

“Created For Community”

Portions contributed by [James E. Parks](#).

Psalm 97:1-12

John 17:20-26

I am so excited about what God is about to do. I came across a series that I would like to do, because it spoke to me, and I believe it will fit in with the mission of our church.

So, today we are going to begin something that I hope will be revolutionary for us. My hope is, that after 40 days of focusing on community, we all will be different. I will be different. You all will be different. But above all, we all will be different together.

My prayer is, that this focus on community, is something that you all have been looking for. It can be the cure to what is ailing you. It can be the freedom from whatever is holding you back.

My prayer is, if you commit yourself to these 40 days of community you will have the answer to loneliness, fear, fatigue, failure, anything that you have to face. Now, that may sound like a bold statement, but I believe it can be true. Those are some mighty mountains, you may be thinking, but I truly believe we can face anything when we face it from within a Christian community that has Jesus on our side.

I see this as a time for a lot of us to get over this Lone Ranger idea. I know that is tough because we have always been taught to do it ourselves...right?

Our country was founded on the Declaration of Independence, which we will be celebrating next weekend, and I remember many lessons in life about being independent. You know that thought process, of, “It is time to get out on my own, to take care of myself, and to stand on my own two feet.”

We have been taught most of our lives that being independent is the goal, it is the ultimate achievement. But as God has worked on my heart, as I prepared for this message series, I have become more and more convinced that independence is just a...a false hope. Independence should not be our ultimate goal.

If you read the Bible, and understand what it is saying, I think it would be hard for someone to say that a major theme of the Bible...is independence. In the Old Testament the Ten Commandments are a key piece and all Ten Commandments are about relationships.

Now, the first four focus on our relationship with God, and the last six are about our relationship with each other. In the New Testament we see how Jesus lives in community with those around him and many of the lessons are also about how we relate to God and to others. God is also community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...Three in one.

If, and when, we strive for independence we are going to be disappointed...because we were created for community. We were meant to live this life with other people, because, let's face it, with other people work becomes easier.

Ever try moving heavy objects by yourself, instead of with the help of a friend or two. I had a huge filing cabinet that was very heavy, that I needed help with moving down stairs to Deb's office. Rob Pope showed up one day, and all I asked was, "Do you think you can help me with something?" His words, "It's that cabinet at the top of the steps isn't it?"

And what does Deb always say to all of us? "Many hands make lite work!" You see, with other people, our fears, our worries, our frustrations, can all be overcome. It is very different walking down dark alley by yourself, compared to when you are walking it with a bunch of friends.

How many of you were born independent? You were born and you could care for yourself, that is. You could live on your own and make your own decisions. NO...we were born dependent on others, and dependent on community.

So, we were created for community in the beginning, but it is also our goal, and it also should be our destination. This became evident to me as I read this passage from the Gospel of John.

John, Chapter 17, is a prayer prayed by Jesus. It is after Jesus, and his disciples, have finished the Last Supper, and just before Jesus is arrested, tried and crucified. So this is a significant time for Jesus and he takes time to pray.

And do you know, or remember, who He prayed for? Jesus prayed for you. In this chapter, first Jesus prays for himself, then he prays for his disciples, and then he prays for all believers who will come to faith later. That is, he prayed for you and for me. And if Jesus is praying for us then it must be important what He prays.

He prays that you and I would be united. Twice he prays for us to be one. Jesus prays you would be part of a Christian community. Now, that is not just having your name on the rolls or a face in the crowd, but a united, inseparable piece of the Body of Christ. Part of a community that knows you, and where you know the rest of the community.

The image that came to my mind was of a quilt. I have seen many quilts in my life. And most quilts are made up of many different pieces, big and small pieces, different color pieces, and pieces of good and bad quality; yet they are woven together to make one warm blanket.

One time, while speaking to someone that made quilts, they described the pieces as, just scraps, from other projects. They sometimes recognized patterns from old clothes, that either their children or grandchildren wore growing up. They would take each of those individual pieces and they would put them all together.

Well my prayer is, that during these 40 Days of Community, I hope you will keep in your mind this image of being woven together.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, **“A cord of three strands is not easily broken.”** When we are woven together we become stronger...we can conquer our fears...we can overcome anything, but only when we are together.

Christian community is the answer to Jesus’ prayer for you, but it is up to you whether or not you will join. Again our independence will tell us we can make it on our own. It will tell us we don’t need other people. It will tell us not to let others know we need them.

