

**Community**  
Jubilee Mennonite Church  
March 24, 2019

**Purpose:** To open the work of community to a broader understanding.

**Message:** As the body gathered, we are called to care and share the new reality of the Kingdom

**Scripture:** Isaiah 55:1-13 [I will read]; Acts 2:41-47 (please read)

**Synopsis:** Community is one of those touchstones of idealism for many people. The notion is that within it, commonality (a root of community) takes the fore and that there is a shared way of being where differences are overcome or minimized all together. Yet we know that when we are in community we are far more likely to know it as work as much as joy and peace. As church and as kingdom people, we are drawn into community not as extraordinary means of being together, but as an incarnational means of demonstrating the kingdom coming. As such we are invited into practicing both accountability and grace at the same time. We know its work; yet can we celebrate the reality it represents as a foretaste of our mutual hope of all that God is doing?

[How Jeff Sessions reads Romans 13 and how my Mennonite Sunday school class does Church Was Supposed to Be an Alternative Society - Center for Action and Contemplation "Community the center of our lives Acts 2 41-47.ppt", "Community the center of our lives acts 2 41-47 10-24-2010.doc"](#)  
[Greatest of these 1co 13 11-13-2016.docx](#)  
[Hesston violence a theological dilemma for Mennonites](#)  
[A Grown up Zacchaeus Luke 19\\_1-10 1142007 peace sunday.doc](#)  
[community and game theory](#)  
[Smartphones, tablets make us think about technology like the Amish do.](#)  
[MWR : Potlucks](#)

Isaiah 55:1-13

“Hey there! All who are thirsty,  
    come to the water!  
Are you penniless?  
    Come anyway—buy and eat!  
Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.  
    Buy without money—everything’s free!  
Why do you spend your money on junk food,  
    your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?  
Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,  
    fill yourself with only the finest.  
Pay attention, come close now,  
    listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.  
I’m making a lasting covenant commitment with you,  
    the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.  
I set him up as a witness to the nations,  
    made him a prince and leader of the nations,  
And now I’m doing it to you:  
    You’ll summon nations you’ve never heard of,  
and nations who’ve never heard of you  
    will come running to you  
Because of me, your GOD,  
    because The Holy of Israel has honored you.”

6-7 Seek GOD while he’s here to be found,  
    pray to him while he’s close at hand.  
Let the wicked abandon their way of life  
    and the evil their way of thinking.  
Let them come back to GOD, who is merciful,  
    come back to our God, who is lavish with forgiveness.

8-11 “I don’t think the way you think.  
    The way you work isn’t the way I work.”  
    GOD’s Decree.  
“For as the sky soars high above earth,  
    so the way I work surpasses the way you work,  
    and the way I think is beyond the way you think.  
Just as rain and snow descend from the skies  
    and don’t go back until they’ve watered the earth,  
Doing their work of making things grow and blossom,  
    producing seed for farmers and food for the hungry,  
So will the words that come out of my mouth  
    not come back empty-handed.  
They’ll do the work I sent them to do,  
    they’ll complete the assignment I gave them.

12-13 “So you’ll go out in joy,  
you’ll be led into a whole and complete life.  
The mountains and hills will lead the parade,  
bursting with song.  
All the trees of the forest will join the procession,  
exuberant with applause.  
No more thistles, but giant sequoias,  
no more thornbushes, but stately pines—  
Monuments to me, to GOD,  
living and lasting evidence of GOD.”

My brother is not much of a church goer. He and I heard rather different things from the pulpit of our shared youth, he getting a much more judgmental bottom line than I took away. For him the union of body, mind and spirit is not inspired by way of meditation and music, but on skis or two wheels, pushing through what ever physical trial he has concocted for himself, and he does not spend a lot of time in a pew. I don't raise this to shame him; far from it. He lives his life well with peace and a way of being that suits him, and that is good. But I do wager that he is a somewhat light on community. A number of years ago, he fractured his knee cap in 4 places on his birthday while doing some downhill skiing. Despite being in a good place, with over 15 years worth of roots, with many close and great friends, he found himself missing one thing when he found himself suddenly isolated by his injury while he was trying to raise 2 young kids by himself: it was one of the only times I recall him vocally missing church for he knew that in these circumstances, he would at least have a stream of steaming casseroles for the asking. This might be a trivial thing to recall, but this notion of being part of one another to the point that we support each other in pain and in good is significant.

