

Thick Community

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[0 : 00] I'm a pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here, not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

We're continuing to take a break from our series in the book of Judges. We're doing a five-week series on our Grit and Grace Generosity Initiative. And as you hear that word generosity, of course you know we're talking about raising money as a church, but in our sermons we are not going to talk a lot about giving because our church is not about money.

It's about a mission. We just happen to need money to pursue that mission. And so we're going to be talking about the mission of this church and our vision together. A couple weeks ago we talked about, from Matthew chapter 5, about the church being the city set upon a hill.

[1 : 14] The church is the light of the world. And then last week we talked from 1 Corinthians chapter 3 about the fact that we're a gospel hub. We're a church that's constantly sending and receiving.

And this week we're going to be jumping forward in 1 Corinthians all the way from chapter 3 to chapter 12. And we're going to be talking about the piece of our vision that is our thick community, that is we're deeply connected to one another.

Now I'm going to read a long section. I'm going to read verses 12 through 27 just for context, but our focus this morning is going to be mainly on verses 25 through 27.

So we're going to read a large section so we know what we're talking about. And then we're going to zone in on three verses specifically. And our question this morning is simple. What is unique about the Christian community?

What is unique about the Christian community? Why is the Christian community the thickest of all communities? Now it's with that, I invite you to turn with me to God's Word.

[2 : 17] You can turn in your Bible, you can turn on your phone, you can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now 1 Corinthians chapter 12, starting with verse 12. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body.

And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?

[3 : 27] If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Verse 22. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor.

And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Verse 26. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together.

[4 : 36] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you for your gift of the church to us.

We thank you for this community, not simply a community that gathers on Sunday morning, but a community that scatters throughout the week together. We ask that you would continue to build this community, this outpost at Cheyenne Mountain.

We ask that you would do it by your word. And so we ask that you help us this morning as we look at Paul's letter to the Corinthians first, and then also for us that you would use it to teach us and grow us.

Most of all, we ask that you would use it to change us, that we would look more like Jesus because of our time together this morning. And we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen.

I don't think I say this very often, but every once in a while, I will say that 2018 was most likely the most challenging year for me of my adult life.

[5 : 44] Some of you who were here back then know many pieces of that. I won't go into all of it, but I will share with you one story from the April of 2018. It was early in the month, and I woke up.

Actually, I wasn't able to go to sleep at night because I had this chest pain that wouldn't go away. And so it was severe enough that I decided I needed to go to the emergency room. So I woke up, one of my housemates that I was living with at the time, and he took me to Penrose downtown, and I wasn't doing great.

I came into the hospital. I got dizzy. I ended up collapsing on the floor. Now, there was another thing that was happening in April of 2018, which is that I was trying to get ordained as a minister. And this ER incident actually happened several weeks before I was supposed to go and do my final series of oral tests before our regional church.

And so during that time, I was working and studying a lot. I was working on these exams to become ordained as a pastor, and there was one particular coffee shop where I would spend an enormous amount of time.

I spent so much time that basically everyone at this coffee shop, they knew who I was, they knew my name, and I was there so much that five-plus years later, sometimes I'll still run into someone from that time who remembers who I am, they know my name.

[7 : 01] The question is this. When I was in the emergency room, did anyone from the coffee shop visit me?

No. Now, it's not their fault. I'm not throwing them under the bus. I didn't tell anyone at the coffee shop that I was in the emergency room.

Not only did I not tell them, I wasn't able to tell them. I had never exchanged phone numbers with them. So I knew these people. They recognized me. We had some sort of community together.

And yet when things went sideways for me, who was it that showed up? Well, it was actually someone from this church. Mark and Marie's fair brother came in the middle of the night to Penrose downtown, probably like 1 or 2 a.m., and they stayed with me while they did all these tests, and then I think Mark and Marie ended up driving me back home to my house, and Mark then took me the next morning to get the antibiotics they'd given me.

By the way, I was not having a heart attack at age, what had that been, 29? They told me I had bronchitis. Chest pain is one of the things that you can have with that. I was able to recover, and by God's grace, I got ordained.

[8 : 17] But I tell you all that story to highlight this, the difference between a thick community and a thin community. Thick and thin community is a term that's used by sociologists to describe different groups of people and the level of care and investment and commitment that exists in those types of groups.

