

# The Mission That Shapes the Community

"Follow Me into Community" Series, September 21 & 22, 2024 | Mark 2:13-17

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Working together can bring people together.

## **Workplace friendships benefit everyone.**

According to the Harvard Business Review, the average American now spends over 80,000 hours at work in a lifetime. That's a solid chunk of our time.

That makes work a place where we are likely to develop relationships and friendships.

Research shows that having a friend at work benefits everyone.

Satisfying workplace friendships make us happier at work, more likely to think positively about our employers, and more productive, which makes the company more profitable.<sup>1</sup>

## **Shared work can bring shared time, shared purpose, and shared memories.**

When we share work, any work, we spend time together, and it takes time to build relationships.

When we share work, we share the common purpose of getting something done. Possibly something mundane like folding laundry and possibly something significant like making sure that everyone in the house has clean clothes so they can go out and change the world!

When we share work, we build shared memories, like painting our first office when I led a team to plant a church in Minnesota. I'll never forget getting ice cream afterward.

## **Working together is like rocket fuel!**

Most rocket fuels combine liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen.

When you combine hydrogen and oxygen atoms, you release a lot of energy!

And what's left behind is water!<sup>2</sup>

When we work together, we do big things, and we're changed in the process.

## **Jesus' mission, His shared work, actually CREATES and SHAPES community.**

Jesus' mission CREATES community because when Jesus calls us to Himself, He takes us out of our old, isolated lives and puts us into the Church, which is a community of His disciples.

Jesus' mission SHAPES community because Jesus makes His mission our mission. We're on a team together. We have work to do. Together.

It's like rocket fuel. We were separated but then we are brought together. We do amazing work and are changed in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2022/10/the-power-of-work-friends>

<sup>2</sup> <https://headedforspace.com/using-liquid-hydrogen-as-rocket-fuel/>

## We learn about Jesus' mission through the calling of Levi.

### **Levi was a tax collector.**

Once again, we have one of those people who may have two names. Levi and Matthew are likely the same individual.

To be a tax collector was to be utterly and completely despised in that society.

It's not just that people didn't like paying taxes either.

It's partly WHOM the taxes were supporting. The Romans were in charge, and they taxed people directly through land and poll taxes. They relied on people who worked for them to collect customs duties and transportation taxes.

Levi was likely in Capernaum, Jesus' adopted hometown. Capernaum sat on a major trade route, so some tax collectors would be at booths on the road collecting duties as they entered a new territory. Capernaum was also a major fishing port, so other tax collectors went to fishermen daily with ledger books open and pens in hand.

It's also HOW the taxes were collected. The government hired non-observant Jews to collect these taxes. They had to bid for the right to collect these taxes, and they kept anything more than the required tax that they collected. So, tax collectors were constantly swindling people.

They were considered traitors. They were counted as being like thieves and murderers. They were expelled from their synagogue. They brought disgrace to their families. If a tax collector entered a house, it made the whole house unclean for a period of time.

Levi was a tax collector. It's not a little deal. It's a very, very big deal.

### **Jesus called Levi to follow him.**

Jesus went to Levi's tax-collecting booth.

He summoned Levi to, "Follow me!" Two terse words that we heard last week mean so much.

Levi didn't hesitate. He rose and followed Jesus away from his old life to a new life.

### **Jesus went to a feast at Levi's house.**

It was likely a feast to celebrate what had happened to Levi.

It was also a feast to introduce Jesus to Levi's friends and Levi's friends to Jesus.

Jesus took his other key disciples with Him to the feast.

The only problem is that, since Levi was a tax collector himself, all of his friends were tax collectors and other "sinners."

### **The religious leaders questioned Jesus' behavior.**

Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. That was against Jewish customs. Forbidden.

The religious leaders went to Jesus' disciples and asked, "Why?" Really, "how could He?" There was indignation in their question!

But the situation shows us something important about Jesus' mission.

## Jesus' mission folds us into community.

### **Jesus went to sinners. What does the Bible mean by sinners?**

Here the word "sinner" means that these were not religiously observant people. They were not keeping the traditions of the Jewish religious leaders. They were not students of the Law, the Torah. Nor were they doing much to keep the demands of Torah.

In that sense, these are just ordinary, every-day people.

But here "sinner" means more. It implies a lot of sin, a lot of guilt. These people had done things.

### **Jesus was SURROUNDED by sinners.**

Apparently, there were a lot of tax collectors and sinners there.

