

How To Build Community
04/08/18

While in Atlanta, surprising my sister for her 80th birthday, I was able to read a wonderful little book by Joy Jordan-Lake, entitled *Why Jesus Makes Me Nervous*. In the book, she talks about 10 alarming words of faith and one of those is what I want to address today. I decided you have most likely heard quite a bit from me and others about doubting Thomas and therefore I figured I would turn my attention to another important aspect of today's readings.

One of the words Jordan-Lake speaks of is Community. As a lead in to my thoughts about this important topic, let me explain why I'm using her reflection. She speaks of a friend named Janet, who lost her daughter Joanna the day after her 18th birthday. It seems Joanna and two friends had driven to nearby Austin, Texas, to celebrate the upcoming graduations from high school, Joanna's recent birthday, the recent proms and the gleam of their futures before them.

On the way home, they'd pulled off for sodas, and in pulling back onto the access road, failed to yield to another driver. Both girls in the front seat, one of them Joanna, were killed. Everyone in this church knows someone, whether directly or indirectly, who has suffered a similar loss, a tragedy beyond belief. And at times like those, there are few words that can adequately express the sorrow we feel towards the family.

It is in this context that Jordan-Lake addresses community. She says that, face after face and life upon life, we discover that shared pain is not lessened pain. Quite the opposite. Her pain and his pain and their pain have all become your pain, too. Somehow the pain becomes greater when it is passed around. But so does the healing and the hope.

She goes on to say that, when Christ says those words, "This is my body, this is my blood", He speaks among us and something peculiar happens. We are all marking our seven-year anniversary without a date; we are all approaching ninety-five and widowed; we are all getting married this summer.

We are all facing cardiac surgery next week. We are all on public assistance, permanently unemployed; we are all driving broken-down heaps.

Christian community, taken seriously, means suddenly we're shouldering the tragedies, the abandonment, the grief of the people around us, just as they are shouldering ours. Community means sharing each other's joy and hope and healing. In a thousand ways, taking Jesus seriously when He speaks of sharing His Body and Blood, makes life harder, tougher, uglier. But it also makes life richer and finer and finally worth living.

We heard in the first reading about the early church being of one heart and mind, with no one claiming any possessions as their own – everything was held in common and so there was no needy person among them. Mary McGlone suggests the sharing of goods described in Acts was not a socialist system or the original model for religious communities with vows of poverty and common ownership. It does not say that everyone put everything in common as did the Qumran community that lived by the Sea of Galilee. Rather, it suggests some gave what they had to provide for those in need.

Luke does not portray this as a requirement for community membership – even if the example of the generous would have put significant pressure on those who were reluctant to follow their example. The emphasis is not on what was given, but instead on the fact that no one was in need.

So what does this look like for us in 21st century Inver Grove Heights? Are we called to sell everything we have so that there is more to share, so that no one, absolutely no one is in need? I don't think that's what Jesus is after. I do, however, feel this passage from Acts challenges us to look at what gifts we have been given and how we share them, whether it is our time, our talent or our treasure. That in itself will be challenge enough.