

Acts 2:42-47
Psalm 23
1 Peter 2:19-25
John 10:1-10

Sermon April 30th, 2023

Jesus Calls Us into Relationship with Thee

We are relational creatures who long to be in relationship with one another. But we also know how difficult it can be to be in relationship with one another.

For example, sometimes we have a hard time making friends. Some of us are shy, introverted, and struggle to start a conversation with someone. Some of us are insecure, anxious, and scared of getting hurt. Some of us are so caught up in our work that we don't have the time to invest in a relationship.

Then once we get through the stresses and challenges of meeting someone it takes a lot of time and energy for us to nurture the relationship. To build that key ingredient: trust. Some of us struggle to balance our time and energy between work, our hobbies, our self-care, and our relationships. Making us vulnerable to become neglectful towards those we are in relationship with. Some of us carry a lot of baggage with us into a relationship. When we start to get too close to someone, we start to pull away. Some of us struggle to forgive someone when they say or do something hurtful. Some of us feel overwhelmed by the amount of energy and time it takes to be really present with someone. Especially when they are struggling through something.

We long to be in relationship with one another, but sometimes it is hard.

Or, another example is sometimes we have a hard time getting to know our neighbours, or as Jesus says, love our neighbours. Whether it is that neighbour whose dog always goes to the bathroom on your lawn. Or that neighbour who likes to practice their drum solo at 11:00pm. Whether it is that neighbour who ignores you when you wave. Or that neighbour who peaks through the curtains at you. Whether it is that neighbour who rambles on about politics to you in the morning when you get out to the car to go to work. Making you late for work. Or that neighbour who blows the autumn leaves into your yard on purpose, because of who you voted for in the last election.

We long to be in relationship with one another, but sometimes it is hard.

Likewise, we long to be in relationship with Jesus, but sometimes find it difficult to nurture the relationship. For example, in the midst of the busyness of our lives, we can struggle to find time each day to read a story in the Bible to help us see where Jesus is at work, teaching, forgiving, welcoming, healing, and redeeming us.

Or, in the midst of our struggles we can find it difficult to find the energy, time, and even trust, to enter into a conversation with Jesus through prayer. Sharing our laments, our gratitude, our needs. Listening for where Jesus is guiding us.

Or, in the midst of our commitments to loved ones, household chores, and hobbies, we can find ourselves struggling to worship God regularly. Missing out on opportunities to experience Christ's teaching, grace, hospitality, healing, and redemption through Word and Sacrament. Reflecting on the Word of God being proclaimed at the pulpit, and in the music. Feeling Christ's presence in the body and blood. Praying for the needs of our world. Being uplifted by this proclamation through Word and Sacrament to go out and be Jesus' hands and feet in our communities.

Or, in the midst of worrying about our own needs we can struggle to reach out and help others. Bearing witness to new life, through the people we help in our community. Whether it is serving in a community kitchen, or helping a Refugee family get settled, or volunteering at a clothing give away.

There are many practices within our faith tradition that help us nurture our relationship with Jesus. And when we faithfully participate in these practices, we are more able to hear Jesus' voice call out our name like the sheep hear the gatekeeper. We are more willing to follow Jesus into the pasture where we are fed and nourished.

Like our relationships with one another, we need to spend time and energy on our relationship with Jesus to nurture it. To follow our calling to be Jesus' disciples. To be gracious, hospitable, a healing presence, and one who can point to where Jesus' redemption is at work in people's lives.

Like our friendships, like our relationship with Jesus, as a faith community, we need to spend time and energy together to nurture our relationship with one another. To build trust with one another. So, we can be that gracious, hospitable, healing, and redeeming presence to one another, as well as, to those who walk through our doors or encounter us in the community.

It is important for us to gather for Bible Studies, worship, fellowship ministries, small group ministries, its not choir practices, service ministries, interfaith and ecumenical ministries, the list goes on.

In the book of Acts, we hear a story of how the early believers become such a close community. People even sell all their possessions to share with and care for one another.

When we take a closer look at what makes this community so close, we see that the main ingredient to this closeness is that they spend a lot of time together. They invest the time and energy it takes to nourish their relationships.

Yes, like us, they have to deal with all the things that make it harder for them to be in relationship with one another. But, with the help of God, they prevail. They become a community that lives out the teachings of Jesus. They become a community that nourishes one another. They become a growing community, because everyone who encounters them can see the closeness and trust within the group. People wanted to be part of this community, because of this trust, and because it is gracious, hospitable, a healing presence, and a light to Christ's redeeming work.

Sometimes it can be difficult to be in relationship with one another, with Jesus. But, when we are able to overcome these hurdles, and invest our time and energy into being in relationship with Jesus, with the community of believers, with our loved ones, we find it easier to trust in God with our wellbeing, as well as, be recipients of, and reflections of, God's grace, hospitality, healing, and redeeming love.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we get distracted, when we pull away from you, help us reconnect with your Word, your Sacrament, your call to prayer and service. Help us reconnect with one another. So that we are empowered through these relationships to reflect your grace, hospitality, healing, and redeeming love to the people we meet. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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