

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

January 21, 2018

Change Your World – Live the Revolution

“Dear Jesus, Help Me To Embrace My Role In *Community*”

1. It Starts With My God
2. It Extends to His World
3. It Cares For His Family

Hebrews 10:19-25

How important is ***touch*** in the human experience of “community”? Touch can be physical. Touch can be emotional. Touch can be spiritual. Would we agree that ***touch*** is powerful —either in its ***presence*** or in its ***absence***?

Do you know the Olie and Lena story? (Norwegians tell this joke and I use it in honor of Norwegians! ☺) Olie and Lena were married 50 years. They are sitting on their rocking chairs on the front porch, in silence watching the sun set in the west. After a long time, Lena says softly, “Olie, do you love me?” Long pause. Olie finally says, “Lena, 50 years ago I told you that I loved you. If that ever changes I’ll let you know.”

Ah! Don’t you always just want to give Lena a hug?! How would her life have been different if Olie had simply stepped up to his role in that marriage and told her every day, “You are the love of my life” and then given her a warm kiss and a gentle hug? Now, let’s leave room for different personalities and life experiences here, but you get the point. Verbal, emotional, physical, even spiritual—touch is important. Some people don’t ***want*** even a handshake on a Sunday morning, but a sincere “hello” still warms the heart!

In 1930, Behavioral Psychologist **Harry Harlow** joined the faculty at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Dr. Harlow is famous for his cutting-edge, and unsettling, research involving rhesus macaque monkeys. He raised macaques from infancy experimenting on the effects of ***touch*** deprivation, ***maternal*** deprivation and ***social*** deprivation—sometimes raising baby monkeys in total isolation from all stimuli for 24 months and longer, even taking away the light of day! His work inspired much of the animal rights movement in the following decades.

Without going into the sad and disturbing observations, the researchers concluded that **maternal** touch and socialization and grooming of the growing babies was essential to their emotional, psychological, physiological and immunological health and well being. The deprivation of touch, of community, was sad and cruel.

It amazes me that it took a scientist to “discover” what people close to God have always known, that **touch** and **community** are a gift of the **Creator**. For not only did the LORD God come into the garden to walk and talk with Adam and Eve “in the cool of the day”, he also expresses his demonstrative love with words like these in Deuteronomy 33. ***“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”***

Touch...**community** is the plan and the gift of the Creator, but today let us consider that it is also the **GOAL** of the **Savior**. Let’s try this theme: **“DEAR JESUS, HELP ME TO EMBRACE MY ROLE IN COMMUNITY.” MY ROLE STARTS WITH MY GOD, EXTENDS TO HIS WORLD, AND CARES FOR HIS FAMILY.**

1 IT STARTS WITH MY GOD

The writer to the Hebrews implies that “community”, for every human being, really and truly begins with God. ***“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God.”***

The book of Hebrews is deep my friends, but let’s keep it simple today. Before Jesus paid for the sins of you and me and the world by dying on the cross, the **place** of worship was NOT open to people. The **place** where the altar stands in our church across the way symbolizes the Presence of the Almighty God, a place known in ancient times as the **MOST HOLY PLACE**. The **MOST HOLY PLACE** was found in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In those days, NO human eyes could see that room or its contents and live except for one day a year when the High Priest would enter through the **curtain** that walled off the room, carrying with him the blood of a bull for sprinkling on the Atonement Cover of the Ark of the Covenant of God to atone for the sins of the people. One day a year; HIS eyes **only**-- under penalty of death by a Holy God!

The only problem was...that blood didn't really atone for sin. It was meant to POINT AHEAD to Jesus, God's Son, who would shed HIS blood to pay for our sin as **the** Great Priest over the house of God—the One who still today advocates for us before his Father. His blood has opened the curtain to the Presence of God!

Lessons to learn? You and I are **free** to **enter** the Presence of the Almighty God without fear through prayer and in death. **Sin** separated us from our God—the most important link in community--but the **blood** of Jesus has again brought us near!

APPLICATION 28 years ago, Paul called and asked me if I could visit him in his apartment. Paul, in his 60's, was long removed from church attendance and confirmation and contact with his Savior. Paul was a chain smoker, fingers yellowed from smoke, coughing heavily, even as he sat before me dying from lung cancer. Paul knew he was dying, and he was afraid. He was looking back at his sinful life and he couldn't even get himself to tell me what he had done. Paul knew that he was standing outside of God's Kingdom looking in, but he remembered enough from "church" to hope that God could still love him, that God might still want a relationship with him!

Paul was **desperate for the community** God had intended, and Paul was ready to acknowledge that true community begins with God! And I? I was privileged to preach for his funeral weeks later, telling the few gathered how Jesus, the Great Priest, had taken Paul by the hand and had walked him through the curtain into the presence of his Father on the red carpet of Jesus' blood. What joy **true** community brings—and it begins with God.