If you are in a thin community, you will have people who know your name. You may have drive-by interactions with those people. You may have a shared activity. For me, I knew these people because we had the shared activity of being in the same coffee shop together.

I had the shared activity of ordering coffee. They had the shared activity of providing me with coffee. But will people in a thin community call you when you stop showing up?

Eventually, I kind of broke up with that coffee shop, and I moved on to another one. Did they call me to find out what had happened?

No. They sent me an email saying, we haven't seen you in a while. Here's \$3 off. If you are in a thin community, will they sit with you and cry when you lose a loved one?

[9 : 40] No. Will they give you money for groceries when you're out of work? Maybe. Probably not.

Those are not things that thin communities do. Now, you might find some exceptions here and there, and if you do, they are exceptions that prove the rule. No, that list that I just read to you, those are things that thick communities do.

Thick communities have more than drive-by interactions. People in thick communities know more than just your name. People in thick communities show up when you end up in the emergency room.

People in thick communities sit with you and cry with you when you lose a loved one. People in thick communities bring you gift cards to King Soopers when you lose your job.

In fact, that's what we find throughout the entire testimony of Scripture. Thick community members are intimately connected to one another.

[10 : 46] When I was in the ER, the thin community was not there. The thick community was. That's because the thick community does things like this.

Romans 12, verse 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Galatians chapter 5. Through love, serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 1 Peter 4. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

John chapter 13. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Now, we could have looked at any one of those passages this morning. We happen to be looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 12, which captures these concepts. It shows how intimately connected the members of the church are supposed to be.

[11 : 55] Now, we're told in verse 26 what it's supposed to look like. If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together.

That's a thick community kind of thing to do. That we are celebrating each other's successes and we're grieving each other's losses. That we are deeply and intimately connected. And the reason for that, we're given in verse 12 at the very beginning.

Paul sets up this comparison between the church body and the human body. The human body is one entity with many members.

And the church body, one entity with many members. So we need different parts to make the body work. This is what Paul is teaching this church.

And yet, it's different parts that make the body work. All pointing towards the same mission. All working towards the same end and goal together. All connected and participating in successes and failures.

[12 : 56] He emphasizes this, not just in verse 12, but also in verse 20. As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. And there's all sorts of implications that we could talk about as we think through what this passage means for us as a church.

We could talk about the fact that there's great unity, right? The body only has one purpose and one goal. The toes and the eyes are not in competition with each other.

And we could talk about the fact that there's different tasks. Each person has a special place to fulfill. Part of what we saw in 1 Corinthians 3 last week is that there are some who plant and some who water, right?

Everyone has a job within God's people. This passage ultimately shows our deep need for one another. And it also shows our deep care for each other.

It shows our deep need for one another and our deep care for each other. And it's the deep care that I want to focus us on this morning. This deep care, by the way, is necessarily how a body works.

[13:59] Paul actually doesn't say, hey, this is what you should do. He says, this is unavoidable. This is what a body does.

Notice his language here, verse 26. He doesn't say if one member suffers, all should suffer together. And he doesn't say if all rejoice together, everyone should.

If one rejoices, everyone should rejoice together. No, he states it as the way things just automatically work. Why? Because that's how a body works.

You don't have to think, if you stub your toe, about whether the rest of your body is going to be upset, right? That's not a decision that your body makes. No, it's a body.

One piece is suffering. The entire body is going to suffer, right? Paul is saying, this is how intimately connected you are to each other. This is not my vision for the church. This is what the church is.

[15:01] If it's a body, then necessarily it will function in this way. If it's a body, already we will see this working out in the functions of the community.

You'll note on page seven, this quote from Charles Hodge. He says, this is the law of our physical nature. Notice that word, the law. This is how it works. You can't get around it.

The body is really one. It has a common life and consciousness. The pain or pleasure of one part is common to the whole.

So Paul is not saying that this should happen. He is saying, this is the only way. If you are a body, then this is reality.

If you are a church connected to Christ the head, this is reality. One member suffers, all suffer together. One member rejoices, all rejoice together.

[16:07] He tells us this, verse 25, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. What does he mean here by the same care?

What kind of care do the members have for each other? Well, that phrase, same care, is getting at what Jesus says in Mark chapter 12. The members give the same care to each other that they would give to themselves.

