

**Series - Community - No. 2. 'Community as a Gift'**

We continue from where we left off last week, within the new family of Jesus, but now focusing upon the benefits of being within that family, specifically the 'Christian family community' of church. 'Much hope and healing can [will] come through participation in true Christian community, but only if we relate to the community in a receptive and investing way' (James C. Wilhoit).

**Read Ephesians 2: 1-10**

Consider the size of the investment God makes in each of us. What price would you put on it? Paul clearly affirms that this investment from God cannot be bought or earned, it is because of God's great love, mercy and grace that the benefits, once accepted, are secured from that moment and for eternity. The challenge therefore is whether or not we believe the personal cost of acceptance is too high. Do you think this loving, merciful, and generous God would want you to work through whatever costs and consequences acceptance brings all by yourself? How, and through whom, have you received help, support and guidance on your faith journey? 'Our Creator designed us to live and grow in relationship with him and in human community. Other people are the most important sources of God's grace in our lives.' (Wilhoit) Do you agree?

**Read Mark 10: 28-31**

To understand the depth of feeling Mark intended his readers to hear from Peter's exclamation, we need to read the preceding verses (17-27); to paraphrase Peter, "what more can we possibly give up"?! What would you say has been the 'cost' to you of following Jesus? What have you given up? Jesus gave a response to the rich young man (previous verses), and following Peter's outcry, another response. Are there significant differences between these two responses? Has Jesus changed his mind?

Jesus states that what his followers receive in benefits will outweigh by a hundred times the costs and consequences of following him. Further, you will receive it 'in the present time'. Is that how you feel? Try listing the benefits as you see them? Do you see belonging to a church family as one significant benefit?

The challenge to his disciples, can we say his first 'Christian church family', was directed at the strength of their commitment, to both follow him and his ways. He wanted no 'if and buts', they (we) were called to fully commit, without which they did not really have belief or faith. It is the same for the church family we choose to join. Take a moment to consider how much of yourself you commit to the church and the church family?

**Thought to take into the week** 'True community issues out of a realisation that God has placed us and held us together as he wants ... community [church] becomes God's nurturing, caring, revealing, supportive means of displaying himself as a personal, relational being in our culture' (Jean Gorman)

**Prayer:** *Holy Spirit, help me allow the indwelling Christ live out his own life through me.*