

# Christ's New Community

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So we're looking at Christ's new community. That's the big theme of what we're going to be thinking about over the next 20 minutes or so. And community is, I think, an essential part of human existence.

From the earliest tribal societies hunting woolly mamans together until now, we all need community. A lack of community and belonging, in fact, often leads to depression, which is probably not surprising.

Most of us need other people. But listen to this quote from the journalist Sebastian Junger. He writes, A person living in a modern city or suburb can, for the first time in history, go through an entire day or an entire life, mostly encountering complete strangers.

They can be surrounded by others and yet feel deeply, dangerously alone. What we have in these verses is the establishment of something new, the establishment of Christ's new community.

And so far in Mark's record of Jesus' life, we have seen Jesus come up against the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees. These are the people who should have recognized that Jesus was the long-awaited Christ, the Son of God.

[ 1 : 1 5 ]     And they despised him. They hated him so much that at the end of last week's passage, in verse 6 of chapter 3, they conspired with the secular establishment to kill Jesus.

And you might assume that Jesus would maybe dial things back to save his skin. But no, he's undeterred. And his following is bigger than ever. The religious leaders, the representatives of God's people, Israel, they've rejected Jesus.

And so he is creating what we could call a new Israel, a new community of God's people, a community centered around Jesus, the Son of God.

And so over the next 20 minutes or so, we'll look at this passage and see the identity of Christ's new community, the work of Christ's new community, and lastly, the enemies of Christ's new community.

And by looking at this section of Mark, we'll consider what Jesus was establishing 2,000 years ago, and see how what we're doing now as the church is the continuation of what was started way back then.

[ 2 : 2 3 ]     And I'm hoping that we'll see that Jesus is offering us not just community. In fact, he's offering us what we could call the community. Because although our society needs community in general, what it needs in particular is Christ's new community.

And that's because all of our deepest longings are ultimately met by belonging to Christ. So the identity of Christ's new community, which is our first point, is a thread which runs through that whole section which we have read to us.

And when you read through the narrative, the one thing you can't escape is the size and the presence of the crowd. Let's read the first few verses again. Mark writes, Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.

When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd, he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him, for he had healed many, so those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.

The crowd is massive, so massive that some of Jesus' disciples have to get a boat ready, just so they can put some watery distance between Jesus and the crowd. Otherwise, they will literally crush him.

[ 3 : 45 ] And there's a powerful irony here. The religious leaders, who should have recognized Jesus, rejected him. But the crowds, on the other hand, welcomed him.

The religious leaders want rid of him, but the crowds, they can't get enough of him. And those crowds come from all over. At the start of Mark's Gospel, we were introduced to John the Baptist.

He was Jesus' forerunner, his wingman, if you like. And we're told that the whole Judean countryside, and the people of Jerusalem, went out to him to be taught by the river. And now Jesus has come.

And as he teaches by the lake, people are coming from even further afield. A crowd came from Galilee in the west, Judea and Jerusalem and Ijmae, there in the south.

The regions across the Jordan, there in the east. And Tyre and Sidon are in the north. So if you look at a map, from Sidon in the north to Ijmae in the south, the distance is over 100 miles.

[ 4 : 49 ] This is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial community. And this is important, because God's people have historically always been the Jews.

But Jesus' new community is wider than Israel alone. Under Jesus, God's people is expanding globally. Globalization is a distinctive feature of the world that we live in.

Everyone's connected to everyone else in the world, through phone lines, trade routes, and of course, the internet. We have, in some ways, never been more connected. And yet, so many feel so lonely.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was also starting something global. And his is a global vision, which truly does unite, in a way that our efforts often fail to.

Its success is because Jesus is the Son of God and its focal point. So the religious leaders of Israel rejected Jesus, and so he rejected them.

[ 5 : 55 ] And Israel, who refused to follow the Son of God, they claimed to love, could not be God's people. But clearly, there were people in Israel and beyond who wanted to follow Jesus.

And these became the founding members of Christ's new community. And from among them, Christ appoints 12 leaders, more commonly known as the 12 disciples. The number 12 is, interestingly, not an absolutely random number.

I've already said that Jesus' new community is a new Israel. If you go back to the start of the Bible story in a book called Exodus, God created the first Israel. It's a long story, which would take far too long to tell.

But the important thing for us to know is that when God first called and created his people, it was by a mountain called Mount Sinai. God had rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt, and now he was giving them an identity as his people now that they were free.

And the way Israel was divided, even before they left Egypt, was by tribes. And the number of those tribes was 12. So this means that what Jesus does when he calls his disciples is hugely significant.

[ 7 : 12 ] Mark tells us in verse 13, if you look down with me, that Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. And then he goes on and says that he appointed 12, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach and have authority to drive out demons.

These are the 12 he appointed. And then he lists the 12 of them. Instead of 12 tribes, we have 12 disciples who are symbolic leaders of a new Israel.

