

“Community to Community”

Acts 2:42-47; Theme Reading: Margaret Wheatley -- July 30, 2023

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Introduction: Growing Up on an Island in Ireland

John Donne, the 17th century English poet wrote that “No man is an island”. He argued that all people are connected to God. I am named after my grandmother Rita, my brother is named after our grandfather Martin, my father is named after his grandfather Tom. We are all connected across generations. We belong to a family and a community. Growing up, I lived on the smallest of the Aran Islands in Ireland. This small island was my home and I knew nothing else. There is a population of about 300 people, and those people were my community.

My dad owns a pub on the island, and as you can imagine in Ireland, the pub was where everyone gathers. Almost everyone on the island knew who I was and supported me. Anytime I had something to sell or a learning challenge I was meant to be doing, they supported me.

Life was different out there on the island. I had just three other students in my class in school. So we were all special, we were all the cool kids. If you needed to buy some clothes you had to wait to catch the ferry to the mainland and then drive 30 miles to the closest town. If there was a medical emergency you’d hear a helicopter on its way. Life on the island is tough, simple and good. The island is organized around the community center, the football team and work is organized around the cooperative company. The winters are cold, dark and windy, but you have a choice of three pubs to visit.

Our island is a small community, and that’s what makes it home. My island, called Inis Oirr, is just 2.5 miles long. So when we go on road trips to visit my grandparents, the two minute drive is never too long. Everyone lives within walking distance of each other. One of my favorite community occasions happens every Christmas Day. Since there is no Thanksgiving in Ireland our big celebration with the whole family is on Christmas Day. Everyone goes to their grandparents’ house and cooks a big meal.

Within the small population some people don’t have any family or live alone, perhaps they never got married or had kids. In our family while dinner is cooking most of us go over to these individuals to spread some love and laughter on what would be a lonely day. This tradition could just be to avoid cooking, but I don’t think so. After dinner we then take a plate of dinner and bring it to all the people who live alone. The meal and the company is all they need for a Happy Christmas.

A World without Community

At the beginning of my Internship here, Don gave the Family Life staff a book to read together: It is entitled "Turning to One Another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future" and was written by Margaret Wheatley. I had never heard of Margaret Wheatley but the more I read her book, the more I grew to appreciate her writing and focus on developing community in a world that lacks community.

The excerpt that I chose from this book for our theme reading today is somewhat of a reality check. Most people in our world do not have the same experience of living on an island like I did or being a part of a community like Southminster or fellowshiping together like the early Christians in the book of Acts. In reality, most people today are in fact alone. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes it -- this is "a radical brokenness in all of existence." Therefore, it seems to me, our Christian calling to the world is to be "community" where there is no community -- to be those who reject isolation and embrace collegiality -- to be those who connect with others rather than those who disconnect. My experience at Southminster has shown me how a progressive group of folx can be a community to and for the world!

Community at Southminster

Herman Melville once said that "we cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men." Southminster community connects us to each other and forges community in a world where there is no community. Let me share with you some specific ways I have seen this happening at Southminster.

1. **Spokane Mission Trip:** This summer when we went on our mission trip to Spokane, Don led us to the loving church of Westminster. Each person in the congregation was supporting and loving of each other. And even when we walked in, it felt like home. Each person welcomed us into the church and their home. When we went to their service on Sunday, they had a prayer list. But the list was a whole page long of prayers and good intentions for others. The list contained most of the 25 people in their congregation but also all of their families, their friends, and friends of friends. Their love and trust in each other lead them to have a list that probably took the pastor 30 minutes to read through. Each person knew that the support from the church was all they needed.
2. **San Juan Bike Trip:** When biking in the San Juan Islands I learned how different people can be, but that we all still need encouragement. We biked up Mount Constitution and the only way everyone made it up was through encouragement. Whether you made it up with the fast group or stayed behind with the slow group,

we all celebrated our mutual accomplishment. No one was better than the other. We were a community.

- a. I remember one of our youth who was at the back during the entire trip but on the day she rode up on Mount Constitution, she decided to push herself. She biked ahead of the last group and found herself biking by herself, never stopping to walk, knowing that she was really not alone, and discovering her potential. She shared at the campfire that evening: "It was so peaceful riding today, I decided to push myself, to ride at my own pace, to never walk but keep going.....it was so peaceful and my best experience of the trip."

3. Rummage Sale: Short Paragraph: This past week we put together the Rummage Sale. I was doubtful at first, as I had never been a part of something like this before. But as the days started leading up to it I started to get more worried. But in the end it was amazing how it all came together. When the doors opened on the very first day, I think I was stunned. The sheer amount of people and stuff was overwhelming. But as I got to know people and how to deal with everything. I soon saw the beauty in a community coming together and how you can make something amazing happen. Each volunteer showed me how supportive you are of each other.

4. Deacons and Family Life Committee and Staff (two short paragraphs)

- a. Deacons: I attended Warren Aney's memorial service this past week and observed a lot about him and Southminster as a community. Wow. The way you care about each other is amazing. I walked in expecting to know no one amongst his family and ended up seeing so many familiar faces filled with smiles and memories. I also attended a Deacons meeting in early June and I marvel at how organized they are to ensure that everyone is welcome and will be cared for in their time of need. I am not sure who organized the Parade for Tom Ingala this past week, but what a demonstration of community. I just wanted to say: Welcome back, Tom!
- b. Family Life Committee and Staff: The first time I met the Family Life Staff, I was amazed at how much work and love they put into their jobs. Each child is special and deserves the best. Then when I met with the whole Family Life Committee their care and support for others was infectious. I had no idea how much work was put into the background of everything. It is truly beautiful to witness.

Closing

Coretta Scott King once said "the greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." In community we are with one

another, supporting each other. Community gives us a sense of identity, a sense of place, and a sense of belonging. It joins us together so that we can lift each other up. Community is essential to life. Here in Southminster I have experienced the comfort and warmth of community.

George Bernard Shaw said, "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live."

In my life I have gone from community to community. The love and support of fellowship and community is what gets me up every morning. Through the love and support I have received, I have learned to lift others up. To love everyone no matter where they are in life, to ensure they have someone supporting and believing in them, because that is all we need. And although I am not perfect, well none of us are, I just keep trying every single day. As my mother always says: "practice not perfection."

Thank you Southminster for an incredible experience of community this summer, and for welcoming me into it. I am forever grateful for all that I continue to learn about ministry and collaboration and mutual support from community to community.

Blessings on the Southminster community. Blessings on each and every one of you.

Amen.