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Recently I happened to watch a Christmas TV commercial made by IKEA, a Swedish home appliances and furniture company. It was so cool that I would like to share it with you.

<Video clip>



How did you like the video? I was so impressed because this ad shows remarkably how a place becomes a community. As you watched, two men were unfortunately confined within a broken elevator. At first, a man offered some biscuits to the other man to break the ice, but he declined with an embarrassed face. They were accidentally together in the same space, but were total strangers to each other.

However, the power outage in the elevator gave them a common task; yes, lighting the dark inside the elevator. While decorating the space with lights and candles, they broke the awkward silence and started to feel a sense of closeness. The unpleasant space now became their comfortable room, little by little, in which they could share food, drinks, even Christmas gifts and life stories. Their hug at the end means that their relationship was totally changed.

This is the power of community. No matter how long we have worked together in the same place, if we cannot build a community in it, it would be hard to feel a sense of belonging and share together what we have.

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Jesus was always keen to create warm community with people. In fact, the main purpose of his incarnation was for creating a true community for God's people on earth, the kingdom of God. He had tried to change lonely or alienated life-contexts of people like the uncomfortable elevator into a life-giving community.

To name a few, think of the well in a Samaritan village where Jesus met a woman who had many husbands. How about the temple courts where people brought in to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery? Through meeting Jesus personally,

and receiving his understanding and forgiveness, the meaning of the space where they encountered him was entirely transformed.

The essence of Jesus’ community-development ministry was calling 12 disciples and living with them for three years until he was crucified. Analysing the narratives of Jesus’ living, teaching, and working with his key leaders, we can find a number of core features of the community that Jesus wanted to develop with his people. These features give us critical guidelines of what kind of community we should try to make. For we were also called to build a warm faith community here where we are gathering.

First of all, Jesus wanted to make a sharing community. The sharing community is a warm and welcoming space. All voices are welcome to be heard, and kind encouragements follow on to support and help people lead a healthy life. Sharing of life-stories, faith, and even pains generates a strong sense of belonging and power to commit ourselves to the group we belong to. On the contrary, a group in which little sharing happens might become weaker and weaker.

According to the four Gospels, Jesus had always encouraged people to tell their stories and listened to them attentively. Such attentive listening and inclusive atmosphere would have helped his followers share their stories and problems willingly, which created a safe and brave community to accept each other and cooperate to follow Jesus’ ways.

Second, the community that Jesus was making with his people had clear communal purposes. Even when Jesus called disciples for the first time, he made it clear what to gather and work for. Let me read Matthew 4:18-20 for you, “As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.”

This was the scene when Jesus called his first disciples. Fishing for people was the main purpose of calling disciples, and Jesus trained his followers to achieve that particular mission. This shows that from the beginning Jesus sought for a missional community.

Last but not least, Jesus’ community was a group accepting changes actively in their situations. Jesus hoped his people would keep transforming themselves to win

the world. For this, Jesus had given his followers big and small challenges continually; he did not stop teaching them radical truth, kept moving place to place to break their comfort zones, even to difficult locations for them, like wilderness, Samaritan villages, sinners’ houses and gentiles’ places, and he had his disciples meet different kinds of people.

He even made his team a heterogeneous group by inviting people with different backgrounds, like fishermen, tax collectors, and fighters for independence, that they might challenge each other and learn from it. Thanks to his training, most of his disciples ended up being disciplined not to avoid hardships in spreading the gospel, although there were many twists and turns.

Likewise, the faith community that Jesus was making on earth was a sharing and missional community to accept changes and challenges actively. This is the community that we should develop together. At this point, we need to think deeply about our congregation, about our sharing culture and opportunity, missional goals, and attitude to changes.

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What’s remarkable is that Jesus had stressed something in building such community. It is indispensable in turning a place into a community. That is stewardship. The stewardship is like yeast; as yeast can make bread rise, stewardship can make a group more close and dynamic. Then, what is the stewardship Jesus focused? In the New Testament, the word *steward* was used 12 times, and Jesus used it 7 times.

The original Greek word used in the Bible that was translated into steward in English is *oikonomos*, which is made with two words, *oikos* and *nomos*. *Oikos* means ‘house’ or ‘community’ and *nomos* means ‘look after.’ That is, *oikonomos* signifies the person looking after household or community.

Today’s second Bible reading, Luke 12:35-48, is a representative scripture containing the meaning of stewardship. For explaining who good steward is, Jesus told a parable, in which a good steward is like the servants who are dressed ready for service even at night, and wait for their master to return from a wedding party, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door and welcome him.

In verse 37, Jesus said, “It will be good for those servants whose master find them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, the master will dress himself to serve, will have his servants recline at the table and will come and wait on them.” In fact, this is very surprising and radical teaching. Look, how can the master serve his servants like that in those days? It is a revolution.

At this, Jesus is talking about how powerful good stewards are. They can transform the atmosphere and culture of their community, even their master’s mindset and behaviour, the last thing to be changed. In this story, two characteristics of good stewards are easily recognised, *readiness* and *commitment*. The good stewards are ready for serving others wherever they are, and willingly commit themselves for those whom they serve or work together.

I think this was Jesus’ life; he was always ready to serve others and committed himself up to sacrifice his life. He was the model of a good steward.

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Sisters and brothers,

Good stewards with readiness and commitment can turn cold place into a warm community full of sharing, clear missions, and resilience to face and overcome challenges. At the beginning of this reflection, we watched a Christmas TV commercial of IKEA. We saw how a place became a community, and also watched what changes a man started to make. The biscuit man was open and ready to welcome and cooperate with a stranger to change the space. Yes, he is exactly like a good steward.

Let us watch the video clip once again, focusing on the biscuit man and remembering the role of a good steward in creating a warm community. And then, let us think deeply about how to be a good steward for our congregation.

<Video clip>

