

Introduction

- Read story from Preface of "The Search for Intimacy" (Elaine Storkey).
(We must be careful to avoid generalising from the particular...)
- And yet we would recognise that loneliness, those longings for closeness, the need for true friendship - for we share those same needs, and our society is filled with hurting people who have failed to find those things.
- For example, films very often reflect state of society.
- Many films centre round the search for true relationships - not just the obvious romance films, but even "buddy" films, where the two mis-matched heroes (often cops) eventually learn to get along, to understand each other.
- We can see the poignancy, aching but frustrated desire for closeness of something like **The Remains of the Day** - such pain, even though its only a story - or the more recent **Brokeback Mountain** - Oscar nominations and acclamation - a story about search for true relationship
- Not just films: **advertising** plays on the same thing:
 - come on holiday with us and have a happy contented family...
 - dating agencies
 - chat lines
- Our society is desperate for intimacy, for friendship - for real, authentic community.
- Yet at the same time community also repels us - we are scared to expose ourselves, our real thoughts, our true desires, our deepest needs.
- There is danger in self-exposure - in emotional vulnerability, in others seeing us as we really are.
 - and maybe that explains why we, individually and as a society, and as Bono put it, **"I still haven't found what I'm looking for"**

Where does desire for community come from?

- Where does this desire for community, for genuine, authentic relationships come from?
 - and how do we explain the fear we have of participating in authentic community?
 - is it all merely in our genes - some kind of successful evolutionary strategy, that ensures a better survival rate for our genes?
 - or is it simply some kind of social construct, not so much part of us as essential for the functioning of stable societies?
- Neither of these, nor any of the other theories that secular thinkers has advanced, are entirely satisfactory.
- Community goes beyond science or sociology to the very core of our humanity - and the best, indeed the only place to get the true picture - is from the one who made us, the Creator God.
- That's why we read from the early chapters of Genesis - and we'll be looking at some of the things those early chapters reveal about the nature and importance of authentic community.

Genesis background

- Before plunging into the details of what Genesis tells us, it will be useful to have some handle on what is going on in these early chapters.
 - **Chapter 1:1--2:3 : the Big Picture - overview - whole shebang!**
 - **Chapter 2:4--2:25 : the Creation of Mankind, zooming in, details.**
 - **Chapter 3:1ff : starts to deal with Fall, results of disobedience**
- **Complementary** accounts of the creation of the universe and men and women within that universe - emphasising different aspects of the whole story.

It is good!

- If you've ever read Genesis 1, you'll know that one of the recurring themes or phrases is God's declaration of the goodness of creation.
- Stands back on reflects on each aspect as he makes it - and as he does so, declares:
– *"It is good!"*
- He finishes the whole thing off, in Gen 1:31, with "God saw all that he had made," and it was VERY good."
- It is in this context that the creation of humanity occurs (Gen 1:26-28)
– of things being "good".
- In fact, humanity is the pinnacle of creation - created last, the jewel in the most beautiful and amazing of settings!
- What, then, is said about humanity in these verses?

"Let us make man in our image"

- In the image of God (Gen 1:26) - investment of Himself in a special way.
- Likeness - image - reflection:
- This last uncovers something important:
- If you stand in front of the mirror, your reflection appears. That reflection has no independent existence. If you were not standing there, your reflection certainly wouldn't - or if it was, you should be very worried!!
- In a similar way, we are by our very nature creatures "in relation" - at the most basic level, we are in relation to God. Dissolve that relationship and we simply are not.
- Not only do we owe our existence to his creation of us - like a car owes its creation to the car plant and workers who made it. If the car plant is demolished, and all the workers die, it is possible for the car to carry on existing.
- However, without the relationship with God, we do not live. Its fundamental to our humanity.
- We are created in the image of God. And we are created relating - relating to God, and so also to each other...

"...male and female he created them."

- Not only did God create us in relation to Himself, He also created us in community with each other.
– *"Male and female he created them"* (Gen 1:27)
- Its not merely an accident of biology, a neat way of propogating the species; nor is the community a construct of our society.
- Its a designed in part of our make up.
- Gen 1 doesn't say much about what the relationships, the community thus formed would be like - but it makes it abundantly clear that its no added extra.
- We are created in community - its fundamental to our humanity.
- God stood back at the end of his work of creation. He surveyed the universe, the stars, the planets, the vast galaxies - and it was good.
- He saw the sea and the dry land, and all the vegetation they supported - and it was good.
- He saw the animals - the birds, the insects, the mammals, the fish - from the tiniest gnat to the great Blue Whale - and he saw that it was good.
- And he looked on man, humanity new created, humanity in relationship with Himself, and in relationship with itself, male and female, and it was **VERY** good.
- Humanity is created in relationship, in community - that's the way we're wired up.
- And that's **GOOD!**

It is not good!

- Zoom in with Genesis on man's creation. Look in a little more detail at what this created in community, in relationship, means. What was the true, authentic, original community like?
- Already identified "it is good" as key phrase.
- Only one place in the whole of the Creation narrative, Gen 2:18, that something is declared NOT good - "It is not good for the man to be alone".
- Context is one of good - the good of the whole creation, all of nature, the good of the task God has given (tending garden, naming animals) - all of this is good....
- And yet, "It is not good for man to be alone."

Why is it not good?

