

## **(CONNECT) CROWD OR COMMUNITY**

**Mark 2:1-5**

**Connect January Message Series**

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This morning as we continue our message series “Connect” we are going to look at how Jesus practiced community. Just like you and me Jesus was very involved in crowds. In fact the Bible tells us that Jesus was in the middle of crowds nearly everyday. Yet in the midst of all the crowds he faced he made sure that he stayed connected with his small group of twelve people.

This morning we will be looking at Mark 2...I love this passage. I want to remind you today that the Word of God is always living. Each time we read a passage from the Bible we often see something new in it. Let us pray today that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to some new ideas and new teachings as we study these verses.

Mark 2:1 begins, *“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the Word to them.”*

Notice the repetition; how people kept coming again and again to listen to Jesus’ teachings. Any discipline, of course, is repetition. Whether it’s hitting a golf ball or catching a soft ball—whatever you want to do well you need to practice over and over again. Jesus transforms our lives as we focus again and again on his Word.

*“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd (notice crowds can hamper true community) they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”*

It is important to note that one of the big inhibitors to transformation and healing is what we call the *“paradigm of isolation.”* Every day you and I find ourselves engaged in crowds; there are all kinds of crowds, aren’t there? There is the work crowd; the school crowd; the crowd at our children’s activities; the party crowd; the senior center crowd; the church crowd.

It is easy for us to make the mistake thinking that our association/interaction with these crowds is the same as the experience of authentic community. Crowds, even church crowds, are often pseudo communities; they are places that relationships are expressed mostly at a superficial level.

People say, *“How are you doing?”* You say, *“Fine.”* Yet no one knows about your addiction; your family struggles; your inner feelings. Everything is *“just fine.”* We have learned to mask this aloneness we often feel—even when we are in crowds.

We have become masters of pain avoidance because of the culture of superficiality we live in. This has easily led to the cult of self where most everything is about me—it’s personal, private, it’s none of your business. I don’t really need you other than in some superficial kind of way.

When I disconnect myself from a community of accountability I create isolation. We need to remember that all addictions occur in isolation. When I begin to say it's none of your business I begin to disconnect myself from authentic community.

The problem is that as soon as I disconnect from communities of accountability I begin to disconnect from myself. I experience isolation and isolation is death. We do not exist for self-actualization or self-gratification—we exist that our lives may honor and glorify God.

My friends, what I want you to see in this Biblical account is the contrast between crowds and four friends (community). Crowds where no one can get through/around; crowds which we easily get caught up in are often inhibitors that prevent people from coming to the real Jesus. They can actually be barriers to seeing the transforming power of Jesus.

A major mistake is that we can easily mistake the church crowd for community. Yet as long as I'm just hanging out in the crowd (even if the church is a small rural church) the crowd is going to prevent me from coming to the accountability of authentic relationships and community; it will prevent true transformation to happen in my life.

True friends of course are the people who share and get involved in your life. They are the ones who are involved with you below the superficial level. They are invested in your life. Acts 2 says that the early church *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer."* It says they *"broke bread in their homes."*

This means that you don't just come to church to sing some songs and go through some worship ritual. No the church is about finding a small group of friends; it may mean eating and hanging out together. It is a place where you can talk about your struggles and temptations; your marriage and your relationships; your jobs and challenges with providing for yourself.

This is the truest experience of church. Jesus said in Matthew 18, *"Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."*

The truth is that I can never experience Jesus in the same way by doing it myself; Jesus lives in the intimacy of authentic community. I want to ask you today—Who carries you? Who is so connected to you; to the stuff you are going through that they are praying for you right now?

Jesus knew he could not fulfill God's purpose and be obedient all the way to the cross if it weren't for his friends; his authentic community; those who were carrying him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before his crucifixion, he took his eleven friends with him.

It is here that Jesus said, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me."* Jesus the Son of God was saying, *"I can't do this by myself, guys. Please stand with me and help carry me."*

My friends, do you have people in your life who are so intertwined with your spirit; who love you in such a way that even when you fail they are going to stand watch? Can you identify people you know who would come for you no matter what you need?

This is especially true for us men. Men, you need men. I need other men to reflect and show me what God is really like. I need other men in my life to encourage me to be the kind of husband that I need to be; to be the kind of Dad/Grandpa I need to be. Men, you need other men.

Notice verse five of Mark 2. *“When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralyzed man, ‘My Son, your sins are forgiven.’”* Whose faith did Jesus see? Did he see the paralyzed man’s faith? No he saw the faith of this man's four friends.

One thing I have observed time and again in my life and ministry is that there is a synergy in group faith. This synergy of faith that can happen in a group can help you fulfill the life and purpose for which God has created you. There is a power in empowering one’s faith together.

Folks I need to ask you a question...who is carrying you? Jesus, the Son of God, knew that he could not do it with the daily crowds. He was always intimately connected to his disciples and special friends. In the same way it was the care of four friends who surrounded their paralyzed friend and brought him to Jesus.

Who are you bringing to Jesus today? Who do you care enough about that you’re willing to carry them through the crowd and cut a hole in a roof if needed in order to bring them to Jesus for healing? Do you care so much about others that you want them to know the love of Jesus?

My prayer each day is that I will have friends (a small group) who will care as much about me as these four friends did for their friend. Someones got to care enough to be willing to kick my behind so I stay focused in the right place. It is my prayer that you too have friends like that.

As you most likely have heard one of our top goals and priorities in our mission at Messiah is to help people get connected in authentic groups. It is an essential component to help us to grow in our faith in Jesus and to be the loving community Christ wants his church to be.

Charis this morning will again talk about a few ways Messiah is hoping to help you (each person) connect more closely with God and in your relationships with each other. Also, if you would like to help with this ministry please let Charis know. (Charis come forward)

Now you may wonder why your group of a few friends getting together once in awhile does not usually constitute a small group like we are talking about at Messiah.

Something that experts in small group ministry have discovered is that the most effective groups need a structure; they need a trained leader and support in order to function in the best possible way. Without this structure most interactions remain superficial and don't have the commitment that is needed to make a great group. Thanks to Charis for organizing and training leaders!

My friends, are you feeling lost and isolated in the crowds and busyness of life? Be assured that Jesus calls his church to be a place of authentic love and community. Be assured that there are people and groups here at Messiah who want to help carry and support you with Jesus’ love.