And Jesus "reclined" with them at the table in Levi's house. That means that Jesus was on a sofa with his head facing the table where the food was located and with his feet sticking out away from the table. It was the custom in that day for big feasts. This was a party, everyone was comfortable, and they were planning to be there for a while.

### **Jesus said, "That's my mission."**

Jesus heard what the Jewish religious leaders were saying. He heard their question and knew the intent of their hearts behind the question.

In this case, Jesus painted a picture. He compared Himself to a physician. He said that those who are well have no need of a physician. Only the sick.

It's ironic when you think about it. Because we know that we are all sinners. In terms of Jesus' metaphor, we are all "sick". But the ironic part about some religious people is that we think we're fine, that we're not really sick. So, we need a doctor, but we don't know it.

Jesus told them what He did not come to do. He did not come to call the righteous to Himself and His Kingdom. By that Jesus meant the self-righteous, those who think they are righteous, and those who, therefore, don't know they are sinners, and sick, and in need of a Savior.

Instead, Jesus came to call sinners to His Kingdom. Sinners are the ones who know that they are not righteous. In terms of Jesus' doctor image, they are sick and know that they need a doctor. They are sinners in need of a solution, of a Savior.

Jesus said in **Luke 19:10**,

***"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."***

That's Jesus telling us why He came into this world. He's telling us His mission.

Jesus' mission is to seek the lost, the sick, the sinners. But He doesn't just seek them. He finds them and saves them.

### **We are RECIPIENTS of Jesus' mission.**

We are not the righteous ones. We are the sinners.

That means that at one point we were not religiously observant. We were not keeping the Law, the Torah. We certainly didn't do it perfectly. We were just ordinary people. For some of us, the list of our sins was growing long quickly. We were or are the sinners, the sick, the lost.

Jesus came to seek and to save us.

If we are Christians already, then at some point in the past Jesus walked up to the tax booth of our lives and said to us, "Follow me!" We rose from our tax booths and followed Him. And that changed everything about us.

But that means that Jesus came on mission to us. We were the objects of His mission. He was seeking us out and saving us. When we rose from our tax booths and followed Him, we became the recipients or the beneficiaries of Jesus' mission. We got scooped up in His work. We received grace and got a whole new life.

That's what grace is like!

### **We are all a little bit like Oshea Israel.**

In 1993, Mary Johnson's 20-year-old son was murdered.

Sixteen-year-old Oshea Israel was the murderer. Oshea had gone to a party. There were two groups there, and they got into an altercation. Oshea ended up killing Mary's only son.

Oshea was arrested three days later. Hatred filled Mary's heart. Mary went to the trial, waiting to give her victim statement. When she did, Mary said that she forgave Oshea. That was what her Christian faith told her to do.

It turns out that she hadn't. Bitterness ran deep in her heart. For a time, she hated everyone.

Eventually, her anger turned to a desire to do something. She started an organization for the mothers of murdered children AND the mothers of the murderers. Mary wanted to do something for both, but she knew she couldn't help either until she forgave the person who had murdered her son.

So, she went to prison. She met Oshea. They started to get to know one another.

Oshea admitted what he had done. For the first time, Mary truly forgave Oshea. At the end of the meeting, Oshea asked if he could hug Mary, and Mary agreed. That's when the anger finally began to leave Mary.

When Oshea was released from prison in 2020, Mary was there with her organization to give him a welcome-home party. He was part of a new community, a very different kind of community, a community of Christians where forgiveness was a way of life.<sup>3</sup>

That's what it's like to be a recipient of Jesus' mission. It's like being a murderer who has been forgiven and welcomed into a new life.

### **Jesus' mission defines our community.**

#### **Jesus' mission brought together WILDLY different people.**

Now Levi—a tax collector—was one of Jesus' disciples.

He was in the band of disciples with four fishermen from Capernaum, people from whom he likely collected taxes and, therefore, had swindled.

Others became disciples of Jesus as well. There's Simon the Zealot, for instance. To be a Zealot is to be part of a group dedicated to the overthrow of the Romans by any means possible—including armed revolt and terrorism.

These were wildly different people from different backgrounds with different ideologies.

I can't imagine what it must have been like among Jesus' disciples when Levi showed up.

#### **But Jesus redefines our identity.**

When we become disciples of Jesus, we are now "in Christ".

