

Missional Marker # 6

Compelling Christian Community

By Peter Sjoblom

Jesus prays, "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

What is our community, the community of faith? I love the "com" words. In the 6th missional marker on the vitality pathway we find two of these words out of three, community and compelling.

A community is any group united with a common thread of purpose and values. A community exists through an empathic sense of how things are and how they could be. A community could be a neighborhood which experiences a togetherness forged through geography, needs and resources.

Community exists also in schools, in places of employment, at the country club, the local pub ("where everybody knows your name"). All these places create a culture reflecting their common values sometimes whether these values are spoken or not. Families can create the tightest form of community through blood ties. They form norms and boundaries that create a common identity.

The church is a community. As Christ prayed in John 17, "that they may be one" he was praying for the establishment of a community which flowed out of the Father's love for Jesus which was now being made known through Christ's followers. The uniqueness of this community is that it is not an exclusive invention. Christ was praying that the unity and love within this community would be an invitation to the world at large.

The faith community is community by nature of its purpose. It was established by God's grace. Grace is the heart of its sustained identity. And the invitation to grace is the empowerment by which others in the world may find their way to God's reconciling love. Stated simply, true Christian community is, by its very nature, compelling to the watching world. Spirit led community affirms Christ's mission of reconciling love.

A friend who is counted now among the “spiritual but not religious” in her lack of church affiliation offered me her summation of years growing up in church. “It seems my dad (a pastor) was consumed with troubles of congregational life.” She said she had no time for all the struggle and discord that was part of church “politics” as she described it. As we talked a bit more she concluded that though she, “didn’t miss the politics, she did miss the community”.

Politics can repel. True Christian community compels. We in the church should always be encouraging the evaluation of our fellowship as a compelling missional community bearing the essence of God’s grace in our interaction with each other. This is our common life together.