

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24  
Matthew 25:31-46

First Presbyterian Lancaster, SC

“There is no ‘yes, but...’”

Community is a vital part of our society. Before you think that this is a sermon on football, let me assure you- I am not a part of any community that played this weekend. Despite my parent’s best efforts- I just don’t like football.

However, the point remains- Community is vital for the society we live in. But community can’t be achieved by simply telling people to be in one. In fact, that happened to me once. I moved in with 7 people about 17 hours away in Kansas City. I was told, “This is your community now. See? here are all the activities you will do together.” It doesn’t work like that. There isn’t the ability to be a part of something simply because you’re told to be. Especially for me, I specifically hate doing pretty much anything I am explicitly told to do. Please don’t hear me wrong- eventually those 7 other people became a community I relied on, but it was not by our boss’ doing.

I’ve been a part of other communities that formed quickly and tightly to reveal strong bonds. My friends at Columbia are a clear sign of this. My first day, of my first class at Columbia, I sat next to a woman named Nell. She turned to me and introduced herself, we talked about our homes and our excitement and nerves of being in Seminary. We sat next to each other the rest of the week, every day talking a little more. Later I found out, she sent her mom a picture of me that said “this is my new best friend, Macy”. Now we have a group of about 12 people who all talk fairly constantly through a group text message. We can always be found studying together, usually at different bars and restaurants around Decatur. That friendship started this

entire Friend-Family that we have going and I know I will be friends with those people when we all graduate.

We see this in the scripture today. The Matthew passage we heard today speaks into the type of community that we are asked to participate in. And yall- this is hard. Really think of what is happening in this passage. Listen, the ones that we are called to be in community with: the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and finally the prisoner. Y'all that is a long list! Think of that for a moment. I would really rather this list sound more like this: My family, my friends, the professors who give me good grades, and finally, the people who cook food for our potluck dinners. But no- there are a lot of differences in our lists.

I don't know about you, but I have walked past a lot of hungry people this week. I know I have sat next to thirsty people in class with a full water bottle next to me. Strangers scare me. If someone were to walk up to me naked, my first thought would not be to hand them my coat. I don't ever know how to help people who are sick, I simply end up awkwardly talking too much. And finally, prisoners are in prison for a reason right? So obviously I don't have to visit them.

It is easy to be in a community with our family, our friends, bosses or professors who are nice to you, and people who make you food. Especially if it is good food. But suddenly, we hear clearly how we are supposed to be in community with each other. Suddenly it isn't quite so easy to be in a community. It is not as easy to whole heartedly and happily say, "yes! Absolutely. I will totally follow you."

I would be easier to say, "yes, but give me just a minute..." or "you know, I am totally good with following you, I just have to do this thing first..." or "yes, I will follow you, but only these ways... I only want to love *these* people." But Matthew 25 has a wake-up call for us, there is no "yes, but...". You may ask, well yes, but what happens if we do ask for that extra moment?

What happens if we say, “absolutely, just let me do this one this first.”? Scripture has an answer for that question, if we look at Luke 9: 57-62 we see our answer, listen now for the Word of the Lord:

“As they were going along the road, someone said to [Jesus], “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to [them], “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another [Jesus] said, “Follow me.” But [they] said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to [them], “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to [them], “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Wow. Okay, that is some pretty heavy stuff. I am sure these people walking with Jesus were not trying to be dense, I am sure they were not even trying to be sassy. They simply had things to do first. They were literally saying, “yes, but...” and Jesus is having none of it.

I can tell you from experience, no matter where God has called me, I have taken a moment to drive home and tell my parents goodbye. As I was graduating college, I went to Tampa, but you can bet that I stopped and hung out my parents for a week or so. Once I left Tampa, to go to Kansas City, man, that time I took a whole month to say goodbye to my parents. When I started at Columbia, I didn’t go home to Mom and Dad, but I did stay with my sister for a week. All of these times, I said, “yes, I will go where you have asked, I will serve how you need... but give me 2 seconds to say goodbye to the people I care about.” Jesus is asking us for more than a “yes, but...”.

I want to encourage you to think of the communities you are a part of. If you're thinking of those and you find yourself saying, "yes, but..." to them, contemplate why. There are times that those communities are asking for more. I know in my walk with my Christian Communities, I know I need to give more.

As you know, my grandmother is Peggy Furr. We have a whole Facebook group called the "Furr Tree and Branches", when I am around Lancaster people will ask me if I am a Furr. I take this question as a compliment, because the Furr family is awesome. But I always answer the same way, "I am Furr Adjacent." I am a Ruple, but that Furr blood runs deep. In that case, I am definitely a part of the Furr community. They are the family that I call when wonderful things happen, and I am proud to be Furr Adjacent. But there are other communities that I am adjacent to that are not so much of a compliment.

This all seems like a lot of work though. You may be asking, what do I have to gain from all this? Well again, we can turn to the Word for this answer. Our Ezekiel passage speaks to our reward for the hard work of happily being a community in Christ. God is willing to give Their sheep only the best! These sheep are having the time of their life. We get the best grazing land, on the mountaintops of Israel. I've been to Israel and let me tell you, it is not a bad place to have grazing land. We get rescued! God is willing to find us in the wilderness and bring us home. We receive the justice of the Lord when we give ourselves to this community.

That reward seems a lot better than it would be to just get a minute more saying "yes, but...". The full reward of God is waiting for us at the end of this tunnel. We simply have to say full heartedly and happily, "Yes." And I know this is hard. It is easier to say, "yes, but give me a moment." or "yes, but not those people, I only want to love these people..." or any other "yes, but..." that you can think of. No matter what you could possibly think of as a good reason to

wait that extra minute without the community you're being called to, it will never beat the glory you will find being a sheep of God. That is the best reward there is.

Growing up my Dad always asked us what we learned in the sermon during church. So I will give you a Reader's Digest version in case you spaced out this whole time. Community is vital. We are called to include the people who aren't as easy in that community, read Matthew 25 for clarification. And finally, our reward for having those communities and saying "yes" to them is we get to be a sheep of God. Read Ezekiel 34 for how awesome that will be.

Thank you all for allowing me to preach this morning. I am blessed to be a part of this community.