

## October 16

### Teamwork is Essential

Matthew 10:1-15

Last week we learned that being involved in a community was important. And to do so, we need to learn to trust others, to love and be willing to serve. This week we will see the power of teamwork to accomplish more than the individual alone can do. When it comes to working together in faith the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

In the book, "The Boys in the Boat" this is a key concept when it comes to rowing. "There is a thing that sometimes happens in rowing that is hard to achieve and hard to define. Many crews, even winning crews, never really find it. Others find it but can't sustain it. It's called "swing." It only happens when all eight oarsmen are rowing in such perfect unison that no single action by any one is out of synch with those of all the others. It is not just that the oars enter and leave the water at precisely the same instant. Sixteen arms must begin to pull, sixteen knees must begin to fold and unfold, eight bodies must begin to slide forward and backward, eight backs must bend and straighten all at once. Each minute action—each sublet turning of wrists,—must be mirrored exactly by each oarsman, from one end of the boat to the other. Only then will the boat continue to run, unchecked, fluid and gracefully between pulls of the oars. Only then will it feel as if the boat is a part of each of them moving as if on its own. Only then does pain entirely give way to exultation. Rowing then becomes a kind of perfect language. Poetry, that's what swing feels like."

The goal of a church is to help all who attend to find their version of swing. It occurs when people are working together with a single purpose. It happens when every person feels they are supported and loved. When swing occurs great things happen.

How do we accomplish swing in a church? We look to Jesus for some help. First of all we need to appreciate the power and value of teamwork. Jesus never left his disciples to do things on their own. Jesus sent out the disciples at least a couple of times two by two. When they would return they were amazed at what they had accomplished. He also had them review their mission with the others so all could

understand what was working and by implication, what didn't work. I believe that Jesus used the two by two method because he understood how easy it is to get derailed from a project when we are trying to do things on our own. This is why, when you are starting an exercise program, you are encouraged to do it with a friend. The success ratio is much higher than when the person does it alone. So, learning to work together in harmony is part of our task.

Also, Jesus didn't send the disciples out to do ministry hoping for the best. He gave them specific instructions. Jesus wanted his disciples to know exactly what was expected of them. They were only go to the people of Israel, they were to proclaim the good news, they were to cast out demons and they were to heal the sick, Also, they were not to accept payment but expect to be cared for by those to whom they ministered. Clarity and unity of purpose was critical to their mission and to their success. This is so important. Jesus realized that without a goal it is hard to make any meaningful progress in your life or in an organization. Once you know the goals and are given the tools to achieve that goal you are much more likely to succeed.

This is a fundamental part of all sports. You tell the participants what they should do and then you have them practice it over and over again until it becomes second nature. In the practice their bodies are toned to the sport. It is called muscle memory. And if you are lucky, like in rowing, they reach that moment where it is done so well and with others that "swing" happens.

Too often, this is something we miss in the church. We think everyone knows what it is to be the church and what the goals of the church should be. One of the things I have come to appreciate after being in many churches over my life is that no one place does church the same as any other place. Because of where they are located, their history in that location, the people who attend there or attended there in the past, and their gifts and graces each church's ministry is unique. New people to the congregation do not always understand this. They come thinking the church here is just like the church they left and they act under those suppositions and then there is conflict. And just because we have been in a particular church for a long time doesn't mean that we don't need to step back and review where we are and ask if we are headed in the right

direction. We have to continually ask, “Why are we here, how did we get here, and where are we going?”

Nothing is more damaging to community than to have someone new become a part of your group or committee and you do not help them to know these things, answer their questions, and see what insights or gifts they might bring that are different from the past. When we always do it one way we are lost. So be clear, Jesus would say.

The disciples were also given a means of evaluating their effectiveness. They were to care for the needs of the people and the people were to listen to the disciple’s teaching. If they did not do this the disciples were to shake the dust off their feet and move on. When you have a goal you also have to be able to evaluate whether you are achieving it. With athletes evaluation is pretty straight forward. You are timed, or measured, or whatever, and progress is seen or lack thereof. I am always amazed at the Olympics where they measure things in hundredths of seconds. And sometimes a person wins by one or two hundredths! That is precision. The rowers had a goal to make it to the Olympics and win a gold medal. All they did was focused that way and they practiced and evaluated everything with that common idea.

What is our goal as a church? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Is our goal to keep the doors open until I die so there will be a place for my funeral? Is the goal vibrant worship? Is the goal social outreach to the community? Is the goal winning people to Christ? Is the goal caring and nurturing one another? Is it all of the above, none of the above? Effective churches have clearly understood goals. The more all embrace those goals and align their activities to those goals the more effective is that church.

The Church of the Resurrection has a goal statement and vision statement. Each is in huge letters in their gathering space outside of worship. Their vision is: Changing lives, transforming the community and renewing the church. Everything flows from that focus. They practice radical hospitality where everyone feels welcomed. They are active in the inner city, working in schools trying to change the culture of violence. They spend a lot of money hosting the leadership institute and other events hoping to be an agent of

renewal in the church. I attended a workshop where their business manager told us they have a yearly retreat where they evaluate everything they do, asking if it is in line with their vision and what is the next step they need to take to keep that vision alive. Clarity of goals and measurable outcomes is how Jesus sent out the disciples and is still being used today.

Also, like a good coach Jesus made them practice, hoping practice would make perfect. Jesus sent out groups at least twice. He wanted them to get used to this kind of missionary activity when he could still coach them and help them. Ultimately he knew the time would come when they would need to do it without him. The success of the early church shows they learned their lessons well. The more we work together instead of as individuals the better the ultimate result.

What does all of this mean here at Trinity? I hear a clear call for us to work together, to embrace the power of teamwork. This means that we need to understand that everyone is necessary for us to succeed. In the book, there was much discussion about getting the right mix of people into the boat so that they could compete in the Olympics. The coaches would change people out, move them around, use different coxswains looking for that elusive team. They needed a group that clearly understood their place and role in the boat, valued and trusted the others, and saw that success came when all worked together. This teamwork mentality was most evident the day of the big race. One of the rowers was really sick. He was the lead stroke. The coach was thinking about replacing him. He and the team refused, wanting him in the boat, saying they would carry him, if needed. Now I am not saying it is good to go to work sick but that day Don Hume sat in the boat, sick but determined, and during the race he became one with the team, swing happened and victory occurred.

This tells me that everyone needs to work together for us to be a winning team. Following Jesus' example, we are going to spend quite a bit of time understanding what our vision at TUMC looks like. This is one of the take-aways I gained from our trip to Kansas City. Once we begin to understand that, we will begin to ask, what does it mean to be successful in carrying out that vision? Then we will be asking, "What are the steps we need to take to get there and what are the evaluative pieces that need to be in

place? And then we will begin to try it out, working two by two, practicing, evaluating, switching things up until we feel like we are getting close to that elusive swing.

All of this is not saying we are not doing great things here at Trinity. I believe we are. The challenge is how to do things better, and even more importantly, how do we reach those who have not yet entered these doors. We will do this as we work together.

The boys in the boat came to trust each other, support each other and worked hard for each other. They found their swing and ultimately found gold. I want you to ask this week, how can I be more intentional about connecting to others for the service of God? Do you need to become involved in a ministry or study? Do you need to invite another out to lunch to support one another or figure out how the two of you can support a third? If what you are doing isn't feeling life giving, perhaps you need to shift to another spot in the boat. If you are struggling with someone, take some time to hear their story. See each person as essential, valued and loved. Building community is hard work. It requires vision. It requires trust. It requires commitment. But the results are worth it!