

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**October 12 & 13, 2013**  
**John Crosby**  
**REGROUP: David's Mighty Men**  
**1 Chronicles 11**

We talked last week about how after the 57 years our church has been here, it is important for us to know that we haven't just gone on autopilot, that we are clear about what renews us. We are talking about how to renew our purpose as a community and as individuals throughout this autumn season. In the same way, we said this begins with reviving, bringing back to life or to new life, our relationship with Christ. We said that this month we would talk about our life as a community, the relationships and friendships that draw us to each other and to our God. We started that last week with a quote from Craig Groeshel that I said would be our theme for the month, "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." It was an echo of Proverbs 13.

**20** Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

These three weeks we would like to talk about your friends. Some of you have no problem, you have an abundance of friends, but others of us struggle with the whole idea of friendship. Sometimes we feel surrounded by love and sometimes we feel all alone. Have you ever had that experience? Maybe it's better to show it to you than to talk about it.

[Video clip.]

"Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." How many of you identified with any part of that video? I especially loved the kid dancing alone. That was my experience anytime I went to a school dance. Not to say we are all losers or we are all alone, but there is something hardwired into us right from the beginning that desires to love and be loved. God said in the Garden of Eden, "It is not good for the man to be alone." How much worse is it outside the Garden of Eden in the middle of the battle for us not to be surrounded by love? Let me show you an alternative.

Before David the Famous became king, he had a group of friends. I'm not sure that David was always the easiest to be friends with. His brothers hated him. He did not grow up in a functional family but one where they almost pushed him out. He developed friends over time. It says this in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles, chapter 11,

**10** These are the commanders of David's warriors who continued to support him while he was king. Together with all Israel, they made him king, as the LORD had promised Israel.

Once when the Israelites, that's the Israelite army, when they ran away in the battle at Pas Dammim, David and Eleazar stood in the field back to back and turned the tide. Another time

when David was at the rock near the cave of Adullam, the Philistine army nearby occupied the town of Bethlehem. David daydreamed with his men,

17 . . . . "If only someone could give me a drink of water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem."

So his three captains, I'm sure they snuck away,

broke through the Philistine camp and drew water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem and brought it back to David. But he refused to drink it and poured it out to the LORD.

Their love. An offering to the Lord.

19 "God forbid that I should do that," he said. "Isn't this the blood of men who risked their lives?"

Since they had brought it at the risk of their lives, David refused to drink it. "This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me." Those are the kinds of friends that I want. These were the exploits of David long before he was king, and shortly afterwards when he does assume the throne, these friends are the core of the army of God's people. Don't we all want friends like that? But how does that kind of community happen? Let me tell you, it does not happen when you are king. You don't get friends when you are on top. The joke in Washington, D.C. is that if the President really wants a friend, he should go and buy a dog because he can't really trust anyone else. "Are they really my friends or are they just using me?"

The story says here that David was near the cave of Adullam. That's a powerful central place in David's life. It's out in the wilderness and here is how he got there with his friends. 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 21 tells the story of how King Saul went crazy, literally went mad, when he saw David as the source of all of his problems and he said he was going to kill him.

<sup>10</sup> And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.

Gath is a neighboring little subcountry.

<sup>11</sup> And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" <sup>12</sup> And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. <sup>13</sup> So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. <sup>14</sup> Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?"

It continues in the next chapter.

1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there.

Now his relatives didn't go because they were David's friends. His relatives went because they knew that if Saul wanted to kill David, he wanted to kill his whole clan. They went there just for safety and not for friendship. Then it says,

2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.