And it's quite interesting to note that the word appointed in verse 14 can mean to make or even to create. So Mark's saying that Jesus made 12.

He was creating the new people of God around him. He withdrew from the religious leaders of Israel, and he was creating a new Israel, a new people of God who will be part of his mission.

So the point Jesus is making, and that Mark is emphasizing in his account of the event, is that Christ's new community is a new Israel that is rightly centered on Jesus.

[ 8 : 24 ] And it includes everyone, providing they follow him. Mark has already shown in his gospel how Simon, James, John, and Andrew follow Jesus, and they fill the first four spaces in that list of 12.

And the rest, we can assume, have likewise decided to respond to Jesus' call by following him. And they're not the religious establishment, the people we might expect to be in the Son of God's gang, as it were.

They're normal people. Some are fishermen. One's a tax collector. One was a political revolutionary, Simon the Zealot. The symbolic heads of Christ's community were just normal guys.

It's called, not because of what they could do, but because Jesus was going to make something out of them. They were just normal guys who followed the call of Jesus.

Listen to verse 13 again. He called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. And it's exactly the same today. What Jesus began when he was on earth, and the community that he created on the mountain, are still with us.

[ 9 : 32 ] But it's bigger now, because that community is his church. And as Jesus welcomed people from all over the world, Jew and non-Jew alike, so his church continues to open doors to all people, Christ Church Glasgow is an example of that.

It's something I love about our church community. So no matter your background or your color, your accent or your class, everyone is welcome, because Jesus holds open the door to everyone.

In many ways, the diversity of Christ's community is a powerful witness to Jesus' powerful work. Who else could unite such different and disparate people but Jesus?

When I was in primary school, I always wanted to be on the football team, because being on the football team was the mark of being cool, which I'm obviously not. The only problem was I was pretty rubbish with football.

Still am, incidentally. So that group was one I was never going to be part of. There were prerequisites to joining, which I did not meet. But Christ's community, his church, is not like that at all.

[ 10 : 42 ] Everyone is welcome. The only prerequisite is something that we can all do, and that's follow Jesus. So that's the identity of Christ's community.

Everyone who answers Jesus' call to join him, and it's the way to become a part of it. But what does Jesus' community actually do? That's our second point, the work of Christ's community.

We've already read from verse 14, but it won't hurt to hear it again. Mark writes, Jesus appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons.

So this is what Jesus calls his twelve disciples to do. He wants them, firstly, to be with him. I've already suggested that Jesus' new community is centred very much on him.

Now here's the truth. What Jesus wants from his twelve closest followers is for them to be with him. Jesus' followers today are different in many ways to the twelve, but not in this way.

[ 11 : 50 ] Jesus still wants his followers, his church, his community, to be with him. And it looks a little different now that Jesus isn't on earth anymore, but he's in heaven.

But the essence is very much the same. The twelve disciples went on to leave the church when Jesus ascended into heaven, and they never abandoned Jesus. They remained faithful to him.

Some of them, many of them, actually, even to the point of death. And so as then, so now, Christians want to be with Jesus.

Christians are loyal to Jesus because we believe he is the Son of God. And Christians believe that the very Spirit of Jesus, often called the Holy Spirit, lives inside everyone who follows Christ.

Christ. So Christians live lives of following Jesus and refusing to abandon their faith in him. And Jesus himself lives with Christians, helping them and guiding them by his Spirit.

[ 12 : 56 ] And so, like the twelve disciples, we too can also know a deep, personal relationship with Christ. Christ. But the work is not just about being with Jesus, however.

Jesus also wanted to send out the twelve to preach and to have authority over demons. And the most important thing to notice about this is perhaps not the work itself, important though that most definitely is, but whose work is similar too.

Since the very start of Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been preaching his message. He's been saying the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. He's been preaching to the crowds now as we've seen in our reading that those crowds have very much hit critical mass.

And he's also been proclaiming his authority over demons. We've seen that too in our reading. Look at verse 11 and 12. Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, you are the son of God.

But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him. Jesus has authority over these demons. Evil spirits who hate him and who possess individuals in the most terrible and cruel ways.

[ 14 : 10 ] So what Jesus' disciples are being sent by Jesus to do is Jesus' work. And his work is to bring his kingdom into a dark world.

The kingdom that Jesus brings stands against the evil and the darkness that plagues creation. His healing of the sick, his casting out of evil spirits, his message of good news.

These are all signs of Jesus bringing something better. A kingdom without evil, pain, or darkness. And that's what his disciples are doing.

Jesus gives the twelve disciples the job of joining him in bringing his new kingdom of light and love and goodness. There are many ways in which members of Jesus' community today are not like the twelve.

They had a special role as being the symbolic heads of the church, but they established a pattern for disciples of Jesus in every land and generation to follow. Churches of Christ's new community today are in many ways like little outposts of Jesus' kingdom.

