

Christ's Call to Community

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St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA

August 4, 2024

Pentecost 11

When I was in middle and high school, whenever someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up I would tell them that I wanted to be a rancher. I had a dream of living a self-sufficient life in the mountain west, riding horses, growing my own food, and living in harmony with the land. I spent most of my 20s living in Colorado, and toward the end of my tenure there I found that my vision started to shift away from the mountain west to someplace more mid-Atlantic. Someplace forested. Someplace with water. But I held fast to that goal of self-sufficiency. I still wanted to grow as much of my own food as I could and started researching other ways to be self-sufficient.

I didn't have many people in my life that I could turn to to help me learn the skills I wanted to acquire to live sustainably. My grandmother, Vivy, taught me to shuck corn and pick strawberries. She knew how to make and can jams, but she died before I had the chance to learn much more than that from her. I remember calling my mom shortly after college to ask her the best way to cook salmon. She told me to put it in the microwave. I thought, "forget it! I'll just google it!" And so I turned to the resources I had most readily available to learn about homesteading – Google, YouTube, and Instagram.

In the last few years, I stumbled across an Instagram account called "Venison for Dinner." It is run by a young woman named Kate, who is about my age, and who chronicles her life on a homestead in northern British Columbia. She covers topics related to homesteading, like how to care for livestock, the process for making different kinds of cheese, the differences between growing a crop garden and a kitchen garden, and so much more. Yes, I have made cheese using her tutorials. Yes, it was delicious!

I have learned about canning, gardening, foraging, and natural remedies all from social media. I have gained so many skills from the instruction of women I have never even met. Kate, in particular, uses a phrase that I had never considered before that helped me shift the way I think about my goal of self-sufficiency. She argues that self-sufficiency is not, and can never be, the true goal of the homesteader. Small scale farmers would quickly fail without the support, knowledge, and supplies of their community. She strives not to be self-sufficient, but to be community-sufficient.

In farming communities, there is no need for each family to own every piece of farming equipment they need to get every job done, as long as someone in their community has it. If one family raises animals for meat, while another grows hay and corn to feed growing animals, those families can trade with each other and support each other. Almost all necessities can be sourced from within a community, but not from within one single homestead.

As Christians, we have the resources to meet all of our needs within our communities too. Jesus calls us out of the illusion of self-sufficiency and into community and interdependence with one another. In the verses of John leading up to today's reading, Jesus has just performed several miracles, signs that he is the son of God. He has healed the sick, fed the 5000, and walked on water. But the crowd continues to follow Jesus around, including across the sea to Capernaum. They're saying, yeah we've seen those signs, but how about you give us an even sign-ier sign?!

In today's reading, Jesus tells them, enough is enough. I am the sign. It's me. "I am the bread of life." But the crowd doesn't understand. They just don't get it. And in some ways, that's fair. Jesus is asking them to give up a lot of the life they had known to this point, to make themselves social and political outcasts for the sake of following him. It's a huge leap of faith, and the people in the crowds want to be really sure that he's the real deal before making that leap themselves.

Instead of giving into these demands for magic tricks, Jesus calls them into community with one another. He is always calling us into community. All of these miracles he's already performed were done in public, in community. He manifests in community, in the presence of each other, and through him we are interconnected. Jesus, himself, is the sign and we are only truly equipped to recognize that when we come together and share what we each have to offer – a miraculous recovery here, finding abundance when we thought we had nothing there. Our collective experiences of Jesus are how we can help each other see the signs that Jesus is truly the way to God.

For us, today, what does community mean? What does it look like? What does it ask of each of us? One thing I have found necessary to being in community is the ability to accept help when I need it. A few weeks ago, I was driving home after picking my kids up from daycare. As I turned onto our street, I saw a huge tree limb blocking the road, and I immediately knew it was from one of our trees. As Mark and I tried to will our brains into next steps, someone we had never met before drove up, stopped in front of our house and started clearing a downed wire. Then two of our neighbors showed up a few minutes later and helped us cut off branches and clear the road. The next morning, another neighbor brought over his extension ladder and helped us get the rest of the limb down and hauled away. There's no way we would have been able to handle this situation by ourselves. We didn't have the tools, the knowledge, or the number of hands needed to get the job done safely. Sure, we could have outsourced the work to a tree company, but thanks to our community we were able to avoid that hassle and expense. We weren't self-sufficient, but we were community-sufficient. We were open to accepting help from our community in a moment of vulnerability.

A second aspect of community-sufficiency is Christ's call to share what we have, to be in relationship with each other. Many of us have vegetable gardens, either here at our Good News Garden or at our own homes (or both). And many of us may have made the mistake of planting too many zucchini plants. Anyone who has ever made this error in judgement, as I myself have done multiple times, knows that no one person, no one family no matter how big, could possibly keep up with the sheer quantity of zucchini coming out of the garden! We rely on our friends, neighbors, strangers, and squirrels to help us get through all these zucchinis we have coming out of our ears! As Marge Piercy writes in *Attack of the Squash People*, "Look for newcomers: befriend them in the post office, unload them and run. Stop tourists in the street. Take truckloads to Boston. Give to your Red Cross. Beg on the highway: please take my zucchini, I have a crippled mother at home with heartburn." By spreading our resources out, everyone has enough to meet their needs, and no one has to deal with more than they can handle.

Even the recent Disney movie, *Encanto*, focuses on this idea of coming together to thrive in community. It focuses on a third image of being community-sufficient: we're stronger together. When the members of the Madrigal family focus too much on what each individual wants for themselves, the entire magical house breaks apart and comes crashing down around them. It's only by coming together to truly hear and support each other, each person shifting from what serves them to what serves their community, that the house is able to right itself and become stronger and more magical than ever.

When we join together, we create magic too. Our beloved community of Saint Davids knows what it looks like to pull together and be community-sufficient. In so many ways, we're already doing it. I have only been here for about a year, and I have seen members of this congregation pull together to support families as they grieve the loss of a loved one. We fill in the gaps for new parents as they welcome a newborn and suddenly have hardly any time to sleep or shower, let alone stay on top of household tasks. We organize meal trains when someone has to have surgery and cannot put weight on their leg long enough to cook dinner. We know how to lean on each other and how to hold each other up, and we do it all the time.

The Saint David's fair is a beautiful example of community-sufficiency. We all donate items that we once loved but don't serve us anymore. We donate our time, on the day of the fair itself, but also in the weeks and months leading up to the big event. We achieve something so much bigger than any of us could accomplish on our own. Then we turn around and give all of the proceeds from such an event to outreach, to help our neighbors and to glorify God. In doing this, we extend our community, and help others to be community-sufficient too.

In times of transition, it can be tempting to retreat inward, to protect ourselves from the unknown, to hide in the safety of our own bubbles. I want to invite each of us to rise above that temptation. We have a wonderful opportunity to come together as a congregation as we welcome our new Rector, Rick Morley, in just a few short weeks. He will need us, just as much as we will need him, just as much as we will need each other. When we come together and form community in this way, we have every opportunity to see Jesus at work in ourselves and each other. When we come together, we answer Christ's call to us and join in his eternal priesthood. Amen.