Community at the end looks a lot different than when it starts. At the end, you are telling stories. Remember when David and Eleazar were at battle? Everybody else ran away. They stood back to back and fought. Do you remember that time that the three guys snuck out for water? They tell these great stories looking back, but at the beginning, at your beginning of forming friendships, it looks very different. I believe God wants to teach us how to live in community, how to love one another, how to become new people along the way. What would that look like in your life? What would that kind of community look like where people would care for one another? I think that's the key phrase there, *one another*. Jesus talks about community as *one another* and He says it this way:

- <sup>34</sup> Love *one another* [John 13:34].
- <sup>10</sup> Outdo *one another* in showing honor [Romans 12:10].
- <sup>18</sup> . . . . comfort *one another* [1 Thessalonians 4:18].
- <sup>10</sup> . . . . agree with *one another* [1 Corinthians 1:10].
- <sup>50</sup> . . . . be at peace with *one another*" [Mark 9:50].
- <sup>13</sup> . . . . through love serve *one another* [Galatians 5:13].
- <sup>32</sup> Be kind to *one another* [Ephesians 4:32].

And above all,

- <sup>13</sup> . . . . forgive *one another* [Colossians 3:13].

Wouldn't you love to be in a small group or community that had that kind of *one another*? These commands are given by Jesus so that we'll know what we should do. They are also given so that you can try it and fail and learn and grow in grace and experience community because community is a journey. It's not something you come to all of a sudden. Community is risky. It's a risk. It's like going across two buildings on a tightrope. A lot of people think that community is an *added value* thing to my life. It's the safety net underneath. If I fall, I've got the community to catch me, but a Biblical view of community would put it another way. It says the community itself is the tightrope. Learning to love one another, learning to live together in community is how we get across the gap from here to there. Some of us are halfway across learning about community and others of us are afraid to move.

David's story shows us how God uses community to get us across that gap from here to there. What strikes me about the community that David has is that it starts when **David is joined by others, not when he is strong but when he is weak**. Anybody can have a lot of friends when things are going well. Anybody can join you in good-time celebrations, but whom do you gather with when you are weak? Whom do you reach out to when they are hurting? That's Biblical community. It says in the text,

2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him . . . .

This is not the all-star gene that he is assembling. This is the rabble. These are the people who can't find community anywhere else, people who were thrown out. They all gather around David. These are not the members of King Saul's court who went, "Excuse me, King Saul, I think I'm going to go join David out in the wilderness." God is able to do things with weak people, people who are hurting, that He can't do with people who have it all together. That shows in the early church. Paul talks to his friends in the city of Corinth and says,

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.  
27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:26-27].

God chose and chooses the weak things of the world. God calls us unto community when we are weak. I played hooky this week. Wednesday night I drove to the Wisconsin Dells. I have never been to the Wisconsin Dells in my life. That place is a hoot. I drove around, found a little motel and stayed overnight because I was meeting a friend on Thursday to play golf and this was about halfway there. About once a year we get together just the two of us and spend the day together. His name is Gordon. Gordon has been a friend of mine for over thirty years. The kind of friend Gordon is, is what was on a card I sent him. The card said this. "A friend bails you out of jail but a best friend is sitting in the cell right next to you." That has special poignancy because that's Gordon and probably that's Gordon and me.

Gordon said he laughed so hard he cried when he got the card, in part because I met him when I went to my very first church in Chicago as the youth pastor. He was a new elder and the head of the student ministries committee. He comes to me about three weeks into it and says, "Gee, it seems to me like if I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to become a Christian." Now, one step at a time. You're a Presbyterian. You don't have to be a Christian to be an elder but it helps. He realized through this time that he had church but he didn't have Christ, and he started this whole new life in Christ.

It changed our relationship where I was able to teach him and then he was able to teach me and we grew together. When I met Laura, the two of us would literally sneak over to their house on Sunday nights and make popcorn so nobody else in the church would know we were dating, and he became my very best friend. We started a small group because as he followed Jesus, he said, "I need a lot more help than just you." He was a senior vice-president at First National of Chicago, a rising star, had great people skills. As he became a Christian, he recognized that some of the things he was doing were not right. Some of the practices he was involved in were not ethical, and so he went to his boss and said, "I can't do this any more. I'm not going to turn you in but I'm out of it."

