

Ezekiel 33:7-11
Psalm 119:33-40
Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20

Sermon September 10th, 2023

A Healthy Community!

In our readings, we hear an invitation from Ezekiel, Paul, and Jesus to be a healthy community. To be a community where people want to come. To be a community where people experience hospitality, grace, and love (**Image One**: people hanging out together having a great time). To be a community where people feel re-energized to go out into their neighbourhoods, and live out this hospitality, grace, and love.

Unfortunately, sometimes communities are challenged to live out this invitation. Whether the community is struggling to be welcoming to certain groups of people, or they fight over what to do to address a particular issue (**Image Two**: people arguing), or there are people in the community who are hurting others again and again without any sign of repentance.

In the church in Rome, Paul sees that the Christians that come out of Judaism are struggling to welcome the Christians that come from Gentile origins. As well, the Gentile Christians are acting in inhospitable ways to the Christians that come out of Judaism.

This tension becomes even greater when they start arguing over core issues in the community (**Image Two**). Should the Gentile men in the community become circumcised? Should the community continue to abstain from certain foods?

In response to these tensions, Paul invites them to be a healthy community. To love one another as Jesus loves them. To be a community where people want to come, because they experience hospitality, grace, and love (**Image One**). Not infighting, and inhospitality. To be a community where they feel re-energized to go out into their neighbourhoods, and live out this hospitality, grace, and love.

In our gospel, the early community Jesus is trying to build has someone or some people in the community who are acting in hurtful ways towards others without being repentant (**Image Two**). Jesus is seeing the impact these actions are having on the community as a whole.

In response, Jesus shows his disciples a way to confront people in the community who act in hurtful ways towards others without being repentant. First, the people who are hurt are invited to approach the person who is hurting them, and share their feelings, in the hopes of seeing some sign of repentance. Now, sometimes this isn't safe to do, because of issues around abuse and authority. In those cases, and in the case, where the person is still not repentant, one goes to the second measure. Invite a mediator

into the conversation, and see if this will lead to repentance from the person doing the harm. If this still doesn't work. Then the person stands before the whole community (like an intervention) to see if they are willing to repent. If they still refuse. Then they are asked to leave the community.

Of course, at this point, the community continues to pray for them hoping that through this accountability, through this boundary that is set, they will become repentant.

Sometimes, this final step in the process feels harsh, as we are invited to be a forgiving and gracious community. But that doesn't mean letting people walk all over us.

Because when someone or a group of people are allowed to walk over others in the community, as Jesus sees, the community starts to fall apart. The community becomes unhealthy, which is not attractive to others. People don't leave here feeling re-energized. Instead, they feel tired, exhausted, not wanting to do anything at all. In fact, it sucks all the energy out of the community.

Sometimes the community has to let some people go with the hopes that this accountability, this boundary, will be healthy for the community, and for the person who sees that their unrepentant hurtful actions will no longer be tolerated.

Some people need to face accountability and healthy boundaries before they have the capacity to change.

Ezekiel states this point when dealing with the unhealthy people in his community. Ezekiel is hopeful that through accountability and the setting of healthy boundaries, these people will turn their hearts back to loving God and neighbour.

Like Paul, like Ezekiel, Jesus invites us to be a healthy community. To be a community where people want to come, because they experience hospitality, grace, and love (**Image One**). To be a community where we feel re-energized to go out into our neighbourhoods, and live out this hospitality, grace, and love.

On this day, that we recognize as welcome Sunday, we celebrate our community through song, through food, through fellowship (**Image One**). And as we celebrate our community, like Jesus, like Paul, like Ezekiel, I, your spiritual leader, invite us to work towards being a healthy community. A community where people experience hospitality, grace, and love. A community where we feel re-energized to go out into our neighbourhoods, and live out this hospitality, grace, and love.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for the gift of community. Encourage us to strive to be a healthy community. Where there is conflict, help us heal. Where we struggle to welcome others, open our hearts to listen and learn. Where we face contentious issues, open our mouths to dialogue with respect and love. In Jesus name we pray, **amen**.