Now, that might be true right now...because, maybe right now everything is great for you...but at some point, life will happen, and you will need a community. You can either hope that a community responds at that time, or you can get connected now and know they will already be there, whenever you need them.

You also need to be aware, that this “good” time might not be about your need for community, but for someone else’s.

A little story about our family...Amy’s mom and dad have a pool, and with the temps getting back up into the 80’s and 90’s most days, (and we haven’t even entered July or August yet), we have been spending a lot of time at their house. That way the boys can swim and keep cool.

Now, Grayson has had swimming lessons and swims quiet well, and the pool is large, but only about 4” deep. So, when Grayson stands up right, the water is up to his chin. Tuck however, is shorter, and has not had swimming lessons yet. We were planning on getting him some this year... but! So Tuck has to wear a lifejacket when he is in the pool. But here is the problem...Tuck looks up to his big brother and wants to be just like his big brother.

Well, one day, Grayson was showing Tuck how to jump off the top step of the ladder and do a cannonball. You know, to make as big a splash as you can. Doing this with a lifejacket, it doesn't let you go all that deep so it does not create that big of a splash, and Tuck was a little disappointed by his small splashes. So, what does Tuck do, to help with his splashing problem...he decides to try it once without his lifejacket.

Now, Amy and I are usually setting on the patio to watch the boys. By the time I seen him without his lifejacket, getting ready for his big leap, I had to take off at a full sprint to try and stop him. I am not that fast by the way!

As I am running towards the pool, he jumps! My first thought was, maybe I should slow down and let him have a little drink. As Amy's dad says, that boy has no fear of that water. Maybe after a bit of a coughing spell from taking all that water in, he will gain a little respect for what water can do to him.

But, this was not a funny little joke, but a serious situation. So, as I said, that thought had crossed my mind, but nowhere in my body did I hesitate. I could not stand there and let him take in even a little drink of that water.

Now, I share this story to encourage us to think about our brothers and sisters in Christ, and how often we just sit and watch one another drown. Of course we would not physically let people drown, but people are drowning all around us.

They are drowning in financial struggles. They are drowning in depression, loneliness or fear. They are drowning in a medical situation. And we get ourselves off the hook because we want them to be independent.

We think to ourselves, if I help them they will not learn from their mistake. Or, probably more often, this person is right next to us, but we have no idea that they are even drowning.

Either we have not asked or they have not shared with us, simply because our relationship is not one that is formed in real community.

Jesus never teaches us to strive for independence. He never teaches us to let others fight through their own struggles alone. He prays for us to be united in community. He actually prays for us to interdependent. He prays we will be one and depend on each other.

So, today instead of declaring our independence, on this up and coming Independence Day weekend, I invite you to declare your interdependence.

Next weekend, not only are we celebrating Independence Day, but we will hopefully be celebrating communion, which is a sacred symbol of our dependence on Christ Jesus; but also, I pray that today will be a celebration of our dependence on each other.

Your declaration of interdependence will be one of these ribbons. So before you leave today, if you are going to commit to our 40 Days of Community, I invite you to take a ribbon and place it on the board with the cross.

This will be your declaration of interdependence. By placing a ribbon on the board with the cross, you are saying you want to grow in Christian community. You are saying I need other people.

Now, if you are watching from home, and you want to make this commitment of interdependence, you can either, stop by the church during the week and place a ribbon on the board with the cross, or you can reach out to me and ask me to place a ribbon on the board for you.

If you do not know how to get a hold of me, you can go to our website at NewaygoUMC.com, and all of my contact information is there for you. Call, text or email me, and I will make sure to add a ribbon for you.

You see it is not always obvious who is drowning, because we act like we are independent, but we are not. We need each other. We were created for community.

When we catch people, when they fall, and when we are truly living as a community, it will be evident that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

So after you have declared your interdependence, I want you to make a commitment to read this Bible verse every day this week, **“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”** John 13:35.

As you memorize that verse each day, you should also be praying and talking to God about your commitment to 40 Days of Community. Maybe you will begin wrestling with how much of a commitment you really want to make...or maybe you will have brushed it off completely.

But I believe, Jesus wants to start a revolution within us. Jesus wants to catch everyone who is drowning, but we keep standing on the shore.

Maybe we hope they can swim on their own. Or, more often, we have no idea that they are even in the water, because we don't truly take the time to get to know the person next to us. All of this can stop, if we just commit to being better together. **Amen!!!**