Because it is so rare. A community—a group of people whose purposes is to share the world and its challenges together—is something that we strongly desire, but find increasingly hard to find. While we have more connections than ever before, we also know that we as a people, in church, out of church, where ever—are more fragmented, isolated, and siloed into like minded bubbles than ever before. I could give you a whole social media/online media rant to prove my point, but this is something we fundamentally know to be true. Fun fact: Loneliness as a concept, a word, does not appear with any frequency in literature until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was used to describe places too far from town and other people to be in contact. Life was so necessarily connected back then that it took some doing to disconnect, and doing so was not terribly possible back in the day. Our more independent existence by the ways and means that we have built to allow us convenience also insulate us from the world has allowed us to do more by ourselves, eroding our sense of community. Many people look at the Amish, our Anabaptist cousins as phobic around technology, insisting that anything with electricity is of the devil, akin to the apple of the Garden. But is you have hung out around Amish, you quickly learn they are just as gadget driven as the next guy (witness the buggies that cruise past my grandmother's house with enough bass pumping out that I am amazed the horse isn't deafened). Instead their

rubric of technology is rather simple: Does it help us maintain connection within our group such that we continue to relate to each other or be carried so fast and so far by our ambitions we have no time to be about being community together.

Our texts for this morning, both the Acts (that we know and love as a defining moment of the newly launched church) and from Isaiah which points to the restored community of YHWH and the mountain of God paint us a beautiful picture. People are there. They have come to the mountain of God and they are sharing their stuff in an image of the way of being people of Spirit together. Note here that in neither of these exalted notions of right belief, right practice, or righteous living that are being practiced; just the basic sharing of goods in the name of the YHWH God. Amongst all the texts we can turn to get a sense of “how to do” community throughout the Epistles and elsewhere, I wanted to come back here not to hold out the impossible task of the idealized reality either in the post-Pentecost high or the end-times healing of the nations, but to remind us of the basic function for doing community in the first place: to demonstrate clearly the gospel that is being preached. Richard Rohr suggests: “Building such communities in contrast to the surrounding society of emperor-worship was precisely Paul’s missionary strategy. Small communities of Jesus’ followers would make the message believable: Jesus is Lord (rather than Caesar is Lord); sharing abundance and living in simplicity (rather than hoarding wealth); nonviolence and suffering (rather than aligning with power). Paul was not just a mystic, but also very practical.”<sup>1</sup> Who wouldn’t want to imagine a way such as this were it possible?

As followers of Christ, we need community in order to thrive as disciples. We need to be together not just as people with the innate sociological needs, but as an integral part of being disciples. Long past are the days of thousands being welcomed into the church on a daily basis, and even for us with some communal heritage in our blood, the life of the church of Acts 2 seems like an over-idealized dream. Church is something we now shop for much as we would a car. We want a congregation that suits the features that we desire, the styling of worship that doesn’t push us too far, a theological outlook that is nice and comfortable and handles well in the tough places, and, most importantly, people who simply do not rub us the wrong way. It is all

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cac.org/church-was-supposed-to-be-an-alternative-society-2018-05-09/> As recorded 2018-05-10

too easy to reduce church to another social network of folks who happen to be headed more or less the same way that I am in matters of spiritual life in a style that we prefer. I tend to think that one of the most powerful incarnations that Christian community can take today is a group that comes together across wide polarities of every stripe-- social, economic, political, theological—who are united and enlivened by the simple formula: that the living, resurrected Christ calls us to be about the work of the kingdom here and now building toward the ever more.