About a year later, because he was following Jesus, he decided to leave the ladder of success and go to the ladder of significance. He started working with a nonprofit organization and became the president of Opportunity International. That's one of the reasons CPC is connected to them. Four or five years go by and one day he calls me and says, "I got a weird call today, and I think I'm going to go to jail." I said, "What?" He said, "Well, that stuff I was doing at the bank. I should have turned him in but I didn't, and now they're coming after everybody involved. I'm out at the fringes but I'm there, and I think they are going to go after me."

After about a year in the legal system, Gordon was put in a medium-security prison fairly near the Wisconsin Dells. For the next 14 months every three weeks, I went to the prison and visited him. We would walk around the prison yard and talk. It was not Shawshank but there was a fence and there was barbed wire and there were guards. We would talk about the state of his soul and what it felt like to be a failed father and the example that he was setting for those people who had trusted him. And could he ever go home again? And what would it be like to be on the other side of jail when he had been on the ladder of success? He taught me so much in those 14 months. Every time I got there, we would hug, you know, man hug, and we would laugh a lot as we walked around. And every time I left, we would man hug again, and he would cry and say, "This is it for me. Come back."

He got out and has had an incredible life, serving other people, helping in the Kingdom of Heaven, but he showed me that community starts, not when you are on top but when you are hurting. Real community happens when the person near you has nothing to offer you, but you reach out to them anyway. It starts with who we really are, not who we would like to be. So many of your small groups have degenerated into "Let's have a good time and say how things are going" as opposed to "I don't know how I'm going to get through this but there's nobody else I can tell." Right there, "but there's nobody else I can tell." God's gift of community to David was a group of people he could tell things to that he couldn't tell anybody else. "I am so thirsty I could die. I can't tell all the others because the commander doesn't show weakness in front of his people. I'm the leader, but I can tell you guys. I'm dying for a drink. You know what I'd love? I'd love some of that water."

God's gift in community is that it is a place to let your guard down. Do you have that? Besides your spouse if you are married, do you have people with whom you can be who you really are, who you're afraid you are, who you'd like to be, where you don't have to have your guard up? I think the kind of community that starts when we are weak instead of when we're strong helps us be who God intended us to be. I also think it starts to change us. The people around David started to change. They were the malcontents. They were the poor. They were the runaways. And they start to change because I believe the gift of God's community is that it gives us courage that we do not have when we are alone. Look at that text. It says, "One time the Israelites were fighting a battle and they all started to run away but David and Eleazar stood back to back and they fought and the army came back to them." **We have courage together, back to back, that we do not have alone.** If this were a classical hero story, it would be that David snuck out in the middle of the night and got water for his friends to show what a hero he was. Instead it shows that the community of people who are together gain courage to save the one who lacked it, and they brought a man dying of thirst some water.

We are in community when we are back to back, when "I've got your back" is more than just a phrase. Do you have somebody who has your back because only when you have somebody who has your back when you're back to back can you have somebody who gets in your face. Back to back means face to face. Without getting maudlin, John Mitchell is a friend of mine who has become our executive pastor, and we are back to back. He's got my back and I've got his, and yet we can fight like cats and dogs when the door is closed because he knows me better than anybody. We can get in each other's faces and find courage because we are together. This is true of King David. He sees these guys and he doesn't see deserters. He sees potential captains. He doesn't see paupers; he sees potential princes, and he gets in their faces and they get in his face.

I know they get in his face because later on, one of his other friends, Nathan, will come up to him. Everyone else in the country knows that David has been having an affair with Bathsheba. Not all of them know that David has killed Bathsheba's husband to cover it up, but Nathan says, "It was you!" Face to face. And instead of killing his friend Nathan, he says, "You're right" because when God gives us friends who are back to back, who have our backs, he gives us the privilege of face to face that can change our lives.

It happened just this week for me. People were talking in one of my small groups and one of the group turned to another and said, "I really like you, dude, but you talk way too much. You just talk too much." There was a little pause there and the guy said, "Thanks, I know. Thanks for being there. Thanks for saying that." Back to back leads to face to face. I have people who will get in my face but they don't have my back. And I have people who have my back but won't tell me the truth. I need people who do both for me. That's the power of community. Are you in any community that gives you courage because they have your back and that tells you the truth because they are in your face?

