

**What is a home?** When you think of the word or image or idea of a home, what comes to mind? Perhaps you think of a building, made with wood and plaster, or brick and mortar. Perhaps you think of home as a shelter from the storm, a place of refuge. Perhaps when you hear the word "home," you think more of the hopes and dreams of the people who inhabit a home. A place where people build and share a life together. A place where husbands and wives and families share the hopes and hurts, and the joys and sorrows of life. Perhaps when you hear the word "home" you think of a place of solace and comfort. A place where you feel safe and whole.

Some say home is where the heart is. Others say home is where you hang your hat. Robert Frost once wrote, "Home is the place, where when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

Van Morrison, sang the song "*I Want to Go Home*" in his trademark growling voice: "*I want to go home. I feel so broke up, Lord, that I want to go home.*" A song for every human heart! Whenever we feel lonely or abandoned, we want to go home. Whenever we are filled with doubt or despair, we want to go home. Whenever we feel cut loose or lost, we want to go home – to the place where we can be real, authentic, honest about our past, and share our fears and hopes for the future. A place where we can embrace our brokenness as humanness and accept one another in the midst of it all. A place where imperfection is received with open arms and people stand ready to remind us that we are all imperfect people. Somewhere we can laugh together, cry together, sing together, shout together. Isn't that what we all long for?

And for home, read community! Jesus looked toward heaven always as home, to the community where all are held in the closest of bonds of fellowship. The Scriptures this morning lead us to reflect on what it means to be community.

Simply, community is a group of people sharing the responsibilities and burdens of survival. Identity in tribal cultures came from community, not from individual accomplishments. One thing that tribes knew is that they were stronger together and that to go off alone, you would eventually lose your mind or die.

In Jesus' time, people identified themselves with being Jewish or Roman or Samaritan or one of the many other cultures and nations that were intermingling under Roman conquest. Jesus himself was Jewish and worked within the framework of being Jewish to call people back to God. When we celebrate Easter, we celebrate a very particular definition of what it means to be community: We are the people who believe in the God who has been revealed to us decisively in Jesus Christ.

John's community saw themselves to be a persecuted religious minority, expelled from the synagogue, their religious home, because of their faith in Jesus. The early Christians were also living within a Hellenistic society—meaning that much of the worldview held at that time was that of the Greeks—the principles, ideas, and pursuits associated with the contemporary Greek culture permeated the Mediterranean world.

John's Gospel was written to a particular community in a particular time and place so that they could define themselves apart from the other religions that were around them. This Gospel helped define them as a community. The question for us today is, how do **we** define ourselves as Christians now? How do we live as Easter people? Defining ourselves doesn't mean that we throw stones at others. Defining ourselves means that we live out our lives in a particular way as community so that people can clearly see what being a Christian means.

The Church is a community of people praying and working together. We are all in this for the same reason; to please God and to grow in our relationships with him as such. The New Testament has a lot to say about community: here are some examples:

*“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”* Thessalonians 5.14

*“That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”* 1 Corinthians 12:25-27

*“Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 2:1-16

And someone said:

*“The church that prays together stays together; the church that sings together clings together. The church that shares, cares.”*

All believers in Christ are united through Christ, as an ekklesia (called gathering), in a state of koinonia (a sense of togetherness or commonness of purpose, of being one people).

Working together for a common purpose. Working together so others can be blessed. Working together to tell the world about Jesus Christ. Why? Because we need each other and the world needs us to be together.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” are the encouraging words Jesus speaks. “Don’t be lost – I will guide you and transform your living because I am identified with God the Father and because you are identified with me and my mission”

To follow the Way of Jesus is not to **go** anywhere. It is to **become** a special kind of person, a person whose whole being reflects the Truth and Life that Jesus reveals to us. It is to be a person who is totally identified with the vision and the values of Jesus. To be such a person is to be a member of the community of Truth and Life, whose hallmarks are complete integrity and harmony which Jesus himself revealed not only in what he said but in the total manifestation of his life and person.

Truth for Jesus was not just something he knew or accepted or believed in; truth for Jesus was what he was in his whole person: thoughts, feelings, actions, relationships. It was that total conformity between his inward self and his outward behaviour. For us to live Truth in that way is also to be fully alive, to be a “fully-functioning person”, responding totally to that abundance of life which Jesus came to give us.

At the mere mention of the word *community*, people often eye you as if you had dropped in from another world, smile tolerantly, and hope you change the subject. Good, sensible, Christian people misunderstand the idea of community. The idea of community is, in a sense, from another world, a world very unlike our own. Community is from the world as God wants it to be. It is the gift of a rich and challenging life together, one that we need and can receive with joy.

Christian community is simply sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of private lives and beyond the superficial social contacts that pass for "Christian fellowship." The biblical ideal of community challenges us instead to commit ourselves to life together as the people of God.

Christian community has as its goal is that, individually and together, we should become mature and able to stand tall and straight, embodying the very "fullness of Christ".