And so this is what Jesus told us. Remember, when we were in the gospel of Mark, what's the summary of the law? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

That's how a body works. The eye cares for the toe as itself. Toe cares for the eye.

The heart cares for the liver. The lungs care for the blood. There is no other way for a body to work.

[17:13] Brothers and sisters, there is no other way for the church to work. If one member suffers, all suffer together.

If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Verse 27 there is telling us why it works this way.

It works this way because that is how bodies work. And so that's our vision for this church.

Our vision for Cheyenne Mountain is that we would be a place of thick community. Our vision is that when someone new walks into the doors here, that they would be warmly welcomed and brought into our fellowship.

Our vision is that as the heartbeat of our community, our worship service would overflow into the week. That we would not simply or merely be people who happen to occupy the same room on Sunday morning, but that as we're sent out from this room at the benediction, we would be connected to each other Monday through Saturday.

[18:36] Our vision is that as one member suffers, all suffer together. Our vision is that as one member rejoices, all rejoice together.

Our vision is that this would be a place where people know each other intimately. That we pray with those who are suffering.

That we rejoice with those who are celebrating. That we work with those who are struggling. That we encourage those who are sad.

And we help those who are grieving. That we would be one community following Jesus together.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member rejoices, all rejoice together. Our vision is not that we would be the church of the beautiful people who have it all together and all look the same.

[19 : 49] Our vision is not that we would have cliques that are hard to break into and insiders and outsiders. No, our vision is that we would have all sorts of people in all sorts of life stages, from all sorts of backgrounds, and all sorts of ages connecting deeply with one another.

Our vision is that we would be the body. Now, this is already happening in our church. When I say this is our vision, what I don't mean is, wow, this is such a cold place.

I hope we can be warm, right? No, I mean, we want to grow. We want this to become more and more true of this community. This is already happening in our church.

It's happening in women's Bible studies and men's Bible studies. It's happening in small groups. It's happening at the ladies' come and go on Fridays. It's happening in our outreach Bible study on Tuesday mornings. We are seeing God at work in this body and we're not satisfied.

We want to see even more. We want to grow even more. We want Romans 15, verse 7, to be true of us.

[21 : 09] Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. A few weeks ago when we launched Grid and Grace on September 24th, a man named Joe was here in our worship services and he was here because Joe is helping us with the generosity initiative.

And so I met with Joe afterwards and I asked him for some feedback. I said, hey, I don't want you to flatter me. We want to grow and improve. Tell me what your experience was like on Sunday morning at Cheyenne Mountain. And he said, well, you guys have that greeting time and it is very long.

He said, I've been to churches before and maybe they have a three minute greeting time. Maybe they'd have less than that. Your greeting time goes for five minutes.

And then he said, and as I was there, I talked to this person and this person and this person and suddenly I realized, oh, there's a reason their greeting time goes so long. These people actually like each other.

I was like, yeah, Joe, that's part of our church. These people actually like each other. They actually want to connect with each other and hear how each other's doing. That is part of what it means to be Cheyenne Mountain.

[22 : 30] I've told this story only a few times, but when I first came to interview in the April of 2017 at this church, I met Paul Bishop, not Paul Bishop II. We have a Paul Bishop in our congregation right now, but we had a previous Paul Bishop in our congregation who's now moved on, the first Paul Bishop.

And I met Paul this weekend, that weekend, and I told him, you know, tell me about Cheyenne Mountain. He said, well, one of the things that's always been true about Cheyenne Mountain is its welcome. People have always commented on how welcome they feel as part of our church.

And I continue to hear that from visitors. People come, they say, man, I'm surprised by how open and welcoming this congregation is. I share all that to say, when we talk about our vision, we're not saying these are things that are not true, but we hope they're true.

No, we're saying this is part of our culture at Cheyenne Mountain. Let it be even more. This is part of our culture at Cheyenne Mountain. Let it continue to grow.

Now, at the beginning, I asked this question. I said, what's unique about the Christian community? Why is it the thickest community? You know, when we talk about thick and thin communities, the church is not the only thick community.

[23 : 48] Okay? There are other places you can go and you can find that kind of care. Now, I will say thick communities are disappearing in our culture. The church is one of the last ones left.

Why? Well, one of the reasons Britt already highlighted this morning, it's on page three of your worship guide. Britt read the first part, community among persons is forged only when there is something more important than one's own interests to which all share a higher allegiance.

