



St Paul's Dorking Small Groups. Sunday 11th June 2017
ACTS OF PRAYER - The Power of Community: Acts 20:16-38



Introduction - We come to the last of our series in Acts. We will address our thoughts under 3 headings:-

- A perfect community - Paul lives the Trinity, Acts 20:21-24
- An organised community - Paul instructs the organisation, Acts 20: 27-31
- Embracing community - Paul has lived deeply in community, Acts 20: 32-38

So what is today's definition of COMMUNITY? "*A self-organised network of people with a common agenda, cause or interest, who collaborate by sharing ideas, information and resources*". So today Community is not only instantly accessible through 'social' media but it is organic and self-organised, requiring no joining criteria nor governance. Although community has never been more available, it has the danger of being superficial, freewheeling, fickle: nothing more than an edited projection of self-aspirations rather than true, authentic, and committed relationships.

1. A perfect community - the Trinity. Acts 20: 21-24

Father Son and Holy Spirit coexist in unity with diverse and complementary rôles. Coexistence can only be imagined through metaphor: An egg is a trinity Water, Ice and Steam are all H₂O, but:

The rôle of God the Father - The origin of all things, who loves and sends; who judges and forgives.

The rôle of God the Son - The way, the truth, the life: the substitute who deals with our sins; He mediates for us and intercedes for us.

The rôle of God the Spirit - The agent of grace who convicts us of sin and helps us to live like Christ.

This sounds quite technical and theological but **Paul lives the Trinity!** He expresses his faith in an intuitively balanced and Trinitarian way, seamlessly moving between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



2. An organised community. Acts 20: 27-31

St Paul in the 1st century AD

Jesus left no handbook, no charter for the early church. Its rapid and organic growth led to dissention as people tried to formulate the true nature of "*the way*" as Christianity was then known. Paul was founding churches all over the 'world' and writing letters to them to counter heresy and to correct and align the principles of faith in Christ.

'Keepers of the faith' in 2nd to 3rd century AD were preserving documents and a **church hierarchy** began to emerge in Antioch. Arguments increased so they started to collate and validate all the writings into a unified **orthodoxy** ('straight/right teaching'). Interestingly, most of the theological debate centred on the Trinity!

4th Century AD:

Orthodoxy: AD 393 The Council of Hippo validated the 27 books we know as the New Testament as authoritative.

AD 325 Council of Nicea adopted a single body of doctrine called a creed. We still say the 'Nicene' Creed

Organisation: The same Council tried to establish one unified church, crystallising the idea of 'organised Christianity'

This is exactly what makes people uncomfortable, because they don't want to be told how to live and what to believe: in sweet isolation I define my God the way I want- inevitably He ends up defined in my own image.

We need Community. We need the correction, insight, example and encouragement of others as a catalyst to help us with holy living. The church is not perfect, it is full of sinners and hypocrites like you and me and it has been responsible for unholy atrocities, but it is also the hope of the world. God's community of believers are helping to usher in His Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven. And that folks, despite all the difficulties, is why it is so exciting!

3. Embracing community. Acts 20: 32-38

Paul had lived amongst the Ephesians for three years. He had shared deeply in their sorrows, hopes and joys. He had worked alongside them. He had supported the weak among them. In verse 36 we see how they grieved together, embraced one another and wept together. This **IS** the power of community. I know that it is in sharing, in giving of myself and in being transparent that I discover a truer understanding of God. The Power of Community is about discovering the power of the Trinity, through worshipping together, through Home groups and prayer partnerships, through the power of real relationships. Community is important: you change me and get me closer to Jesus as we work together to bring in a little bit of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, here in Dorking!

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

- How do you relate to the Trinity? Do you have a natural focus? Is your view of the 3 in 1 God lopsided?
- How do you feel about "organised religion"? How might you discuss or counter the view that religion is private?
- What strikes you most about how Paul addresses the Ephesian elders?
- How do you "*embrace community*"? Are we sometimes in danger of hiding? How do we counter this?
- What excites you about "*Working together to bring a little bit of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven*"?