Community comes not when we are strong but when we are weak. Community gives us courage we don't have when we are alone, and I want that so much for you guys. Many of you have been in this church a long time, long enough that you have many friends here and yet I question, "Are your friends back to back and face to face in the Word and in each other's lives or are you just talking about the Vikings, talking about each other, having a good time? Are you in need of redoing the covenant between you so that you will be in love with one another?"

This month *CPC Life* is all about community, all about regrouping. In the middle, on page 9, you will see about 16 different opportunities, if you are not in a community, to get in one. It is also for those of you who are in communities to say, "Are we doing what God thinks we should do?" As you leave today, there will be a table out there that says "Regroup" for new people and people who would like a fresh start in their communities. Questions from both are welcome.

I believe that God takes weak people and puts them together and I believe that God gives people courage together that they don't find alone. I also believe that David's friends are transformed when they get out of their holy huddle. A lot of churches are just that. You come into this church as a visitor and what do you see? You see a lot of backsides. You see a lot of rear ends because everybody is with friends in groups. It's hard to break into a church that has good community because we are all facing each other instead of facing out. That's the acid test of God's communities, that **people are transformed by service**. We have loved a book that's in Pathway [CPC book store] by Bob Goff called *Love Does* [*Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*]. Love does stuff. Sometimes that stuff is going out and getting water for somebody who is parched. Sometimes that love is telling the truth to a friend who needs to hear it. Sometimes that is serving together.

For decades Ross Robinson and Joan Bentz led a group of us down to the border towns of Mexico where we built houses intergenerationally. Twenty or thirty of us built homes for a week, and in that week formed friendships that have lasted ever since because when we serve in community God draws us together. Are you involved in something like that, or are you in the very unfortunate position of being so busy that you just come to church? And now you're not even going to come to church because the guy insults me when I come. I believe in the power of God's community, that is, we build houses; God builds us.

I told you last week that I'm in the tweeter-verse or whatever you call Twitter. I'm a twit who tweets. I had a tweet this week that I need to explain. I said, "Going on my bucket list: getting arrested sitting next to Congressman John Lewis at a civil rights protest." Some of you know that this last week there was a protest in D.C. for a civil rights issue, and a couple of congressmen were arrested including a local congressman of ours, Keith Ellison. But lost in the shuffle was the idea that Ellison was sitting next to Congressman John Lewis. John Lewis is 73 years old. Fifty years ago he was sitting in Birmingham Jail and making Freedom Marches and getting beaten and eaten by dogs. And at 73, he said, "I want to be part of a community that reaches out so that all of us have rights." He is still marching for the outsider. If I ever have to grow up, I want to be seated right next to him, and I want some of you on the other side of him.

I believe community is God's gift to transform the world. Community is the primary tool for God's mission in the world because as believers, we are supposed to be focused outward. God wants to use our little communities, messy and broken as they are, weak as they are, to draw others into His story and introduce them to the love of Jesus the Redeemer. I don't want to confuse community for God. David takes the water and he pours it out in praise of God, but I believe that community is a group that brings us to God. I want to challenge you to ask, who am I with when I am weak and they are strong or vice-versa? Who do I need to be with so that I will have courage or they will have courage and not feel alone? What community am I involved with that changes my life because I serve in ways that I never would otherwise? Like David's mighty men, who started out as beggars, let's break through enemy lines together and bring the water of life!

Lord Jesus, I bet You heard this story in Sunday School. I bet it's part of what made You turn to Peter and John and James and Levi and Judas and all of the other 12 and say, "Come on. Walk with Me. Live with Me. Love with Me. Form a community of people with me who don't have to wear masks." Jesus, You said You would teach us to love one another with comfort and peace and forgiveness and kindness. The world is hungry for that. We know that because we are hungry for that. Teach us, Lord Jesus, to love one another, to be the kind of person who not only has our friend's back but who lives in our friend's face to help us grow like You. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who show us what community looks like. All God's children said,

[All:] Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*