

SUNDAY, April 6, 2025 Lent 5 "Bread for Community"

Psalm 126 850 VU Luke 19:1-10

How do you define 'community'? When the UCC restructured beginning in 2019, we were introduced to the term "community of faith" so that we no longer use the terms church or pastoral charge. As a community of faith we share together and we look after our gifts and work together to worship as we strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus. But just what is a community?

Are there parameters needed? Is it based on location, geography? How would you define Glenwood United church as a community? What is interesting is that yes we are faith based but according to many governments we are also a community which welcomes others. For example we are the home of the 45th Scouting groups, the 55th Guide group, AA, VON Yoga classes, chair yoga and pickle ball. We also share in community this building called a sanctuary a place set aside for worship- and we do this and so do our friends in community-- from the Windsor Korean First Presbyterian Church. But what is a community? And how do we build one?

A 'community may be defined as a unified body of individuals with different parameters: a) living in a particular area-- ie south Windsor; b) a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society-- retired people- or a monastery or a student residence; c) a group of people with professional interests scattered throughout- academic community or scientific community; d) a group of people with a common history or common social, economic, and political interests; e) a group linked by a common policy or an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (such as species) in a common location.

As a community of faith we define ourselves because we are a church and believe in God- "because God is present when we share acts of worship and compassion; when we seek and do justice; when we love one another; and when we serve others in and beyond our community; we do this by learning together with a spirit of humility, joy and commitment. (Mission statement 2015)

Why is this important? Because Jesus preached, healed and taught in a variety of communities. Most often the community was established where he stood, sat, and talked.

In our Lenten series thus far we have referred to Jesus as the Bread of life; as the means to grow, to be nurtured, to share and today our focus is bread for community. What does this mean? The reading from Luke 18-19 occurs as Jesus is on his way to Jericho. As he

approaches this town, a blind man was begging on the side of the road. He hears a crowd going by and wants to know what was happening. He is told that Jesus is going by. The blind man shouts, Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me. Those in front told him to be quiet but he shouted even more loudly. Son of David, have mercy on me. Jesus stopped walking. He ordered the man to be brought to him. Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you? Lord let me see again. Jesus states, 'Receive your sight, your faith has saved you.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him glorifying God- and all the people when they saw it, praised God.

All those who were walking with Jesus, 'the crowd' saw it and praised God. But Jesus did not stop there. He was going to Jericho and so continued on his way. In Jericho, a man named Zaccheus had heard about Jesus. AND he was trying to see who Jesus was. Zaccheus is a chief tax collector and was rich. But he was a short man and would not be able to see who Jesus was. So he ran ahead on the street where he figured that Jesus would have to walk as he went further into the town. Zaccheus climbed a tree to watch the crowd. But instead of just watching Jesus go by, Jesus spotted him. He said Zaccheus- come down I'm going to stay at your house today.

How did Jesus know Zaccheus' name? or what he did or who he was? Was this Jesus' plan all along? To go to Jericho to see this man? Had Zaccheus' life story and reputation been told to Jesus? We don't know all the answers to these questions, all we do know is that Jesus made a point in front of the crowd that he was going to the house of this man. The man who was known as a sinner, for he was a tax collector who cheated others out of their money. A man who not only collected taxes from citizens but also as a chief tax collector he would have made more money from those whom he supervised. He was rich.

But when he saw Jesus something changed within and Jesus made it happen. The community or crowd around Jesus saw it too. Zaccheus told Jesus- I'll give half of my possessions to the poor; and if he defrauded/cheated others of anything he would pay back 4 times as much. Then they went to his house. We don't know exactly how far the crowd was before they went to Zaccheus' house but Jesus declared fairly quickly that 'today salvation has come to this house' because he too is a son of Abraham."

One can only imagine what happened next. The servants would be scrambling to look after Jesus and the other guests- refreshments, water for cleaning and food preparation. We don't know what Mrs. Zaccheus thought about this change for her husband but there was

something that happened. Half of what was in the house would be sold; those who were defrauded/cheated would come to call and receive payment and then what was left would be what the family would now live on. Would there be enough to survive? To live? Or would the lifestyle of the household be changed dramatically?

Jesus is the bread of life and it seems that in this story of the blind man's healing and then the change in Zaccheus lives are changed for the better overall? Or are they? The blind man would be welcomed back by his family and the community as a whole. He could now contribute and support himself in whatever he did before he went blind-- he asked to see 'again'. But with Zaccheus he too would be changed-- life would be simpler, and the community around him would support and care for him even though they did not before. He was seen as a sinner a cheat and one who was not trusted. But because of Jesus giving of himself just by being himself, Zaccheus knows that he does and will make a difference in his life. He has much wealth- but he also sees that he can give it away and still have enough. He has seen what he has done to hurt others and is willing to make amends. He has seen Jesus as the one who offers new life and he has accepted this change.

SO when Jesus stays at Zaccheus' house he is given food and drink, and great hospitality but what Zaccheus receives is a community that will forgive him and love him. He will be seen as a man who was changed from within because of Jesus. HE will be known not only for his shortness and hiding in a tree to see Jesus, but he will be known as the man who was found by Jesus. For Jesus the Son of Man came to see out and to save the lost. Zaccheus was lost in the lifestyle of a wealthy man. But knew something about Jesus. He wanted to him for himself. There was a sense of wonder and curiosity about Jesus the Son of God. And so he risked being himself in front of the crowd who travelled with Jesus, and those with whom he lived. And was changed by the One who gave him a new life and new hope.

As we continue our Lenten journey we will soon hear the story of Jesus as the kind who rides a donkey, the one who is sentenced to die and the one who dies and is buried. But we will also hear what he asks us to do - remember his teachings, and remember Him at the table. He is the one who brings salvation, hope and new life to all who would believe. HE is the one who established communities of faith filled with hope, peace and love. And it is the joy that Jesus offers to people that we want to experience anew. The joy that came to Zaccheus' heart that day forever changed him and his life. And this is what we believe is important for all the lives of those in this community of faith and all who come together as one. Because we are here

because of Jesus. Over 70 years ago, it was a group of people who said, we need a UCC here in South Windsor and Glenwood Church was established as a place of meeting- a place where one is welcomed into community and where lives are changed because of Jesus' message of love. As we consider our purpose, mission and what we do we need to remember that Jesus is the bread of life and the focus of our community. Without Jesus being taught and believed by people in the past, we would not be here. And it is our responsibility to share this message with others. It is our hope that as we continue in our Lenten journey through Holy Week and to Easter, we will grow in faith and experience the wonder of life and love for each other and in the name of Jesus. For we are one in Christ and one with each other. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

God we gather here because your Spirit calls us to be here in community with the one who feeds and nurtures with hope and love. Jesus is the bread of community and so we pray that His message will endure as we strive to be the hands and feet of Christ here and now.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.