



TRINITY LOVES HUNTSVILLE

Sermon Series Discussion Guide

2024 MINISTRY FOCUS: Building New Relationships and Strengthening Community.

INSTRUCTIONS

This discussion guide aims to facilitate meaningful conversation about how your group can build new relationships and strengthen community. If you look at our Ministry Focus, you'll see that there are two parts: one external and one internal. The external focus is on building *new* relationships within the community of Huntsville. The internal focus is on strengthening the existing community within our Trinity family. As you go through this guide, you will notice that there are multiple discussion options for you to participate in. Each group can choose how much time they want to spend on this discussion. However, each group must do the 10-minute exercise in the blue box below. Please send in notes from your discussion to becca.bibee@trinityhsv.org by May 1st.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

If we look at Jesus' ministry, we see that it was incarnational and relational. Jesus was not one to be aloof or standoffish, but rather, Jesus was willing to be with his followers in the muck and mess of life. He entered into their lives to celebrate and to suffer with those around him. Jesus knew the people he spoke with deeply. He asked questions that got to the heart of the matter and didn't let his interactions remain at the surface level. As Christians, we are called to be practitioners of incarnational and relational ministry worldwide. Here's what that looks like:

Incarnational Ministry:

- Incarnational ministry focuses on embodying the presence, character, and teachings of Jesus Christ in the world. It emphasizes the idea that just as Jesus incarnated or became flesh to dwell among humanity, Christians are called to physically and tangibly represent Christ to others. The term "incarnation" underscores the belief in the divine becoming human in Jesus Christ. In incarnational ministry, practitioners seek to follow Jesus' example by engaging with people in their physical, emotional, and spiritual realities, meeting them where they are, and demonstrating God's love in concrete ways.

Relational Ministry:

- Relational ministry places a primary emphasis on building authentic, meaningful relationships with others. It recognizes the importance of human connection in Christian discipleship and ministry and seeks to foster trust, mutual understanding, and support within communities. Practitioners of relational ministry invest time, energy, and care in getting to know people personally, listening to their stories, sharing their joys and struggles, and walking alongside them in their journey of faith and life.

SCRIPTURAL CONTEXT:

While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, “This is what you heard from me: John baptized with water, but in only a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?”

Jesus replied, “It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1: 4-8, CEB

In this passage, Jesus is with his disciples just before his ascension into heaven. This passage holds significant theological implications, particularly regarding the empowerment of the disciples for their mission to witness Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus instructs the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the empowerment Holy Spirit which will come at Pentecost. This promise is a continuation of Jesus' ministry, as he had previously foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit to council and guide his followers (John 14:16-17, 26; John 15:26-27; John 16:7-15). The presence of the Holy Spirit is essential for the disciples' ability to fulfill their mission and continue the work that Jesus began. We can't spread the Gospel without the Spirit.

The disciples inquire about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, indicating their expectation of a political and national restoration of Israel's sovereignty. However, Jesus redirects their focus from temporal concerns to the larger scope of God's kingdom. He clarifies that the timing and nature of the kingdom are under God's authority and that their mission is not primarily about restoring earthly kingdoms but about bearing witness to the Gospel's transformative power to all nations.

Jesus assures the disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, enabling them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The places that Jesus names are significant. He calls the disciples to be witnesses of the Gospel to their town; then he broadens it to their province; then he broadens it even more to their enemies' land; and lastly, to the ends of the whole world. The disciples are not only called to proclaim the Gospel but also empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so effectively, despite the challenges they may face.

OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is the fastest you've formed a friendship with someone. Why did that friendship move so fast?
- Who are the people who have entered into your suffering? How did it feel to have them there?

THE WORD IS OUR PARISH:

- Thumbs up if you agree or thumbs down if you disagree: You are in ministry to all the world.
- For those who answered with a thumbs down, why do you think that?
- For those who answered with a thumbs up, why do you think that?
- What does it mean to be in ministry to all of the world? What does this practically look like?
- Say something like: As a Christian, it is not your choice whether you are in ministry to all the world. You are because of the nature of our faith. To paraphrase John Wesley, the world is our parish. What you are in control of as a Christian is whether you are a good minister of the Gospel or a poor minister of the Gospel. Jesus models ministry to the world through the way he lived. How would you describe Jesus' ministry?
 - Go over the definitions of Relational and Incarnational ministry that are listed above.
 - What are some examples of Jesus being incarnational? What are some examples of Jesus investing relationally?
- Where have you seen Jesus' Incarnational and relational ministry in your own experiences?

BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY:

*** Note: This is the required part of this lesson. Have someone take notes on this discussion and email them to Becca.**

Our church community's focus for the year 2024 is centered on building new relationships and strengthening existing ones. The aim is to reach out to those not yet connected to Trinity while also nurturing our internal bonds. Why do you think this focus was chosen for this year?

Could someone please read Acts 1:4-8? How do you see the connection between the Great Commission and our ministry focus?

What is it about the Gospel that makes it worth sharing, and how does the Holy Spirit play a role in this sharing?

How do our relationships within Trinity and outside of it impact our ability to share the Gospel effectively?

Reflecting on your class or group, what draws you to gather here every Sunday?

What are three practical ways your group or class can leverage its unique qualities to strengthen the community at Trinity?

Similarly, what are three practical ways your group or class can utilize its gifts to forge new

relationships within Trinity?

Out of these six ideas, which one do you feel most equipped to implement? What additional resources or support do you require to accomplish this?

CONCLUSION:

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- Do you feel equipped to be witnesses for the Gospel? Why or why not?
 - What gifts do you see in the people around you that can be used to be a witness to the Gospel?
 - In this version of the great commission, Jesus mentions geographical areas, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. What are your Jerusalems, Judeas, Samarias, and the end of the earth?
 - Before we pray, in what ways do we need the Holy Spirit to equip us as a Church community to be witness bearers of the Gospel?
 - Pray for those things as a group and any other prayer requests that arise.