

40 Days Of Community: Living An Easter Life Reaching Out Together 5.14.06

Introduction

We're wrapping up our series on community. We've been learning how God intended us to live with one another. We've learned that he doesn't want us to do life alone... He created us to do life together – in meaningful ways – **to walk together, to work together, to wait and weep together, and to witness together.** To live in interdependent relationships. We've learned that in our culture today one of the best ways to live in community is in the context of a small group.

First week saw a humorous drama highlighting what a small group is *not*. The next two weeks we heard some powerful stories of St. Mark's members who have been growing and serving together in the context of a small group. Today we're going to see a drama of a small group "reaching out together." In fact, you'll see just how powerful a small group can be when working right. But first, let's pray...

Drama "Coming Back Island"

Sermon

"Somehow I think He wants me here..." A man goes from not wanting to have anything to do with Christians and the church, to being effectively welcomed, befriended, and cared for through this amazing thing we call "**biblical community, or small groups.**"

If you've wondered why we have spent the last five weeks talking about community... I hope that scene just answered all your questions. There are a LOT of "Evans" out there. And chances are, you know some of them. They are in your neighborhood – in fact, your kids probably play together. You work beside them each day at on the job. You coach little league, or carpool to dance class with them. You may even live with one of them.

I'm here this morning to tell you that the Evans of this world matter to God. In 2 Peter 3:9 Peter says: "*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord... is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.*" A pretty good indication that reaching out to non-believers is pretty important to God.

But why is this so important? Why do we have to reach out to others like this group did to Evan? Can't God do it on His own? Why can't our group just stay the way we are? Should small groups really be used for evangelism? Why is this so important?

Well, Peter offered a pretty straightforward, yet convincing answer in 2nd Peter 3:9: the Lord doesn't want anyone to perish! That's a very good reason!!

But there's another reason it's so important to work together to reach the Evans in our lives. A reason that often gets overlooked. A reason offered by Jesus himself in John 4:35-36. But before we hear what Jesus has to say, we need to understand the context in which He spoke.

Let's go back to the beginning of John chapter 4. This is the story of Jesus talking with the infamous "woman at the well," a Samaritan. You may remember that Samaritans were bi-racial and the Jews hated them. This woman was also known to be living in sin. She was clearly a public disgrace. No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances.

But Jesus did. He asked the woman for a drink. His request was an invitation into community – an invitation that made the disciples very nervous. Actually, I believe the quote was "they were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said anything."

I wonder if some of us might be inclined to question the decision of the small group to welcome a non-believer like Evan into their group. But they did. They welcomed Evan into their little community. Chances are good that there were people at church who "were astonished that they had invited Evan into their group, but said nothing."

Did they do the right thing? Was their welcome worth the sacrifices they made? The welcome the small group offered Evan led him to faith. Not only did he join the group, but he was baptized – a sure sign he had become a believer. Likewise, the welcome Jesus offered the Samaritan woman, connected her to community, and led her to faith. In verse 29 we read: "*she went out and told everyone she met...*"

But the disciples still weren't convinced. So while his little small group was standing there looking "astonished" Jesus said to them (John 4:34-35): "*Look around you. Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike.*" John 4:35b-36

These are the words we've been waiting for. These are the words that help us understand why it is so important for us to reach out to the Evans of this world! Did you catch it?

Allow me to paraphrase: *Look around at all the people! There are many, like the Samaritan woman, like Evan, who are ready to believe in Me! My plan is to*

*use **you** to connect them to Me. Why? Because when you allow me to use you in this way, when you work together to connect people to me, you are doing what I created you to do. And when you are doing what I created you to do, you will find meaning in life, feel fulfilled, and experience joy beyond reason.*

God's plan to reach the world involves us! When he created us, he created us to assist him in His work! He didn't have to. He's God, and God isn't dependent on anyone to accomplish anything. But He chose to. He chose to use us to accomplish his work. Because he loves to be with us!

Much like a father asks a 5 and 8 year old kids to help him fix the car. The father isn't dependent on his kids in order to have the car fixed. But he loves to be with his kids, and he wants them to have meaning and purpose in their lives. So he asks them to help him fix the car, and they stand there handing him the tools he needs when he needs them. And in so doing, the kids help their dad fix the car.

Remember how the Samaritan woman went out and told everyone she met about Jesus? Do you know how that story ends? Verse 39: *"Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony."* What's amazing about this story is that for centuries the gospel was meant only for the Jews – God's chosen people. But this was the beginning of a new era – an era in which the gospel would be for all people! And because Jesus invited this woman into community, she came to faith, and then went on to launch a whole new era – an era in which countless Samaritans came to faith!

We don't know how Evan's story ended. But we do know that God uses sinful people working together to accomplish great things for him.

So why is it so important for us to work together to reach the Evans of this world? First, because they matter to God – he desires that no one should perish. And second, because God created us to, and when we do what God created us to do, we are the ones who benefit. When we work together to reach those who don't know Christ, we find meaning and purpose in life and as a result, we are filled to overflowing with joy.

"Look around you. Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike." Amen.

Growing together, Serving together, Reaching out together – that's what life in community is all about. Simply put, we're better together. So as a way of bringing closure to this series, we'd like to celebrate in a special way the gift of community here at St. Mark's... Slide show of small groups "in action" set to music.