

*When the day of Pentecost had fully come, the believers were all in one place with one purpose.* In that common setting, the Holy Spirit came and filled the followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-4).

We live in a very individualistic society, perhaps more so than any other society that has ever existed. We have our rights, and we can each pursue happiness in our own way, so long as we don't trample the rights of others. This is one of the foundations of our American society, and a very important one at that.

While we do indeed have the right to each go our own way, we should consider whether or not it is sensible to always exercise that right.

There are plenty of old, wise sayings that shed a different perspective on our rugged individualism: "It takes a village to raise a child"; "There is strength in numbers"; "United we stand"; and of course, the words of our Lord Himself, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am among them."

While we are created by as individuals, we are created *for* community. The basic community is the family, and then there are villages, cities, and nations.

In the same way, we also are called to be not only individual believers, but to be part of God's community, which we call the church. Within that church are congregations, each striving to be a community of followers of Jesus Christ.

Each congregation is a haven for the individual believer. Yet by regularly gathering in community, the individual believer is strengthened, nurtured, and empowered to continue in a life of faith.

There is a story of a man who, having suffered an unjustified insult, did not think he needed the community of the church any more. No matter what the people of the congregation did, they could not convince the seasoned man to rejoin the community. For his part, he believed

he could be just as good a follower of Christ without those hypocrites back in the church. Little by little, however, his behavior began to change. His morals sagged. His previous generosity dried up. Without the support of the church community, he began to slip away not only from others, but from God too.

One day, a new pastor was assigned to the church, and everyone begged this fresh recruit to bring the older man back to the fold. The young pastor, full of confidence, paid a visit to the man. The older man let him in, but gruffly told the young pastor that there was nothing he could say that would bring him back to church. The young pastor asked if they could just visit for a while.

Pulling up two chairs, they sat by the fire and made small talk. After a bit of awkward silence, the young pastor took the poker and moved one of the logs in the fire away from the rest, and sat back down.

The isolated log burned nicely for a while, but eventually the flame went out. Of course, the logs that were piled together burned on beautifully. The old man recognized his own life illustrated by the isolated log. Turning to the young pastor, he said only one thing: "I'll see you in church on Sunday."

When it comes to our faith, all of us are tempted from time to time to go it alone, to give up on the headaches and heartaches of trying to live in community with other sinners. But the message of the gospel and the wisdom of God's creation is clear -- we are created for community. When we are in that community with the common purpose of following Jesus Christ, it is then that the Holy Spirit fills us with life and power.

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