[ 15 : 23 ] If the world is plagued by evil and darkness as we've already sung about in one of our songs today, Great is the Darkness, well then Jesus' church is supposed to be a little encampment of a new world marked by Christ's good.

Like lots of little candles in a room of total darkness, Jesus' disciples now, as back then, try to show the world that Jesus' kingdom is the way out of the dark.

Because the way out of the dark is Jesus. He came to earth to establish his people and save them from the effects of their sin, which is all the wrong that they've ever done.

sin is at the root of all the problems in our world. And we all have it. So like you were saying in his testimony, we all do things that are wrong and think things that are evil.

Sin plagues all of us. And Jesus promises all who follow him that their sin will be forgiven and that he will create a new world free from sin and free from all its consequences.

[ 16 : 30 ] Evil, suffering, death, despair. prayer. So for disciples today, like little lights, Jesus wants us to bring that message.

For those who wouldn't call themselves disciples though, that's the message that Jesus really wants you to consider. What we can't get away from, however, as we go through this section of Mark, is the fact that there is a pushback to this.

Jesus' new kingdom and his new community, who are a little foretaste of his new creation, is not popular with everyone. And that's our third point, the enemies of Christ's new community.

We've already mentioned the demons, the evil spirits who fall down before Jesus. We've noted that the Pharisees, the religious leaders, are plotting with the Herodians, the secular state, to kill Jesus.

There is strong opposition from spiritual foes and human foes. worst of all is perhaps the last name in the list of the twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

[ 17 : 37 ] It might feel like Mark is somewhat spoiling part of the ending of the story by revealing this detail about Judas, but what it does is it reveals that there is opposition on the inside too.

I'm a bit of a Shakespeare geek, so if you'll allow me, I'm going to quote from the play Julius Caesar. In the story, Caesar is assassinated, in the Senate, and one of the assassins is one of his closest friends, a guy called Brutus.

And Brutus was someone who he loved and mentored. And a character later in the play says this of Brutus, that his stab was the most unkindest cut of all.

And so Judas, likewise, was a leader of Christ's new community and saw Jesus' divine power firsthand. He saw the kingdom that Jesus was bringing, and yet, and yet he betrayed him to the Pharisees and the state to be executed on false charges for a poultry bag of coins.

His truly was the most unkindest cut. Christ's new community will always face opposition from the spiritual, and it will always face opposition from men and women outside and inside.

[ 18 : 53 ] But the twist in the tale, however, is that Jesus is more powerful than his enemies. The good news of Jesus is that although his enemies seemed to beat him, his defeat was actually his victory.

Jesus died, an innocent man on a Roman cross. But in dying, he sorted out the sin problem. Jesus' message is that everyone has sinned, has done wrong, and we're all responsible for messing up our world and contributing to the darkness.

But Jesus died and took the punishment that our sin deserves, and then he came back to life. In doing this, it meant that he could establish his new community as those forgiven from sin who are looking forward to a sinless world.

It meant that his enemies, those who reject him and are on the side of the sinful world, the world represented by evil, suffering, and death, they were defeated.

Jesus won the victory. So where I want to finish is to say that Christ's new community is marked by hope. Jesus' disciples believe that Jesus has saved us from our sin and all of its effects.

[ 20 : 17 ] and we believe that Jesus is creating a new world for his community, which now spans countless generations of people from our tribe, tongue, and nation.

We believe that this new community is a little slice of that new world, a little light in the darkness. Mark's Gospel is a story all about Jesus, who he was and what he came to do.

And if he truly is the Son of God, and if he truly did sort out the problems that plague our world, then his community is the place to be.

And so, the Christian hope is not merely a hope that all Jesus promised will come to pass. The Christian hope is also a hope that those who don't believe would come to believe.

Christians want, and Jesus himself wants, more than anything for people to join him in his new community and follow him. And a lot of us here today will be firmly in that community.

[ 21 : 21 ] And for those in that boat, I hope that this section of Mark is one of encouragement. Encouragement that Christ's church really is a little outpost of hope in an often hopeless landscape.

But I also pray that it's one that will challenge you. We need to be vigilant because there is always opposition to Jesus' message of hope. But we need to ask God for help to keep following Jesus even when it's hard because the hope at the end really is worth keeping going for.

And we need, too, to be working. Christ's community then and now is not static. Like the earliest disciples were doing, Christ wants us to be following his work of spreading the good news and lighting new candles in the world.

the message is important so we ought not to be half-hearted about it. If you're here and you say that you're not in Christ's community, I'd encourage you to probe a little further in our culture that is often without community.

We hope that at the very least you can feel welcomed and at home in this one. What we really would like is for you to recognize that Christ's community is more than just community.

[ 22 : 42 ] It's a community built on real hope and the real Son of God. It's a community which looks forward to a better world, free from all the problems of this one.

And it's a community which welcomes all, no matter who they are and no matter what they've done. Christ's community is, in short, a community of hope.