- Man has just been given a task - of looking after the garden, cultivating it.
- Working away, I'm sure with the same satisfaction from the work we get, the thrill of achievement, ...
- Yet not enough. For real satisfaction, it is not good for the man to be alone.
- work; labour; achievement; attainment... not enough!
- Gleam of success can wear off - the money, the power, the physical success - empty in themselves.
- Often hear of the dissatisfaction of those who've worked hard, and lost family and friends along the way.
- "It is not good for man to be alone" - need for relationships, for community.
- and not just the community of marriage, male female.
- Adam not only lacked full satisfaction from his God-given task, but it was also beyond his solo abilities. On his own he could not do it.
- Success itself - requires people with different gifts and abilities - management of teams suggest optimally they will have 8 different kinds of people - ideas people, details people, completers, leaders, organisers.
- "It is not good for man to be alone."
- Final reason why it is not good is that it stunts the way we can relate to God!
- as we live and relate to each other we have pictures of how we are in relation to God - Father, brother, Lord, servant... all these word pictures are based on our relatedness to others.
- worse - not only would we not have any concrete pictures of how we can relate to God, we would not be able to worship together, to do what we are doing tonight, to spur one another on, to learn from each other...
- Even for Adam, alone in a perfect world, it was "not good" for him to be alone in his relationship with God.
- So we can't fully worship God on the golf course, in the supermarket, wherever:
- that will only ever lead to a stunted faith, an incomplete ability both to serve and to listen to God.
- Going solo:
- ultimately doesn't satisfy, and
- ultimately leads to lack of achievement.
- ultimately, we are in some way less able to relate to God outwith the context of community (Church).

What is God's response to the "not good"?

- Creates community on earth too - a helper for Adam.
- notice that the first thing Adam is noted as saying, the first exclamation of delight (whole of creation, fresh from God's hand...) was in response to seeing his companion, his help-meet!
- Subordinate place for woman?
- not really - literally "a help as opposite him".
- **Complementarity** - whether it was the intuition/analysis, the thinking/feeling

Genesis 1-3 **The Rise and Fall of True Community** Fintry, 24/8/2008, pm

difference many see between men and women, or simply that they were different, don't know - in a sense doesn't matter

- They were different - **start of the rich tapestry that is humanity** - each one a unique individual

- God's response to the "not good" of Adam's aloneness is **the richness, the depth, the variety of a community of individuals**

- not separate notes with space between, but living, working, playing, communicating, resting together

- God is painting in colours, not in black and white.
- And he is painting, ordering, shaping, displaying his glory in and through mankind - he is not randomly scattering paint on the canvas. There is intention in our interactions, purpose in our relatedness.
- What was "not good" has become "very good" as God places the richness of true community at the heart of humanity.

It is good and broken!

- What an amazing picture of what God intended for us - the fulfillment, the satisfaction, the completeness of authentic community.
- And yet that's not the way the world is today. That authentic community is long since "good and broken".
- Turning one more chapter into Genesis, a section we did not read tonight, we find the explanation: **man's sin**.
- Genesis 3 sketches out how Adam and Eve disobeyed God, how they allowed themselves to be deceived into thinking they knew better than God.
- We know the story - serpent tempts Eve to take the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, she takes some, gets Adam to do the same, shamefully hide from God.

- Really only want to point up one thing here:
 - **what is the first thing that goes once sin has arrived?**
 - **community** - authentic, trusting, open relationships immediately scuppered
 - **first, they became ashamed** - ashamed of their naked bodies, ashamed of letting another see them for who they really were.
 - **second, they became afraid** - afraid of God, who had created them, who had talked with them in the cool of the day.

- Sin had cut them off from the two fundamental dimensions of community:
 - community with the Living God
 - community between the helpers suitable for each other

Sin busts Community Today

- The fact that sin busts authentic community is just as true today as it was then:
 - its true where selfishness at work means you hide some piece of information from colleagues for your own power - and you can't trust them anymore, since they just do the same to you.
 - its true in marriage, when a failure to love, to forgive, to be faithful will drive a wedge of discord in.
 - its true at church where a broken promise to help, or careless gossip, or a lost temper, dissolves trust and the willingness to invite your service again.

- **The list is endless - think of any situation you care to, and envisage sin entering - and you see the start of the breakdown of authentic community.**

The Rise and Fall and Rise Again of True Community

- The true community, the authentic, God given relatedness that lies so much at the of our humanity has been torn apart - scarred and marred by sin, whose effects were mostly quickly seen in the demise of true, open, trusting community between Adam and Eve, between mankind and God.

Genesis 1-3 The Rise and Fall of True Community Fintry, 24/8/2008, pm

- And yet we as Christians need not despair.
- We need not despair in the face of society's desperate but often futile searching after community. We need not despair even when we often seem unable to build that community here in the church.
- **Why?**
- Because in Christ we are a new creation: 2 Cor 5:17 says this:
 - *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*
- We are not merely saved, not merely guaranteed a place in heaven - we are remade:
 - re-made and re-equipped, so that we can begin to form that new community, that reflection of heaven here on earth - the church.
- What a thought - the church as a reflection of heaven, a glimpse of the glory that is to come! What a challenge! What a hope!
- More - we are to model for those around us true, fully fulfilled, vigorously achieving humanity - humanity as its meant to be - life in all its fullness
 - life in authentic, genuine community.
- That's the church's task - we are the church - that's our task!

- God said: *"It is not good for man to be alone."* (Gen 2:18)
- The Psalmist echoes the same truth, in Psalm 133:
 - *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"* (Ps 133:1)
- Let us, then, take up the challenge of learning how to live the way we were made:
 - living in authentic, open, honest, caring, dangerous, self-exposing, risky community.
 - living as God's new creation, a foretaste of the unity and one-ness of heaven