

## **Together; kia kaha**

Exodus 19:3 – 8, John 17:15 – 24

Bridget Crundwell was 2 weeks younger than me. She was loved in life and death. Her funeral was on Friday. The church was full. We remembered Bridget before as well as during her mental illness. We didn't avoid the truth that she took her own life. We recognised there is great hope and that God's love is far greater than we know. God and Bridget were honoured.

Many people have said "I feel guilty ...." We all think we should have visited more, prayed more, offered more .... whatever we did For Bridget wouldn't have made any difference.

But I wonder if we shouldn't dismiss those unpleasant guilty feelings too quickly. Perhaps God is inviting us to sit with them for a bit; not to condemn ourselves, but to ponder what it really means to stand together?

What does it mean to be a Christian community in this locality where God has placed us?

### A community covenant

The Old Testament incident occurs about three months after the people have left Egypt. No longer captives, they are wondering what next. As they enter the desert, what does the Lord have for them?

The Lord reaffirms his love for them to Moses –  
You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

He goes on to say that he requires obedience from them. Obedience to God is key in forming a genuine worshipping community; one that will be life-giving to all its members and bring light to the rest of the world.

And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded."

So the people have heard God's love for them and responded. They want to be God's treasured possession. They want to belong to God and to each other.

They go on to prepare themselves for worship and to seal that relationship as a community in a covenant with God. Moses and Aaron would receive the Ten Commandments on behalf of the Jewish community.

On hearing of God's love for them the people responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded."

We will do everything – the commandments are not about individual behaviour but about the well-being of the community. They are about living in community and supporting each other.

We will not I will. We will.

The exodus is a critical part Israel's history. It's vital in forming God's community. The covenant that with God came out of that context.

But ..... they stuffed up – they didn't obey God in the way they said they would. Are you and I any different?

Regardless of their failings, the Lord continues to work on their behalf.

### Unity in the Community

And in time Jesus came to another community. Jesus lived with them, bringing healing and hope; bringing a whole new way of life.

All of Jesus' teaching about himself and his father and new life in that relationship, is directed at the community. Jesus transforms individuals who will bring the Good News to their communities.

The Samaritan woman invites her community to "Come and meet a man ..." John 4:29

It was inevitable that the religious lot and the secular authorities couldn't let such a man live. Jesus undermined all the authorities' efforts at individual self-promotion.

Before Jesus is killed by those authorities, as always, he hangs out with his mates offering wisdom and prayer.

It's an important night together retold over four chapters in John's Gospel. Our snippet is part of Jesus prayer for unity for his mates and for all who would follow them. For us!

Jesus made it clear they, and we, are not to be an isolated community; we are to remain in the world.

There are times for retreat; for refreshment or teaching so that we are equipped to live in the world. Living within the world, just like the earlier Jews, we are to obey God and to live holy lives – as a community.

Jesus' tells his mates that God's truth; God's word helps us. Paul expands on this in his letter to the Colossian church:

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. .... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Colossians 3:12, 14, 15

Back to Jesus' words in John: We can live a holy life when, we are 'in' Jesus and 'in' our Father God. v21 Our unity with each other comes out of our relationship with Jesus and his Dad. It overflows from their love for each other.

Unity comes only from love. Unity is essential for community to work. Genuine community is rare and the world longs for it – we all do.

As a church community we have covenanted with God to Follow Jesus and Build Community.

A few very brief observations about our community – as we are in part now and can grow more into:

We are Christ focused, Spirit empowered, deeply loved by our heavenly Father  
We are relatively fluid - responding where needed  
We are a safe place – welcoming everyone; all ethnicities, social status, sexual orientation, personalities, eccentricities etc – after all you have welcomed me!  
We care for each other and we reach out to others in love

There is much more that is positive that I could say but I want to leave us with two challenges to pray and ponder about.

The first is how we talk genuinely and lovingly to each other about things we disagree on. That's all I want to say about that just now.

The second challenge is something that Kevin and Anne highlighted when they were with us – (3 years ago?) It is a huge challenge.

It would involve examining every aspect of our individual and corporate lives. This challenge will make us look at:

- our relationships with God and with each other
- where we get our individual sense of self-worth from
- our calendars
- how we do church generally
- and our finances

That challenge is one of our busyness. How come we rush around and make ourselves so busy as a church?

This week someone said "Can we meet now?" So we caught up over coffee and had a fantastic and productive conversation.

But you know what struck me about that instance? Very rarely could I say "Yes, I have an hour free right now."

In an emergency obviously, I would drop everything to be with someone. But what about my daily life – how come I have so many meetings and tasks to do every single day?

Perhaps our biggest challenge over the next year or two is to be less busy.

Being authentic community takes time; time many of us don't have right now. Our new building is only as good as how we live in it and reach out from it..... together.

Jesus said to his Dad "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one." V22

I saw glorious community in action at Bridget's funeral. I saw hugs and tears; friendships being renewed and love being shared over cups of tea. That was a community of friendship and support which I know will continue for Martin, Bridget's husband, over the years – he is going to need it.

Together we can stand strong in life. We can be there for each and for others when life is hard. Kia kaha together.