

“Seeking the Sacred Unseen Through Life with Others”

Series: *Seeking the Sacred Unseen*

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Corinthians 13:1-10, 13]

Rev. Mary Bowman

February 16, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

As we consider how seeking the sacred unseen is tied to life with others, we have to begin with the reality that we were made for life with others.

We were created for connection.

We were designed by God for community.

This should not really surprise us since we were created by a God who values and lives within community . . . a divine community of three . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Divine Three created us to be in relationship — both with God and with one another.

However . . . God understands that human community and connection are not always easy.

Human beings are imperfect, and human beings are complicated.

Human community has to deal with human imperfections and complexities.

Jesus, of course, understood all too well the imperfection and complexity of human beings . . . so it is intriguing that Jesus began His ministry by building a community.

Equally intriguing is that Jesus' community was not so different from our own. Jesus' community included imperfect and complicated people.

Jesus' group included those who did not fully understand Him, included one who would betray Him, included one who denied Him, and included others who would sleep when He needed them the most.

Jesus knows our imperfection and yet knows that we were designed for community.

So why would Jesus choose community?

There is a wonderful African proverb about community — “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Jesus understands that we are ultimately better together.

One of the gifts of healthy community is that it functions like a mirror for each of us.

Each of us is sacred and holds sacredness within us, but sometimes we need help to be able to see things about ourselves.

For example, there are things about myself that I do not know or do not understand unless you tell me, especially about how I relate to others.

Within community, we can lovingly share what we see in each another that we cannot see ourselves.

Sometimes the communal mirror reveals gifts that we didn't know we had. Sometimes the mirror reveals sharp edges that need sanding or patterns of behavior that need changing.

A loving community can help reveal the sacred within.

Another gift of a healthy community is the gift of loving comfort.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul encourages the early church to share life with one another . . . specifically to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15)

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When we live in healthy community, we receive care when we are hurting, we find cheerleaders when we need them, and we expand our joy by sharing it with others. And when life feels dark, we can be light to one another.¹

The church shares the sacredness of life together.

Another gift of a healthy community is the gift of grace.

Ideally in a Christian community, we are invited to be our authentic selves. We are invited to practice Christianity. We practice forgiveness when we are hurt. We practice love with people who are also practicing.

I read a recent article² by Andrew Sullivan, a non-believer, who was bemoaning the decline of Christianity in America. Sullivan was genuinely disheartened because he noticed that as churches declined so too did their framework of grace and forgiveness. As the author watched other communities gain prominence that were based on ideology and loyalty, he appreciated all the more the power of forgiveness and grace.

You have heard me repeating the phrase “healthy community.” Unfortunately, the church is not always healthy. There are many examples of churches that have been unhealthy and caused great harm. You yourself may have felt hurt by the church or by fellow Christians.

A church is only healthy if Christ is its sure foundation, its corner stone, its loving head. Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood better than most the need for Christ to be at the center of community. Bonhoeffer encourages us to seek Jesus as a guide in our relationships because Jesus is the only one who truly knows the best way to love each person. Our job within a community is to participate in the love that Jesus has already created by staying in touch with Christ.

The Holy Spirit is also instrumental in aiding community.

In our Scripture readings, we listen in as Paul delineates a list of virtues needed to live in community. Paul uses the metaphor of getting dressed with new clothes. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. These are not clothes that humans can manufacture. These are all gifts of the Spirit. The more that we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, the more and more we can become like Christ and be clothed in His qualities.

A minister shares the story of one of her parishioners coming to her with a complaint about another member of the congregation. The parishioner detailed all of the ways that the other member was irritating, out of line, difficult, selfish, and problematic.

The minister’s advice was that the parishioner begin to pray for the other member — in a committed way, not casually.

You can imagine that the parishioner left the session frustrated. The problem was still a problem. But out of respect for the minister, the parishioner began to pray for the other member.

A month or two after their meeting, the minister had occasion to ask the parishioner how things were going. The parishioner admitted that the problem was resolving itself and it was resolving itself through prayer. He admitted that praying for the other person made him look harder at the person’s life, to look harder at what that person’s life was like, and to look at the other person as a human being like him.

¹ Parker Palmer quoted by Katherine Mansfield in her daily email.

² Andrew Sullivan., *Out on a Limb*.

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In addition, the praying opened him to noticing the ways that he himself could be irritating and difficult, which in turn created more openness to the other member.

Our deepest wounds come from relationships and yet, so does our deepest healing.³

Sharing our lives with others is a risk. Being in community is a risk because it does not always go well.

Church community helps us learn to become safe people who bring God’s welcoming embrace to others.⁴

Are we willing to take the risk and move a little closer into community and into God?

³ John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way*, 187.

⁴ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*,