

"Community in a Consumer Culture"
Sermon Notes
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First Church of East Hartford
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We are in the midst of a sermon series entitled "What Lifts You Up?"
At First Church we are celebrating a season of blessings,
and to that end each sermon looks at a particular blessing.
This morning, we look for the blessings found in the midst of a consumer culture,
a culture that is forever asking us to buy things we may or may not need.

PRAYER

Think of something you love about yourself.
It can be something you love about your body.
...a choice you have made in your life that you are proud of.
...the way you smile or the gifts you make for the holiday fair.
Let yourself sink into this feeling of happiness.

Now imagine the world tells you this quality is undesirable, bad, or ugly.
...scientists are trying to figure out how to genetically modify people like you,
so you no longer have this trait.
....strangers says things like, "Oh, I'm so sorry you need to live like this."
....people look away or ignore you as soon as they see this quality.

[pause]

Now imagine, you find a place where you are loved for you.
a place where all your best parts are allowed to shine.
a place where you are respected and the qualities you love about yourself are valued.
a place where you sit down to eat with friends,
a place of celebration and belonging.

In the 1960s Jean Vanier inadvertently, as if by accident, began such a community.
He saw the dismal conditions of the mental institutions
These institutions held people with disabilities as if they were animals, not humans.
As the founder says, he saw a "huge gap of injustice and pain." (29)
As a man of deep Catholic faith, he welcomed two people to share a home with him.
These people would have otherwise been in the institution.
Instead they were loved and had the opportunity to share love.
The community grew.
L'arche homes spread across the world in numerous countries.
L'arche homes are:
"communities in which people with intellectual disabilities live
with people who do not share that life experience.
They do not live together as carer and cared for,
but as fellow human beings who share care and need." (17)
The communities are not based on accomplishments, degrees, or status.
The communities are grounded in reciprocal relationship.

When you think about it, relationship and connection is at the root of our longings.
I sent out a link to the top ten commercials of 2014 so far.

These are commercials that hit a cord with people,
so much so that they sent the commercials to friends online.
and the commercials went viral.

Now, the list came out this summer, so there are quite a few commercials about the World Cup.
What do they have in common?

First, all except one, are trying to sell a product or experience.

One way or another they suggest that their product will make you better/worthy.

Worthy of what?

The underlying message is that x will make you worthy of connection.

This desire for connection is what sells the products.

People crave relationships and connection.

That why popular commercials feature

Teams working together

A "unsung hero" who slowly building relationships with the people he runs into everyday.
or even a whole experiment with people kissing.

Our society is hungry for connection and relationship.

We are blessed to be in a place that is ripe with connections.

Church is a place where we practice connection and relationship -

It's a place where a unique community is formed.

Community that does not require you to be an expert soccer player.

Community that does not require a downpayment.

Community that is not based on how glamorous or put together you look.

Community that is based on the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Community that acknowledges that all of us are beloved children of God.

Community that isn't about lifting up any one individual,
but about lifting up everyone together.

In the Gospel this morning, Jesus lifts up the need for humility in community.

He says that faith communities are not about showing off,
but about serving one another.

The focus is on God, not on any one individual's personal merits.

So, What lifts me up in the midst of consumerism?

Where consumerism focuses on collecting products to enhance our personal worth,

Christian community focuses on building each other up.

In Church we don't need to prove ourselves worthy of love.

In Church it isn't about showing who is the best.

In the midst of consumerism, what lifts me up is:

Communities like L'arche.

Communities that practice Communion where all are welcomed.

It's hearing stories from all of you about when and how you have been there for each other.

May we strive to build up this community,

continuing to care for one another and

seek out new ways to serve our neighbors. Amen