But here's the second part. When I am the final authority for determining right and wrong and when nothing is more important than my right to live as I see fit, tight, supportive community is eroded, perhaps even impossible.

In other words, thick community and individualism don't go together. Thick community and secularism do not go together.

Thick community requires, it demands that you be committed to something greater than yourself.

Thick community requires and demands that you adhere to a way of life that you share with other people.

[25 : 04] what's happening in our culture right now. We're rejecting that entirely, right? I am the ultimate standard of authority. If you are the ultimate standard of authority, community will always have its limits.

Because as soon as something is not serving you in exactly the right way, where are you going to go? Somewhere else. No, there's a higher commitment that community requires.

And so that's part of why the church is one of the last thick communities remaining. There's another reason. Let's get to this on the back of your worship guide. A quote by a man named David Brooks talks about the difference between thin institutions and thick institutions.

Thin institutions tend to see themselves horizontally. People are members for mutual benefit. Thick organizations often see themselves on a vertical axis.

People are members so they can collectively serve the same higher good. In the former, there's an ever-present utilitarian calculus. Is this working for me?

[26 : 12] Am I getting more out that I'm putting in? That creates a distance between people and the organization. But in the latter, there's an intimacy and an identity born out of common love.

Why is the church one of the last thick communities left in our culture? Because there's an intimacy and an identity born out of common love.

There is something that is more important than our self-expression. There's something that's more important than our self-identity.

There's something that's more important than our self-interest. And so that's one piece of the story. That's one reason that the church is one of the last thick communities left.

Now, I haven't answered the whole question. The next question is, and why is the church the thickest of all the ones that are left? Before I answer that, I want to say this.

[27 : 16] Right now in the church, there's this phenomenon of people coming and they're coming to the church looking for community. community, but they're consumers of community, not creators of community.

In other words, they come to the church and they say, you're a church and churches are dispensers of community. So where's my community? Where is the group of people that I'm going to get along with the best already established for me?

Where are the events that meet my exact needs at the exact right time? Oh, and by the way, if this doesn't happen on my timetable, well then I'm just going to go find another community vendor.

I'll find another church that's maybe meeting my community need. And so what happens is folks just jump from church to church searching for something that doesn't really exist. And so when I say that we're a church of thick community, that's what we long for, that's our vision, I am not saying we're going to serve it to you on a silver platter.

Because we are not community consumers, we're community builders. You want thick community? Join us in building it.

[28 : 29] You want to be connected with other people in the church? Show up when those people show up. Meet with those people when they meet. Be a part of building this community together.

By the way, that's why Cheyenne Mountain is still here 27 years after its founding. It's because the people who have come here have not been consumers of community, they've been builders of community.

They have not asked how they can be served, but they have asked how they serve. In other words, if you don't show up to anything and you leave during the last song, as thick as this community is, don't expect to find it for yourself here.

Does that make sense? We need to be builders of community, not consumers of community. Okay, I have explained the disappearance of thick communities in one sense, the sense that our society is more and more individualistic.

That doesn't answer the question, though, of why Christianity is the thickest community. You could find thick community in a mosque.

[29 : 47] Maybe you could find it in a Mormon temple. Why do you come here to find it in a Christian church? Well, there's probably many reasons. One of them is this.

This is once again on page seven of your worship guide. Pastor Tim Keller is speaking about truth claims here, but we could apply this to communities as well. All claims are exclusive. The gospel is an exclusive truth, but it's the most inclusive, exclusive truth in the world.

You might say it a different way. All communities are exclusive. The Christian community is the most inclusive, exclusive community in the world.

Why is it the most inclusive of all the exclusive communities? It's the most inclusive because there's only one requirement to be a member. And the requirement is that you recognize that you have no hope outside of Jesus Christ.

And in recognizing that, you realize that you must follow after Him in His faith and obedience. which means it is more inclusive than every other community.

[30 : 59] It's not limited by age. It's not limited by ability. It's not limited by generation. It's not limited by culture. It's not limited by how much you can do or perform.

It's only limited by one thing, and so it's the most open of all the communities. There are many places that will claim to be a family for you.

The army will claim to be your family. And the army will be a phenomenal family for you and to you until the day you get a DUI.

And at that point, the army, I have bad news for you, is no longer your family. Okay? There might be a running club in which you have deep connection and community, and you've actually found a level of thickness there.

