

# Where Two or Three Are Gathered

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25



©Rev. Sarah Cooper Searight  
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When my husband Bill and I were brand new parents, there was a lot that we were learning on the fly. And everyone, of course, had wisdom to share. Good-hearted and well-meaning, the advice came from all corners. Admittedly, some went in one ear and out the other, but a good bit of it stuck.

As much as we were receiving advice, we were also reading; because we are, by nature, convinced that studying solves all problems...Our go-to baby bible was by Dr. Sears, and by now that book is so dog-eared and baby food stained, but it was a sanity-saver at the time for this anxiety-prone momma. My mantra to myself at all times in those early days included these elemental bonding practices set forth in the book:

Touch her. Talk to her. Look at her.

It's amazing what you need to be reminded of when you are monumentally sleep deprived and overwhelmed with joy at the same time.

We were constantly in awe each moment to see, in those earliest days, how just their presence evoked a desire to touch them, to talk to them, to see them and get them to see us. Fortunately, these were the easiest parts of having a newborn: Those little ones were as captivating as we were exhausted, and we lived for the reward of little twitches in the mouth that we were *sure* was a smile (my mom assured me, however, that it was just gas).

The rationale, of course, is that these basic human interactions develop a level of trust and connection between parent and child that is primal. After a while, their sight develops just so and something shifts ever so slightly, and it is magical. The parent looks at the child and all of the sudden, he sees her looking at him.

We are both winners in the deal—her brain is stimulated and our instincts heightened.

Clearly, human to human connection is still as important as it was way back to the very beginning; when man awoke from a deep sleep and before him stood woman.

“At last!” he proclaimed, as though he had been waiting for her forever, “This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” I can only imagine this as accompanied by a deep sigh of relief and utter wonder.

Nowhere in here does he declare primacy.

Nowhere does he assume the authority of the first-created.

Nowhere is there any word of her being anything but the magnificent culmination of creation.

So overjoyed, he clings to her.

Daniel Migliore, in his book *Faith Seeking Understanding*, furthers a theology of humans as made in the image of God, saying that “Being created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all creatures...Being truly human and living in community are inseparable. This wisdom is beautifully captured in an African proverb; ‘I am human only because you are human.’”<sup>1</sup>

The parent looks at the child, and all of the sudden he sees her seeing him. The connection we have between one another is not only primal, it is also theological.

It tells us about who God is for God knew from the very beginning that one could not live without another.

And of course, God did, because God is in community within God’s very self: Father, Son and Spirit; Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. All are distinct, all are with purpose, all are co-equal, and all are within the One we call, God. God knows the importance of relationship because God IS relationship.

Further dispensing with years of lazy theology, neither man nor woman’s purpose is greater than the other. Nowhere does her given vocation as helper make her lesser than his given vocation, which is to till and to keep. We would remember that elsewhere in the scriptural witness, God too, is identified as a helper.

Psalm 54:4, “But surely, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.”

Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you.”

Rather than a natural order, each has a responsibility, a purpose in line with God’s expectation, a vocation which is a God’s given gift to share. They are not there to lie around and eat fruit all day. There’s a creation to care for. Together.

In the beginning, God created community. One with each other. One with the created world. One with God.

While this story is used most often in the context of two people standing together to make covenant promises of marriage, we should not limit its voice here. Church, too, is a place where we hope to practice this kind of relationship with one another and our world, or so we try our very hardest.

We know, of course, that the church does not have the corner on community; it never did, excepting perhaps those very first days. Starbucks has long cultivated the third place—home is the first, work is the second, and the third place is where conditions are created such that social environments arise—that is, community develops perhaps with opportunity to be more diverse that is possible elsewhere. Neighborhoods have shared gardens. Playgrounds might pull more families on a sunny Sunday than church pews. There’s no limit on places where we can find one another. And this is just right.

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<sup>1</sup> Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Church is certainly a third place as well, and there is something specific about what the church—that is the people, and not necessarily the building— can offer in the way of community, and it seems that this is just what we find in Genesis 2.

In God's intended, created community there is purpose,  
there is accountability,  
there is commitment,  
there is awe,  
there is dignity.

A few months ago I visited Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. I was there with a group of civic leaders, pastors, professors, seminary administrators, and together we met Pastor Mike and De'Amon. Broadmoor Methodist was like many other mainline denominational congregations when Pastor Mike served his first stint there (yep, he was their pastor twice). The congregation was deeply passionate and dwindling. They were earnestly committed to the community and so they found ways to give to it: clothing cupboard and after school program and food pantry. Pastor Mike threw himself into growing the summer day camp and had great success in the early days. Lots of kids participated. He said of the success, "I nearly broke my arm, patting myself on the back."

Yet, in the span of nine months, Pastor Mike buried nine boys from the neighborhood, several of whom attended that same camp. He noticed that things didn't really change for those kids or any others, even with his very earnest effort and very successful camp.

Mike left Broadway and was assigned elsewhere, all the while thinking and reading about modes of community building. By the second time he arrived to Broadway United, ten or so years later, Mike had thrown away the typical and well-intentioned model and adopted a simple question, "What are three things you can do well enough to teach them to others?"

Mike met and hired De'Amon to be a "roving listener" in the neighborhood. Yes, that is his title. It is specifically De'Amon's job to pay attention to and be present for the people in the houses and on the streets around the church.

Instead of finding out what people need, the goal is to find out what they can give. In the process of meeting, one woman told De'Amon that she was a great cook. All the neighbors vouched for her; so Mike invited her to cook for the next big meeting to be held at the church. The food was so good, that he hired her for the next several big meetings. After that, the board agreed that she would be the church's official caterer, compelling any who used the space to contract with her. After a while, she'd saved enough money and raised enough social capital that she was able to move out and start her own business.

She talked. They listened. She felt welcomed for who she was and what she could offer. They saw her. I mean, they really saw her and created the space and made the connections. She shared her gift, and they committed to her to work together towards a dignified new start for her and her family. Everyone ate well in the process.

Church can be the third space for community that is nurtured around these types of seemingly simple acts: to touch, to listen, to see. To truly see the human standing before us as equally made, equally worthy, equally deserving, equally loved. Church is called to be this kind of community: one

whose purpose is to tend, to keep, to help, to hold one another accountable and to care for one another in such a way that all have dignity and purpose of their own.

The parent looks at the child and all of the sudden, he sees her seeing him.

In answering their question about who among them will be the greatest, Jesus redirects the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew to community that is not earned but it is given, to relationships that are not based on what you can get but on how well you can forgive; and he reminds them that “wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be also.”

It’s like God continues to nudge at us with the simple fact that we are not alone, nor are we made to be alone. Our easy isolation is not good for us. Our list making and line ordering is not as we were created nor as community is intended. As God among us, Jesus made room for others and established a richly diverse community.

I wonder, what person have you known or community have you been part of who has really seen you for all that God created you to be?

Imagine what that feels like to be seen, remember it. Imagine, how uniquely the church can hold this space of community—of seeing others so that they know what it is to really be held for who they are, and for the change that creates in us. Imagine, a community of purpose, of accountability, of dignity, of commitment, of love—now this is as God created us to be. Thanks be to God.