

**ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)
SUNDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2020
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (YEAR A)**

**READINGS: EXODUS 12:1-14//PSALM 149//ROMANS 13:8-14//
MATTHEW 18:15-20**

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God of wisdom and love, source of all good things, teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace and love. Please strip away the walls we build to protect ourselves from broken relationships and pain and lets us reach out to those who has hurt us and help us to forgive them and be reconciled with them. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,

On the 26 March 2020 our country South Africa entered a national Lockdown because of the Corona Virus pandemic and our Churches have been closed for in person services since that time. (Although it was open for funerals services).

So these past six months have been very challenging and traumatic for all of us. Some of us have either been infected and contracted the coronavirus ourselves or we have lost loved ones because of the virus. Some of us have also experienced emotional, physical, social and financial challenges. (loss of jobs, loss of income/ we couldn't go visit our loved ones who were sick or who were dying)

And you will agree with me it was during these difficult time that we missed the spiritual nourishment, love, support, care of our St Paul's spiritual community.

This morning I would like us to reflect on what it means to be part of a **COMMUNITY**. What does it means to be in communion with each other

But let us first look at the meaning of the word Community: *A group of people living in the same place or having particular characteristics in common. A feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes interest and goals.*

Let us turn to our Scripture readings and learn more about what it means to be part of a community

***Firstly to be part of a community means to participate and share together.**

The Old Testament reading for today Exodus 12:1-14 is the story of the Israelite community. The Israelites were held captive in bondage to slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt for 430 years. Then God told Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to “*Let my people go*”. Pharaoh did not listen, so God sent plagues to the Egyptians. After sending nine plagues Pharaoh still did not listen.

In today’s text God is sending the tenth plague – the killing of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. God told Moses to gather His people together and provide very specific instructions for them

In v 3 we read “*Tell the community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb they must share with their nearest neighbour*”

This was the institution of the Passover .The whole community was to participate. No one was to be excluded. No one was to excuse himself from participating. The lesson for us: Christians and Messianic Jews have been made into a community. We are individuals, but each of us is also a member of Christ’s Community. It’s not just us and the Lord. It’s us and the Lord and everyone in the Messiah’s Community. We participate with everyone else in the life and work of the community. We don’t excuse ourselves from taking an active part in the life and work of the community and we share with each other in our community.

The Passover meal in Exodus 12:1-14 continues to this day as a central festival for the Jewish community. It is a reminder of how their God Yahweh have liberated them and brought them out of slavery. This meal, however, also has meaning for us the Christians community—it is ritual meal of Holy Communion “ Each time when we as St Paul’s family, St Paul’s community partake in the Holy Communion we remember that Jesus died on the cross so that we can be liberated from our sins and be reconciled with God. (we come together today after 6 months as St Paul’s community to partake in the Holy communion)

***Secondly members in a community must try to resolve conflict, forgive one another and reconcile with each other**

The passage from the Gospel reading Matthew 18:15-20 was intended to give the early church guidance about how to deal with conflict and broken relationships and how to forgive and reconcile.

How many of us are not in conflict with someone or are struggling with broken relationships, at home with family members in our workplace or with our neighbours or even here with fellow parishioners in the Church.

I want you to pause for a moment and think of any person that you are not on speaking terms with because something happened. How long is this conflict between the two of you? How are you feeling about it?

The first step toward reconciliation involves self-examination and listening.

In v 15 we read ***“If your brother (In the NRSV translation we read – if another member of the Church) sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over”***

Before we can even go to the one who has hurt us, though, Christ encourages us to do a little soul-searching (self-examination), to recognize our own part in the conflict. We should ask ourselves ***“Can I let it go?” What was my contribution?*** We may discover that the problem we have is really within ourselves, and we can avoid causing distress in others and in the community) through our own repentance and discipleship.

But sometimes, that ***self-examination*** shows me that I really have been hurt by another, and allowing that wound to fester will not lead to healing. Then I must get up and go to the one who has hurt me, and tell that person what is wrong.

If one-on-one efforts fail to resolve the problem, the next step is to involve two or three outsiders. If the involvement of two or three outsiders fails, the next step involves taking the dispute to the church. (but before it goes to the Church)

If there is one thing that COVID 19 pandemic has taught us is that things can change so quickly

If there is someone who you know holds a grudge against you for something you did, or were perceived to have done, either recently or ages ago, apologize and sincerely ask forgiveness. Likewise, if there is someone who comes to you and asks forgiveness for something that has caused you to hold a grudge against them, grant them forgiveness. To ask forgiveness is not weakness. And to grant forgiveness is not to condone what someone has done. They are merely steps toward reconciliation – to restore the peace and wholeness in a community---

Thirdly members in a community must love each other

In Romans 13 v 8 *“Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another for he who loves his fellowmen has fulfilled the law. The commandments Do not commit adultery Do not murder Do not steal Do not covet and whatever commandments there may be is summed up in the one rule Love your neighbour as yourself Love does no harm to its neighbour Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law”*

This kind of love is about care for the other person’s well- being. How do we speak to one another, how do we care for one another, how do we look out for the brother or sister in the community who is hurting, physically or emotionally, how do we reach out to the one who is missing from our fellowship, or who is weighed down with sin or guilt or depression or distress--this is how love moves into action. Where is the brother or sister who is in need? What are his or her needs? How can we help? This is what it means to love one another in a community.

CONCLUSION

Ubuntu is an African ideology which says that people can only find fulfilment through interacting with other people. Some of the sayings associated with Ubuntu is “I belong therefore I am, “I am because we are” Ubuntu emphasizes community and focus on people’s interactions and relations with each other. People in Ubuntu are open and available for others and are accountable to one another. They do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater group.

We cannot know and grow in Jesus by ourselves. Where do we get courage? It is through community. Where do we find help, comfort, accountability, encouragement, rebuke, hope distributed when our heart is doubting and fearful? We get it from the Holy Spirit (God) who works through community

During Lockdown we have missed the community and fellowship with one another. So my challenge for each one of us this morning let us apply the Ubuntu ideology at St Paul's let us not take each other for granted let us recommit ourselves to participate, share, love and reach out to one another and strengthen the bond as St Paul's community—Let us make this our Post Covid/Post Lockdown resolution

If we look at South Africa today what do we see? A country a community in turmoil: Corruption, Racism, Gender Based Violence, High crime rate, Poor service delivery, Inequality.

If we as South Africans can live out the Ubuntu ideology and ourselves to participate and share together, to discuss and resolve our conflicts and forgive each other and to love each other South Africa will be a different country