

Why is it Better Together? Support
Eccl 4:9-12
Everton Hills
1 March 2015

Intro – Cheers Theme Song

Perhaps it shows my age... but I used to love the sitcom **Cheers**. The dumb story lines. The mismatch of characters. All people with various perspectives in life and significant social and emotional problems. And the fact that they get along well together, or find ways to live life in community... that's what grabs me. Healthy communities are never homogeneous – people who are essentially the same. It is the embracing of diversity that Paul was meaning in 1 Corinthians 12...

²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. ²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

There is a great line in the theme song that goes like this...

"Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came; You want to be where you can see, Our troubles are all the same; You want to be where everybody knows your name!"

Wouldn't it be great if that's what people would say about us – Prince of Peace. According to the apostle Paul, there is something immensely spiritual about it. Better Together is a spiritual thing.

But how spiritual are we? Are we a place where everyone knows your name? Where we are always glad you came? Where your past is not judged? Where we recognise that our troubles are fundamentally the same – because we share a common humanity?

Maybe? Maybe not?

Charles Swindoll once made the following observation that the local pub is possibly the best model of what church should be like. But it's an imitation. It dispenses grog instead of grace. Escape from reality, rather than a journey through reality. But, (and these are his words ***"it is a permissive, accepting and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."*** (Charles Swindoll. *"Insights on Luke"*)

Are we unshockable? Accepting? Loving? Loved?

The wise man, Solomon said...

⁹Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

¹¹Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? ¹²A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NLT

Perhaps you have heard that reading at a wedding – used in the context of a marriage. That wasn't Solomon's original intent. He was actually talking about the importance of making connections, the value of friendship! Ultimately, we are Better Together!

Billionaire publisher, Malcolm Forbes once said, "He who dies with most toys wins." He had what many people desire; power, prestige, privilege... But he was wrong about having the most toys. Things don't buy you happiness. It is relationships, and shared experience within those relationships that do. That's why next weekend, we are beginning our monthly 'On Sunday Funday' to provide opportunity for shared experiences! That's why we are providing opportunities for our young people to hang out at Youth Connect or after Sunday night church at Remix.

And that is the underlying thought of Ecclesiastes!

Elsewhere, Solomon put it this way...

Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.
Proverbs 18:24, NRSV

So this morning, I want to spend a few moments, to look at why life, 'lived in community' is better.

People in community **Are there, when you're down!**

¹⁰If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

This is a real touch stone question. Are your friends 'friends' or 'acquaintances'?

How do you know the difference? Try calling someone at 2am in the morning. Tell them you need them. And see what happens.

That might be a bit of an overstatement, but you get the point. True friends, true community, puts themselves out for others. They are other-centred, rather than self-centred. If we are truly community, our heart is to do whatever is necessary to bring out the best in others, to be there for each other, to give up things that are important to us for each other.

What sort of community do we want to be?

Life 'lived in community' **Provides Emotional Or Physical Warmth.**

We live in a world devoid of touch. For some, the closest they get to touch is the plastic handset of a digital device. And while that might provide some sense of connection, human skin is the largest organ of the body – for a very good reason... it craves human touch! During the second world war, one orphanage had a disastrous mortality rate because the nurses had no time to hold the children. It was only when a visitor made the effort to hold, touch and talk to each infant every day, that the mortality rate abated.

Solomon says,

"Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?"

Now while touch is important, Solomon is talking about more than physical warmth. He is talking about that depth of connection that enables people to know that they are not alone!

And the key word is **connection!**

Connection is not about one person telling another person what to do. Connection is about having shared experiences, where you will never feel all alone even in the middle of a crowd. That's why we promote Life Groups within our church – and if you want to know more, speak to me.

You see, I think that there are two sorts of people. Encouragers and discouragers. Encouragers are those who you hang out with, those whose very words and actions fill your emotional bank balance. Discouragers are those who are so busy criticising, arguing, telling you all about their problems, or about what you should be doing better, that when they leave, you smile to yourself and offer a little prayer to God... “Thank you God!”

What sort of connector, do we want to be?

Life lived in community means that **you never fight alone!**

Solomon says...

¹²A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.

Solomon was quoting ancient world military strategy. Almost all combat, was hand to hand combat. So soldiers went into battle with a partner, someone that could be counted on and trusted implicitly. The soldiers stood back to back with each other, keeping their backs in contact, fighting whatever enemy came from any side.

Having each other's back! Physically, emotionally, socially. That's what true community does. It's not about saying things that are negative or unkind when that other person isn't present – no matter how true it might be. It is about protecting, and honouring the relationship of the other.

Finally, **life lived in community is committed to living life in community.**

“Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:12b, NLT)

This is one of the most miscontextualised readings in the bible. Often it is used about having God entwined in the relationship of your marriage. And that is a good thing... but that's not what it foremost means.

If you look at the context, this is about living life in community. “A triple braided cord is not easily broken”. And as life lived in community, with people defending each other, being there for each other, looking for the best in each other, never speaking ill of each other, fighting for each other – well, there is something spiritual, very spiritual, about that community.

So **Cheers!** Be there for each other. Be available to each other. Build connections. Fight together. Live life in community. And be God's presence in each other... and in so doing, you will experience the presence of God.