2 IT EXTENDS TO HIS WORLD

Why did St. Paul's call me to serve as Resident Missionary on behalf of its members and you? Verse 23. ***"Let us hold unswervingly to the HOPE we profess, for he who promised is faithful."***

A wise man once penned these words: "Cleansed **hearts** lead to open **mouths** and **speaking** lives." Bottom line, St. Paul's said, "How can we not more actively share this supreme treasure of forgiveness and community with God?!"

You know, in many circles, St. Paul's congregation and the Bridge is a BIG DEAL. 2,700 members at this campus! That's a lot to manage. A lot of staff. A lot of programming. A lot of sharing of facilities with our community. That's a hefty budget. It takes work! To the point where someone might actually ask, "Aren't we big enough?"

Haven't we reached out enough? Couldn't another church take on some of the responsibility?"

But apparently, that is NOT how St. Paul's rolls—and it is the coolest thing ever that gives God great joy! Jesus says, **“You are to be my witnesses in Muskego, in Wisconsin, in the United States and to the ends of the earth.”** Now THAT, my friends, is a TALL task! And he has given it to us! Which is why 3000 people came to faith in one day at the first sermon of the Apostle Peter, on a day Christians know as Pentecost. There was work to do in the Kingdom of God! The message of salvation was cascading from the throne room of God! The curtain separating us from God had been torn in two, the blood of Jesus opening the way! Blessings were flowing into the hearts and the lives of people—and then overflowing from their lives to the world around us! **The Bridge is saying**, “Savior God, there is work to do in your Kingdom. 2,700 people here after 160 years of work--awesome! But we are going to continue working our tails off to reach more broadly and more deeply into the fabric of your world. For your Church is a community that Starts With You and your forgiveness, that Flows to us through your message, and is intended to Extend to Your World!“ This community's profession is one of **HOPE** that lifts the eyes of people from the present with its struggles, to the **future** with its joys in the presence and blessing of Almighty God forever.”

APPLICATION This past week, on behalf of Jesus and you, I visited two men—father and son--I'll call them Robert and Sam. I visited them in an extended-stay motel. Robert is recovering from a significant injury and surgery resulting in the restriction of NO weight on his heel for three months! Sam at age 19 is working to support his dad, but money is tight. “Could St. Paul's possibly help?”

Did you know that some in the city of Muskego sense that the love of God exists here and they tell others about it? Do they understand HOW God's love is at the heart of this community? That this community knows the sacrificial love of Jesus who gave us access to God by his own blood? Probably not, but we are pumped to tell them! Which is why it was a joy sit down with Robert and Sam and tell them the good news of **“Jesus for them”**—that Great Exchange of our sins for Jesus' holiness! Community with God. Community with us. Blessings for us all—here in time but most importantly for eternity! Life after death with God! I hope to share more with Robert and Sam about the privilege of approaching our God through Jesus, bending his ear with our needs...knowing that he has us tucked into his heart of love! The family of God

reaching out...but the Spirit also prompts us to be aware of community care here at home.

3 IT CARES FOR GOD'S FAMILY

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

The story is told of a certain pastor who mourned over a member of his congregation who had stopped attending church. The pastor went to the member's home and found him sitting in front of a glowing fireplace. Without saying a word, the pastor walked over to the fire, picked up the tongs, lifted a glowing coal from the fire, and laid it aside on the hearth. In silence, the two of them sat and watched the coal's fire slowly dim and finally die out altogether. After a pause, the member exclaimed, "You don't have to say a word, pastor. I'll be there next Sunday."

For a community to grow and to be healthy and strong, it must get together. It must invest time to know each other, to talk to each, to encourage each other. "No man is an island" the world says. So here in Muskego, I'm hearing about ***Jammin' on Janesville*** and the ***Muskego World's Fair***. Sally Wallner and I went to a Chamber of Commerce meeting this past week where business leaders meet and communicate. It's what healthy communities do. They care, they share, they invest the time!

By God's grace, may the same be said about ***THIS*** community--a community that begins with God and his love, overflows to his world, but also cares about the family assembled here. We are glad that we are all here, and we want all of us to come back because there is blessing in His community says our God!

APPLICATION What is YOUR role for the health of this community? Look around you. Are there faces missing here today—maybe missing for a while---faces that need to be here? Can YOU be the one who pays them a visit like the pastor in the story? Maybe a text, an email, a phone call? "We've missed you, friend! And Jesus is still speaking at the Bridge."

What is YOUR role for the health of this community? Look around you. Are there people here to whom you have never spoken? People that you do not know? Now, careful, don't be too aggressive! Maybe THEY don't want a handshake; maybe YOU don't want a handshake. But a sincere "hello" still warms the heart! And a warmed heart may want to come back. A warmed heart may be curious about the love that is

here. For here is where we meet Jesus. Here is where we learn about the open door, the forgiveness of sins, the presence of God—eternal life!

CONCLUSION How important is *touch* in the human experience of “community”? It IS the plan of our Creator and Savior! **“DEAR JESUS, HELP ME TO EMBRACE MY ROLE.”**
Amen.