected to someone, at North Park, in a caring and truth-telling relationship?” “Are you?” Who are you connected with?” And, what does it look like?” If someone were to ask you if you were in a caring and truth telling relationship at your church, could you say “yes?” If, I were to ask you, I am asking you....can you say “yes?”

Here’s the thing, and I hate to bring this up, but...here it goes.

Caring and truth-telling. These are the things, that don’t best happen from the stage on a Sunday. These are the things, that you don’t often get from a walk through the lobby, you don’t often get when you drop the kids off to nursery, you don’t often get when the worship leader leads the singing, you don’t often get when the announcements are made, and you don’t really get when the sermon is preached...but we do really care for you and we do want you to know what the truth is....

But the relationships, the community in which this happens, generally doesn’t happen in this room, and generally doesn’t happen in these seats. Nope, they happen in small groups, in homes, out for coffee, they happen in relationship, and relationship is small group, it is not large group.

So, right now, as pastors at NPCC, we will take the lead on the apostles teaching, we will create some opportunities for fellowship, we will lead in breaking of bread (next Sunday), and we will create lots of opportunity for prayer—we are devoted, to these things, we have common-unity in these things.

But community, happens in the one on one, the intense conversations—true caring and truth telling, best happens in a day when the focus is not on the large group gathering. Oh, and it seems like the smallness is what we are leaning into these days, so today is the day for you to lean into community...

One of the new, fresh ways we are valuing community across the North Park orbit, is by the formation of North Park quads. These are groups of 4 people—if you’re watching from Fanshawe, or Stratford, or Huron, you can find 3 or 4 friends, and connect this way, online every week.

We will provide you with some scriptures to pray through as a group, and help you have a structure by which you can form community with 3 or 4 people, every week. All you got to do is reach out to us, and we’ll help you with this. We do this, because we value Community.

When was the last time you cared for someone, in your North Park community?

When was the last time, you told someone the truth, in your North Park community?

The truth/ YOU CANT HANDLE THE TRUTH (I love that line :). Is it harder to give truth, or receive truth? When was the last time you received the truth, from someone you trusted, in your North Park community that was hard for you to hear?

I remember a day, when I had a conversation, with one of my North Park friends, that was let’s just say, “a hard conversation for me to hear”, and I’m sure it was a challenging conversation for that person to have with me”.

The moment of truth telling, arose from something that I had said in public. You need to be careful what you say and post in public (that’s why I’m not on Facebook :) And the thing that I said, let’s just say, wasn’t well thought through and didn’t land very well with some of the people that heard it.

A friend of mine who heard it, rather than let me continue to make that same mistake over and over, chose to take a risk, and give me a little “truth telling”. We had the beginnings of a relationship, and her approach was super humble and helpful, but it was painful for me to hear. The truth hurts

sometimes—for the thing that I said, sounded “male chauvinistic”, and that hurt me to know I came across that way, it hurt me, a lot. Especially considering my role as a Christian, a pastor, and more importantly, a husband and a father of 2 daughters. But, that truth telling conversation, made me realize that my words matter, and that I ought to be thankful for people, who are brave enough to have those conversations with me.

That’s what community is about—in that conversation, there was both care, and truth telling. Now, that doesn’t give you the right to walk up to someone you don’t know and hit them with a sledgehammer, but, who do you walk in relationship with, that you can tell the truth to, and you can receive the truth from.

That’s a real gift—its’ the gift of Christian community, and we value that gift, here at North Park Community Church.

So, we may not be gathered in large groups on Sunday, but we still value community, and we can still have community. Find North Parkers in your orbit, and form community with them—it’s God’s will for you :)

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Points to Ponder

Ethos. Our Church, Our Culture and Our Community.

Common-Unity Around Community

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions...

1. When you think of the best scenario of community that you have ever personally experienced, what does it look like? Where was it? Who was there? What was your role?
2. Acts 2 puts forward the “ideal prototype” of what the church community first looked like. When you consider the Apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer—which of these rhythms do you most enjoy personally when you think about your church community?
3. Talk about the last time you experienced “one-on-one care” in the NP community. Talk about the last time you experienced “one-on-one truth-telling” in the NP community.

Action Item

4. Who are three people around you, you could gather together to form a North Park Quad?