Here's the thing. We get it wrong all the time. We are far from the ideal that we aspire to. This community hurts people. We miss people's loneliness. We concentrate on preserving the church without spot or wrinkle and miss opportunities for radical incarnation. We skip the hard, slow conversations of making choices together, and settle for majority rule. It's efficient; but it is not necessarily church. We rely far more extensively on our human understanding of constraint and protection that would say that we dare not spend too much lest we not have enough for ourselves then to entrust the work of our sharing to the abundance of the God who authors it. We make the question one about us versus them, whoever we happen to make them be right now, forgetting that there is only us. Community is not supposed to be an insulation from the world but an illustration to the world. And as such, no matter where we place the border of our community, we are invited to place it wider still. Church is often encountered as a community of judgment more than one of embrace. This has to change.

A truly discipleship based community needs to first acknowledge that we are all disciples on the way and in the act of following after Jesus. And that means that we are broken. That means we are hurting and we are here. Our central task as community is to create a place that is brave enough for the walls to be torn down (demolition is never safe), secure enough for each of us to reveal our brokenness (vulnerability is never without risk), and open enough for us to be precisely and wholly who we really are so we might better know and show the love of God in our midst. We have a long way to go to this goal. Lord knows we have failed. But this is one of the great gifts that we have to offer in a world in need in an age where community is such a rarity that people who prioritize it like the Amish are tourist draws and curiosities.

We are centered in Christ as a focus of our faith. That focus brings us to our own need to walk alongside others, and have companionship for the journey. We are called through

discipleship to the community of Christ as a way of committing ourselves to the tending not just of our own selves, our own news, our own preferences, but to look out and see that others are tended too, incarnating the way of God that is already here.. Our community is broken because we are broken. We cannot, and we should not pretend that it is perfect. It is actually that very brokenness and our honesty about it that allows us to incarnate the life of the Spirit. As Leonard Cohen writes: “there is a crack in everything: that’s how the light gets in.” What might it mean for us to tend our cracks well, and know them for what they are: the authentic signs of the Spirits work of a New World coming.

May we each be given the courage to continue the hard work of community.

## Lent 4

### Confession and reconciliation

Leader: *(reading Psalm 32:10-11)*

“Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Who will trust the Lord **today**?

**Confessional response:** *(one or more persons stand in the congregation and say)*

**We trust in the Lord today.  
God, here we stand; your people gathered,  
Flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone.  
You made us. You love us. You redeemed us. You call us.  
Help us to embody the great calling you invite us too.  
Lord we confess that we have too often placed the similarity  
Of language,  
Of race,  
Of ethnicity,  
Of history,  
Of economics,  
Of education  
Before our call to be your hands and feet to each other,  
To the world that you love.  
We allow our preferences to rule our place.  
We have looked for ability within ourselves,  
Denying the vulnerability of being all of who we are before you  
And before your body.  
God, we confess that your thoughts are not our thoughts  
Your ways are not our ways.  
We know that you are always inviting us to more,  
Even as we fall so often short of the best that you have for us.  
May all that we are, all that we do,  
and all that we embrace be a reflection of your kingdom,  
where none are made afraid.  
Amen**

Leader: We are all invited to trust the Lord **today**. Let us bring ourselves to God in prayer.  
*(Worship leader leads in prayer.)*

**All: God of steadfast love, we put our trust in your care for us.  
When we need to find our way home, we put our trust in you.**

Leader: When we need forgiveness (*pause*), we put our trust in you.  
When our souls hunger for a new way of living (*pause*), we put our trust in you.

**All: In the morning and in the evening, we will put our trust in you.**

Leader: Our generous God provides for us. *(Leader moves to the worship center and fills the bowls with bread while speaking these words of assurance.)*

**Sending** (from 2 Corinthians 5)

In Christ there is a new creation. Everything old is gone, all is new. Go forth, embodying the ministry of reconciliation given to us by Christ.