

## CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

Last week my wife and I were watching the tv show, "Finding your Roots". The guest was a well known actress whose grandfather's family tree was being traced. She did not like her grandfather whom she remembered as a gruff person. When she discovered his difficult past she remarked, "I sense that my grandfather was a very lonely man..." This same description could apply to many people today.

This is NOT what God wants for us! God created us for community. God made us for each other. Do you remember the reason God created the first woman? In GENESIS 2:18 we read, "*It is not good for the man to be alone...*" When God called Abraham to follow him, he called Abraham because God wanted to make him the father of a great nation! Throughout the pages of the Old and New Testaments we see God was seeking a people; a people who would belong to God own, and love God and worship God and serve God and be a model of the way in which God intended humanity to live with one another! In other words, throughout the Old and New Testaments we see God was trying to build a community! In the Old Testament the name of this community was Israel. In the New Testament the name of the community was C H U R C H... I agree with Watchman Nee, a distinguished Chinese Christian and author who wrote, "*God is not satisfied with single, separate Christians. When we believed in the Lord we became part of His body. Individualism is sin. It does injury to the body of Christ.*"

I learned the need for community when Kathie and I lived in New York City. I was 24 and a rookie pastor and there was a group of older pastors who met for coffee and donuts on Wednesday mornings at a nearby church. There were two Baptists, two Lutherans, one Reformed pastor, two from the Evangelical Free Church, two Assemblies of God pastors, and one Moravian. Every week we shared what was happening in our churches and prayed for one another. These pastors became my spiritual family and helped me through the uncertain days of my first years as a pastor. One of the pastors from this group came to our church each month for a year and led a prayer meeting, then said goodbye and handed its leadership to me. Several from this group have remained lifelong friends.

Kathie and I were four hours away from our families in York and these were the days before Facebook and unlimited long distance phone calls. We called home about once a month. One family from the church welcomed us into their home. They invited us for dinner on many Sundays. We chatted with them at the table while our infant son lay on a blanket on the floor. When we had more children they cared for them so that Kathie and I could have a night out every month. When we were sick with the flu they brought chicken soup. They remained our lifelong friends.

After we had lived there for about six years we found others like us who had no family in the city and we became a family for each other. Six couples and three individuals felt led to agree to a covenant and form a Christian community. We met in homes for a meal following Sunday worship. We shared lawn mowers, tools and a roto-tiller for our gardens. We cared for each other's children. When the transmission in our station wagon broke, I answered a knock at the door the next day and discovered a member of our community who hand me an envelope. She said, "I heard about your transmission and wanted to help..." When I opened the envelope I discovered two hundred dollars in twenty dollar bills – a lot of

money in 1974. Part of our covenant was that we would make no major, life changing decisions without consulting one another. When we received a call to serve as pastor of a Moravian Church in Philadelphia we discussed it with at a meeting of the community and declined upon their advice. A year later, we received a call to the Moravian Church in Lebanon and they told us they felt we should meet with the board at that congregation. When we talked about the call to Philadelphia the year before, they said they had been afraid to see us go and they were wrong. This time they felt that we were a strong church and maybe I was needed more at Lebanon. We followed their counsel, met with the leaders at Lebanon, and accepted the call to pastor that church.

The early Moravians experienced this kind of community. When they founded Bethlehem, they did not live in separate houses, but they lived together in a large "Gemeinhaus," or "community" house. Families in Bethlehem did not own their own property. Everything belonged to the community. This arrangement was called the "General" economy... Each person did not work to earn money for their work, but did what they were called and gifted by God to do and the community supported them. If you were a farmer, you grew food for the community, if you were a weaver, you made cloth, if you were a tailor, you sewed clothing, if you were a candle maker, you molded candles, if you were an instrument maker, you made horns, if you were an organ maker, you built organs, if you were an artist, you painted pictures. Being part of a community made it possible for the Moravians to make music and art that rivaled anything being produced in Europe. As Moravians, we have a heritage of community! You can see this in the words of our hymns:

*"Christian hearts in love united"*  
*"What brought us together what joined our hearts"*  
*"We in one covenant are joined"*

Contemporary society in America is a much different animal! Today we do not celebrate community! What do we celebrate in this country? We Americans celebrate "Rugged Individualism!" This is part of the legacy of the frontier where people had to be self-sufficient. When we think of rugged individualism, WHO comes to mind? John Wayne in "True Grit," Clint Eastwood in "Dirty Harry" "Go ahead, make my day!" Frank Sinatra singing, "I did it my way." Today we have Bruce Willis, Steven Segal, Tom Cruse and Vin Diesel... Brothers and sisters, this is the spirit of our culture. We celebrate the exaltation of the individual. We say, "Do what's best for me," "Gotta do my OWN thing..." "I've got to be my own person..." Today we push self-esteem, self-enrichment,  
self-development,  
self-image,  
self-fulfillment,  
self-love,  
self-respect...

There is even a popular magazine called 'SELF' which is filled with lots of advice about how to get more money, a better body, more sex, and a great job

SELF, SELF, SELF....

In a culture where the message is “Look out for #1,” as Christians, you and I are called to be different, to go against the flow, to be counter-cultural! Steve, why should I? Why should I be concerned about community? Why should I be concerned about giving? Why should I be concerned about serving others?

Brothers and sisters, the one who calls us to do this is Jesus! Listen to what Paul says about him in PHILIPPIANS 2:2-5, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”* Jesus could have stayed safe and cozy by the father’s side in heaven and been waited on by the angels for all eternity. But he loved us and came to earth for us and was nailed to the cross to pay for our sins... It is this Jesus who says to us, if you want to be my disciple, you must say YES to me and NO to your native selfishness and follow me. I is Jesus who says if you insist on saving your life you will lose it, but if you give it away to others and to me you will find your true life. (MARK 8:35)

Brothers and sisters, I have discovered that the world is filled with lots of miserable people screaming, “ME, MINE, I” and demanding that the world meet their needs. Think about the people you know who are the happiest. Are they selfish people? Or are they people who care about others and work at relationships?

Brothers and sisters, we were made for God. We were made for each other. We were created for community! I believe that most of us here at First Moravian already know this. I believe there is a good sense of Christian community here. It is our calling as Christians to show others and tell others. God created us for community!

Rev. Dr. Steve Nicholas  
March 31, 2019