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/mary-johnson-oshea-israel/>

We become sons and daughters of God, which makes us brothers and sisters to one another. On top of that, we become citizens of the Kingdom of God. No matter what nationality or loyalty or identity we came from before, we are now fellow-citizens with each other in the Kingdom of God. We are actually ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

**Galatians 3: 28** says:

***... you are all one in Christ Jesus***

**We are PARTICIPANTS in Jesus' mission.**

**Ephesians 2:13** says that we have been brought near by Jesus:

***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

But when we are brought near to Christ, we are brought near to each other. Jesus tears down all the walls between us. **Ephesians 2:14-16** continues:

***For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.***

**Jesus puts surprising people together, kind of like *The Best of Enemies*.**

*The Best of Enemies* is a movie based on a book based on true events.

It all happened in Durham, North Carolina, during integration.

A black elementary school was firebombed and burned, almost completely down.

That left children with a need to go to school somewhere, the all-white school. The town was in an uproar, and they brought in a man to lead a process of community decision making.

The process relied on a leader from the black community and one from the white.

The leader from the black community was an activist, Ann Atwater.

The leader from the white community was a Ku Klux Klan leader, C. P. Ellis.

Let's just say that the two hated each other at the beginning.

Ann is the one who changed things. Out of her Christian faith, she began to see C. P. Ellis' practicality. And his humanity. And his need. He was poor, his business was suffering, and his son was hospitalized.

The two built a real relationship. And found ways to work together. And a plan for integrating.<sup>4</sup>

The two became friends. Good friends. When C. P. Ellis died, his family asked Ann Atwater to do the eulogy at his funeral.<sup>5</sup>

Ann Atwater did beautiful things in Jesus' name. Jesus does even bigger things still!

**Jesus puts us all together, and we cannot let differences, like ethnicity or race, ever tear us apart.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://dmtalkies.com/the-best-of-enemies-summary-review-2019-film-robin-bissell/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2019/04/best-of-enemies-overcoming-fear-with-love/>

The Kingdom of God is filled with people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. We come from all over the world and throughout history.

We are taller and shorter, darker and lighter, thicker and thinner, nicer and (well) less nice, with different kinds of hair, different tastes in food, and different preferences in music and football and politics. We can't let any of those things divide us.

Jesus brings us to Himself. In doing so, He tears down the dividing walls that keep other people apart. And we can never, ever, ever let those walls go up again.

## Jesus' mission shapes our community.

### **We are PARTNERS in Jesus' mission.**

Jesus' mission is now OUR mission.

Of course, He owns His own mission, but we are "in Christ," so we now own that mission, too!

We are working toward the same ends that Jesus is working toward; many of Jesus' goals are now also our goals; we are dedicating ourselves to that mission, and we are giving ourselves fully to that mission.

### **We are like the cells of The Human Body.**

The human body consists of roughly 30-40 trillion cells. Most of them are red blood cells.<sup>6</sup>

Those cells are organized into roughly 78 organs, including things like the brain, the heart, and the tongue.<sup>7</sup>

Those organs make up 11 systems, like the digestive system, the circulatory system, and the nervous system.

### **God brings all of those cells, organs, and systems together to make one dizzyingly intricate body.**

The parts all work together. And together, the parts do work!

Those parts work together to support us, fuel us, maintain us, and defend us.

Those parts, working together, enable us to think and create and speak.

Those parts, working together, help us to walk, to open doors, to laugh, and to cry.

Those parts, working together, help us to tend creation and relate to one another.

### **The Bible describes the Church like a body.**

In **1 Corinthians 12:13-14** the Bible says that as Christians we are individuals, but we are made part of a larger body, all of us:

***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.***

Later, **1 Corinthians 12:27** clarifies that this body belongs to Jesus:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health/number-of-cells-in-body>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/how-many-organs-in-human-body.html>

***Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.***

We are Jesus' body in a sense; we are one of Jesus' means of doing His work in this world.

**Jesus' mission shapes and motivates the Church, the Body of Christ.**

Jesus's mission draws us together.

Not only that, but Jesus' mission fits us together—the way a body consists of a hand and an eye and a liver. All of these parts are necessary. All of these parts are important. All of these parts must work together.

The work we have to do is the work Jesus gives us.

It's the same work Jesus was doing during His earthly ministry.

It's Jesus' mission. We are partners in the mission, and Jesus' mission shapes the Church.

**Let's be the Body of Christ.**

Find A PLACE in the Body and on the team because we're all pulling in the same direction. We need one another, we need genuine and authentic community with one another, because this job that we share is too big for us alone; it is so much easier together, and it is so much more fun when we work together on the mission Jesus has given us.

Find YOUR PLACE on the team because there is a place where you fit. Don't give up until you find it.