

Theme: Authentic community requires in person, face to face relationships rather than those mediated by technology.

## I. Intro - COVID, Masks, ZOOM, Community

- A. COVID has changed our lives for almost a year!
- B. Wearing masks protects us physically - but they really inhibit relationships and communication!
- C. ZOOM & internet has let us have some virtual meetings
- D. But these things are not the same as face to face relationships!
- E. How do we build authentic community?

## II. The Blessing and Limits of Technology

- A. John is writing letters - and that is good!
  - 1. He is writing - and has more to write!

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 12

I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 3 John 13
  - 2. Letters like this comprise most of the NT
    - a. John wrote 3 letters, plus Gospel and Revelation
    - b. Paul's letters are a huge part of NT
    - c. Almost everything was originally written correspondence
    - d. We should be glad they had the technology of writing - and used it!

## 3. Technology is not inherently evil

- a. It is how we got the Bible!
  - b. We have even more ways to communicate with one another today
  - c. We should use all of these when necessary to build relationships
- B. But John sees the limits of written communication
- I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 12
- I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 3 John 13
- 1. John wrote a letter - but there is more to be said
  - 2. Some things need face to face communication
  - 3. A similar theme in other places as well

But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. 1 Thessalonians 2:17

    - a. They can write letters, but it is not the same!
    - b. There is no substitute for in-person, face to face relationships
  - 4. Technologically mediated relationships are better than no communication, but they are limited. They can NEVER be a substitute for face to face relationships.
  - 5. See "The Church in the iWorld" series from 2013, especially two teachings listed in devotional guide

### III. The Nature of Authentic Community

#### A. Authentic community requires face to face relationships

I have much to write to you, but **I do not want to use paper and ink**. Instead, I hope to visit you and **talk with you face to face**, so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 1:12

I have much to write you, but **I do not want to do so with pen and ink**.<sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and **we will talk face to face**.<sup>3</sup> John 1:13–14

1. Pen and ink are not 'face to face'
2. John prefers face to face if it is at all possible
3. Face to face refers to unmediated conversation
  - a. It is used 16 times in Scripture - always unmediated
  - b. A couple of examples

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Exodus 33:11

    1. Face to face, like friends do
    2. Moses was unique in this regard

"When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.<sup>7</sup> But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house.<sup>8</sup> **With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.**" Numbers 12:6–8

      1. Prophets receive via mediation of dreams, visions
      2. Moses spoke with God face to face - only him
      3. This is the most intimate form of communication
4. Authentic community is built by face to face conversations, unmediated by technology.

#### B. Authentic community is essential to our human nature

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Gen 2:18

1. We were made in the image of the Trinity (Ge 1:26)
2. This is why it is not good for us to be alone
3. But true community requires someone 'suitable' - our equal, not the animals
4. For many of us, this finds partial fulfillment in marriage (Valentines Day - enjoy time together!)
5. For all of us, it requires face to face relationships with others
6. This will find its final fulfillment in the beatific vision

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see **face to face**. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12

  - a. Now we "see" God in a mediated fashion - the Scripture, prayer, Sacraments
  - b. Then we will see God face to face - the unmediated beatific vision
  - c. Mediated leads to partial knowledge, unmediated to full knowledge
7. This is why relationships complete our joy

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, **so that our joy may be complete**. 2 John 1:12
8. Human nature requires the authentic community that is found in close face to face relationships.

C. Authentic community is essential for a local church

I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>13</sup>The children of your chosen sister send their greetings. 2 John 1:12–13

1. Chosen sister - another church
2. This reminds us the relationships John is speaking of are in a local church context
3. A local church is a community of believers who worship together, walk with God together, and experience the joys and griefs of life together.
4. It is not possible to be really part of a local church and avoid building real relationships with others.
5. Any attempt to avoid close relationships prevents our joy from being complete!

D. Authentic community can only exist with a limited number of people

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings.

Greet the friends there by name. 3 John 1:14

1. Greet the friends by name - you know each other
2. Humans do not have the capacity for real relationships with hundreds or thousands of people
3. This is one of the dangers of technologically mediated relationships - they deceive us into thinking we know many more people than we actually do
4. Authentic community is local, small community!

## IV. Applying the Authentic Word

A. Do I see Gnosticism undermines authentic community?

1. Last week we saw the heresy of Gnosticism, which denies and denigrates the goodness of our bodies
2. For a Gnostic, face to face relationships are no better than virtual relationships, and in fact are probably worse.
3. But John knows authentic faith disagrees with this!
4. Thus, we must beware that our Gnostic age will work to undermine authentic community.
5. This is why we are becoming increasingly isolated in our age - it is the natural outcome of our Gnostic tendencies as a society.
6. But the authentic faith recognizes we were created for face to face community!
7. This is why we have felt such loss during the last year of COVID - we need face to face relationships, and to worship in each other's physical presence!
8. Don't be deceived or lulled into the falsehood that face to face community does not matter!

B. Am I building into authentic community?

1. You were created for authentic community!
2. You were redeemed for authentic community!
3. But sin always works to undermine authentic community - it will take conscious effort!

4. In our age, technology promises to replace face to face relationships with “superior” or “equal” virtual ones - but this is a lie!  
Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities. And as it turns out, we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk. - Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together (Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other)*
5. But this is not the authentic community for which we were created and redeemed!
6. The restrictions from COVID have made authentic community very difficult indeed!
7. Am I consciously building authentic community?
  - a. Am I using technology to gather right now?
    1. John wrote - until he could come!
    2. Use technology right now until we can all gather!
  - b. Am I planning to gather in person as soon as possible?
    1. Can I gather now - but am just being lazy?
    2. In the spring we will be back outside
    3. Am I planning to gather in person?
    4. Virtual gatherings are NOT the same as face to face, in-person gatherings!
    5. Virtual church is NOT authentic community - never settle!

## C. The Lord’s Supper - Our Communal Meal

1. This meal reminds us of all of these things
  - a. It is real food - not “virtual food”
  - b. It reminds us of our need for a Mediator before God
  - c. It reminds us that one day we will see God face to face and eat with Him
  - d. It reminds us that we are one Body - the community of Christ
2. Today, we eat our communal meal - together

### Authentic Community

2 John 12-13

February 14, 2021

Communion

Numbers 6:24-26

Teaching keywords: Community; humanity; technology

The Lord bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24–26

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