

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR COMMUNITY

Real Community: Spirituality of Mysticism & Community

Scott Peck in *The Different Drum* talks about four pivots to building community

Pseudo-community: where we try to be nice to each other and build community by avoiding conflict.

Chaos: when the niceness wears off and people start being real.

Emptiness: when people realize that if community is to occur your life is in the way of community.

Real community: where people are excited about being stuck with each other.

- Of course this is not a straight line – we can skip some stages, we can get stuck in one of them and can experience all of them at any moment
- Illustration: Gillian Bouros
 - She was a journalist with *The Age* who married a Greek and then moved back a little Greek village. Her books started with the spirituality of enthusiasm (*A Foreign Wife*), the spirituality of the roster (about living with her mother-in-law), the spirituality of disillusionment (her divorce), her latest book was about Grandma visiting Australia (so it has come to this!).
 - The sadness to Gillian Bouros' story is not that it is messy – that is life – life is messy – it is a sense that maybe what she gave herself to left her feeling ripped off.
 - As Christians I do not think we can appreciate the depths of real Christian community without facing a sense of being ripped off.
 - Perhaps even harder – when we might be the agents of the rip off.
 - Otherwise we are not a people of forgiveness and resurrection.

Discussion: Philippians 4:4-7

- Paul's letter to Philippians is to a group full of recriminations and back biting sabotaging themselves in the argy bargy of being a Christian community.
- This text is not just a pep talk but words encouraging them to look beyond feelings of being ripped off and disappointed.

To help them hang with those they stuck with in Christian community

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1. How does it feel to be ripped off? What it's like dealing with those who feel ripped off?
2. How do these words help us?

True Christian Community

- What is the heart of true Christian community?
- it is the willingness to allow yourself to need one another even when you have no need of them – as an expression that we all need God.
- Love God Love neighbour is the way of love.
- Understanding that as Christians we are stuck together.
- where we find ways to embrace pains and joys – even get excited about being stuck with each other – though the Jesus power of forgiveness.

Discussion: Philippians 4:8-9

- Paul is asking Philippians Christians to respond to feelings of disappointment, frustration and feeling hard done by with a different inspiration.

Above all Paul knows it requires effort and goodwill to make community work for us all not just for the few

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

1. What are some of the challenges that get in the way of Christian community life?
2. How do these words help us?

Conclusion

- we can find ourselves feeling ambivalent or even fearful of true Christian community because it gets in the way of our life.
- we avoid true community through two idols.
 - materialism: caught up with our financial matters, eg cars, mortgages, renovations, clothes, hobbies – live our Christians lives from a position of security.
 - familialism: caught up with our immediate relationships, eg spouse, children, family – live our Christian lives from a position of rhythm and safety.
- inflicting yourself with either of those is debilitating for your true Christian community.
- inflicting yourself with both at the same time is terminal for true Christian community.
- It is an occupational hazard of being a Christian that we can experience disillusionment and emptiness that kills community.
- Our hope as followers of Jesus is our belief in the God of resurrection – if there is no death, disillusionment and emptiness why do you need resurrection?
- Nothing is beyond the resurrection of our God.

- it requires more than guilt, recommitment and a renewed search for meaning.
- Quote: *The Power of Myth* J.Campbell (p.5)
 - People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences of being alive on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.
- It's rejoicing in Christian community patterns that will make us feel Christian alive.
- it is thinking and placing ourselves in the rhythm and ritual of essential Christian community patterns that make feel Christianly alive.
 - services together
 - praying together
 - reading the scriptures together
 - looking after each other together
 - doing good together
 - caring for God's world together
 - loving God, loving neighbour, together
- of course some modes will come more readily to some but that is okay.
- as we head together into 2025 may you rest in the ways of being together that lead to rejoicing and worthy of honour that will help each other feel Christianly alive.