But what happens if you lose your legs? There might be another religion that welcomes you in for a time, and if you're not able to perform at the right level, because all religions outside of Christianity are works-based, you will find that it's not the place for you.

[32 : 24] Christianity is the thickest of all communities. The church is the thickest that you can find, because there is only one requirement for admission.

Of course, there's only one requirement for admission because of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. when we talk about being the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, we cannot forget that every body has a head.

Paul tells us in another letter in Colossians, the church is the body, Christ is the head. So why is the church the thickest community? Verse 27 tells us, now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

the church is the greatest body, it's the greatest community, because we have the greatest head.

Now, as we think about being a thick community, we have to talk about what it means to be a community that is getting larger and larger. As I've told you all before, there are many things that we disagree about at this church.

[33 : 40] no one disagrees with the fact that we're growing. No one disagrees with the fact that this church is getting larger and larger in terms of the people that are connected to it and are coming on Sunday morning.

And the challenge of greater growth is that it becomes harder and harder as you have more and more people to build and maintain a thick community. Now, notice what I didn't say. I didn't say it becomes impossible.

I said it becomes harder. It is more challenging the more people you have in a community to stay tight and connected to one another. And one of the ways that you do that is by having even more smaller groups for folks to plug into.

The large group can be a challenging place. You know, sometimes you show up to a restaurant and you have like a party of 15 and everyone insists that you have to sit at one table. Everyone knows that 15 people can't have one conversation, right?

But everyone wants that feeling of, oh, we're all at the same table. Same thing happens in the church. As we grow, there comes this reality where we need more and more smaller places for folks to connect.

[34 : 47] Especially intentional small groups for people to connect. And so that's why the elders have set the goal of by 2026, we want to have five to seven new small groups. Not because we're obsessed with small groups, that's just a strategy, but because we're passionate about thick community.

We're passionate about places where people can come, plug in, connect, and walk side by side with one another. The challenge is this. To get there, we need a second pastor.

And to get a second pastor, we need to eliminate our building debt of \$800,000. And to eliminate that debt, that's why we have the Grid and Grace initiative.

We are trying to raise that money to pay off our mortgage so we can free up \$8,000 a month in our budget. We want to release that \$8,000 and we want to release it into thick community.

We want to release it into a second pastor who will help us do this well. A pastor will be raising up and developing leaders who can run those groups. A pastor will be overseeing them.

[35 : 53] A pastor will help us to be faithful in maintaining our vision moving forward. And so that's why we're inviting and challenging you as the congregation to join us in that.

That you would get the same vision that we have of a community that's intimately connected to one another where as we grow there would continue to be places where people can know and be known.

That's our vision. That's why we're talking about this. That's why we're trying to raise money. Not because we're about money but because we're about a mission. And that mission involves moving forward the next level of growth as a church.

Now I mentioned earlier verse 27 helps us understand why the church is the thickest community. It's because of our head our Lord Jesus.

Colossians chapter 1 says this and he is the head of the church of the body the church. He is the beginning the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent.

[36 : 57] What does a body need to make everything else work? It has to have a head. If you lose your arm you can still make it in life.

If you lose a toe things will be challenging you're still here. If you lose your head game over. right? And it's our head that leads us and guides us. You may have noticed in the back of your worship guide in our vision section we have our symbol for thick community and the symbol is a towel and a basin and the towel and the basin are meant to remind us the story of Jesus from John chapter 13. Remember Jesus is with his disciples it's the last week of his life. They come in and Jesus acts not as the host but as the servant and he does this by washing their feet and he says this in John 13 If I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you also ought to wash one another's feet for I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Why is Christianity the thickest community? It's the thickest community because we are a body that's connected to Christ our head and it's the thickest community because Christ our head has set for us an example.

[38 : 31] He has set for us the example of washing one another's feet. He has given us the grace to not be focused on our own rights and privileges.

He's given us the power to embrace him and others above ourselves. That's the logic by the way in our final song.

A song that can really only be sung by Christians. Tells us three times in the first verse teach us your ways. As we learn from one another learn to love each other.

And that does two things. It recognizes our need. We need to be taught. We can't do this by ourselves. And it also shows us the one from whom we learn it, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the one who has the ways of love. We ask him to teach us. We do that following him together as one community.

[39 : 40] Let's pray. Let's pray.