

Psalm 19:1-8, 13-14

*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.*

*You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

*You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.*

*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.*

*You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*

*If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*

*Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

Isn't that an amazing passage? It speaks of a relationship dripping with fidelity and transcendence. It's true communion between us and God. It's spiritual and physical. We aspire to feel that.

Yet, if we're honest, that passage also hits a nerve because at some level, we long for that experience with someone else, not just God. We long for a relationship with another person that can satisfy us in the same way the psalmist is satisfied. Communion is a deep yearning for union with the source of our delight.

I love that phrase – and if you need an image of communion, think about your favourite band live in concert. Get to the part where they invite someone up on stage to sing their favourite song. Now, that person knows they will be embarrassed and people will laugh at them, but the opportunity to join their musical hero and sing along is irresistible. As they sing in union with their idol, they forget where they are and are moved. They share with us sheer joy. True communion.

Tonight is our last week reflecting on what young people long for. Kenda Creasy Dean suggests the three common passions among young people are fidelity, transcendence and communion. Tonight we'll be exploring the word communion, and hopefully tying the last few weeks altogether.

Now, communion is a loaded word. It raises a few different images in our minds. The word itself simply means 'one with,' but when we think about communion and communing with others, we think about intimacy... sometimes we think about the meal called the Eucharist with the bread and the wine, and sometimes, we think about sex. Tonight we'll reflect on each of these, and try to discover how our passion for communion draws us closer to God, and deeper into our Christian community.



I love Mel. I love Mel a lot. I also love God. I love God heaps. I probably love God more, because God probably loves me more, but I can't know for sure. My love for Mel and God consumes most of my thoughts and actions. I long for communion with Mel. I live for communion with God. But it wasn't until recently that I realised the more I love God, the more I love Mel. You see, the more I love God, the more I better understand who I am. My purpose, my passions, my emotions. And as my knowledge of myself increases, I have a greater capacity to love Mel.

You hear this stuff at weddings a lot, but by adding a third dimension to my communion with Mel, that third dimension being God, my earthly relationship is bettered. And it's not just restricted to Mel or even to my family, but to everyone I meet. As I draw closer to God, I see people through God's eyes... which are filled with love, compassion and joy. I'm no expert at this... but I seek to try. It's a double-edged sword though, for we become also more aware of the times we've hurt others.

For young people, communion is a physical thing. It's carnal, it's raw. You see this at any mixed gender sleep-over. You see it all over MTV and at any Christian camps. Actually, I reckon if we did a survey of all high school church camps, the number of conversions and sexual connections would be on a par. This is because teenagers seldom distinguish their desire for God from their desire for one another. The feelings look and sound the same. Think about it – replace Jesus from any of tonight's songs and replace it with the cute guys name, or the classroom sweethearts, and suddenly we're on Love Song Dedications with Richard Mercer.

This is not to say their faith isn't real, it's very real. Adolescents, despite their fascination with genitalia, ultimately desire relationships that offer fidelity, that is trust and honesty, and self-transcendence, which is that giddy feeling when your existence becomes dependant on that person feeling the same way. They seek these relationships with their peers. The problem arrives when MTV and Dolly convince us that these feelings are best manifested between the sheets.

Yet young people are resilient. Surveys indicate that whilst abstinence, or sexual purity as it's been labelled, is a growing trend in relationships, the definition of abstinence is becoming somewhat blurry. The church, however, is somewhat black and white, which can lead to confusion, guilt and inconsistency. I've had discussions with sexually active teenagers asking questions like, 'what exactly does 'no sex before marriage' mean?' Did Jesus teach that, because aren't we just meant to do what Jesus said? I'm still a virgin, all that stuff doesn't count as sex.



It seems we tend to pigeon-hole intimacy as a purely physical act. Young people routinely equate emotional and physical closeness with intimacy, however true intimacy requires a sense of self in order to 'be known' in a relationship instead of devoured. When we do not know where we begin and end, we easily become consumed by our others – who may be as boundary-less as we are - which is why we can feel we have sometimes 'lost ourselves' within our relationships.

Martin Robinson suggests that within our relationships, there are actually 8 equally powerful, equally significant dimensions of passions which lead to intimacy. If we have a look at his thoughts:

Sexual – ability to be sexual and sensual

Artistic – ability to be creative and playful (which we talked about last week)

Physical – ability to touch and to be personal (sexual and non sexual)

Spiritual – ability to share inner-truth, music, beauty, connect to God

Moral – ability to share values and lifestyle

Social – ability to be known and recognised

Intellectual – ability to share information and connect

Emotional – ability to risk vulnerability and truth

As humans, we can express intimacy in any of these ways, not necessarily at the same time or with the same people.

Regardless of how we express our intimacy with others and with God, sin gets in the way. It disrupts our attempts at fidelity, it flattens our stabs at transcendence and it fractures our attempts at communion. It impedes any chance we have in reflecting God's image to those around us.

It's for this reason that we must root our presence, purpose and unity in the witness of Christian community. A community which is passionate about fidelity, transcendence and communion is a safe, nurturing place for us as we stumble along life's journey, equipping us and sustaining us with love.

Love seeks to know the beloved down to the smallest details. It's why gossip magazines are so popular. Yet as we seek to love God, we find more mystery than answers. We feel uneasy about seeking communion with God, whom we can't easily define. Yet the delight we find in God, through holy interruptions in our daily life, continually draws us nearer (if we let it). So I want to spend the last few minutes exploring ways we can seek oneness with God. For like I said earlier - the greater our love of God, the greater our capacity to love others and to feel their love for us.



When we share in communion as part of a worship service, often we mean breaking the bread and sharing the wine. We call this communion, as we seek to unite with God through this meal. This meal requires repentance and forgiveness, hospitality and reconciliation. The meal is open to all, to feel the loving embrace of God. We read in Luke 22, Jesus commands his disciples to 'do this in remembrance of me.'

Nuns used to trade their habits for wedding gowns as they took communion, for their love for the Eucharist meal was incomparable to their love for any other person. They sought true communion with God at the table. This is why young Catholics dress up for their first Holy Communion – it's a symbolic marriage to faith, a love affair with their incarnate God.

John Wesley coined the phrase 'searching the scriptures.' He meant that we should read the bible with the prayerful expectation that God will meet us there. As we search the scriptures, a personal knowledge of God, not just an intellectual understanding, is possible. Searching the scriptures seeks communion more than comprehension. This attitude of submission and openness is found in other practices, including prayer, meditation and pilgrimage.

As we seek to be in union with God, the source of our delight, we must offer mutual communication. All relationships rely on this. Practices of communion require a rhythm of risk and encouragement, with plenty of opportunities to start over, as we acquire a language of faith that can frame every relationship, not just our relationship with God.

And so we, as a church, keep going back, week after week, worship after worship, to the only instruction Jesus gave to us regarding communion, 'Do this.' He gave us an embodied, material way to remember him. Keeping company with one another, we pray over material things like bread and wine, and we remember Jesus. But something else happens... Jesus joins us at this meal.

May we each seek experiences of fidelity, transcendence and communion with the God who loves us, and the people we surround ourselves with. God longs to be revealed in your reality, and for each of us to be God revelation to this world.

