

August 19, 2012 - Here on Gilligan's Island

Those of you who were in my Small Group last year, will recognize this book, because this is a book that, whenever we had the Issue/Discussion night in my group, we pulled this book out and selected a couple of choice passages to read from it. What it is, is it's a book full of questions and we'd let someone pick out a few questions and they'd read out the question and everyone in the group would have to choose from one of two things. It would always be "Would you rather?" and then it would give you two undesirable choices and you had to decide which of the two was the lesser of two evils. Every now and then it would give you a positive one which you could choose the greater of two goods. For some reason the volunteers never seemed to pick that one they seemed to pick the ones that were most unnerving and the most gross, and the most, make your stomach turn, kinds of things. And so, which of these two things would you rather do? That's what we did sometimes to kind of break the ice as we did our discussion times together. Our one rule was, there's no cop outs, what someone would always try to do, even though we stated at the beginning, that you have to choose one of those two, someone would always say "I don't really want to do either of those things". And I would say "Well I know, no one wants to do either of those things, but which one would you rather, if you had to choose?" So that's how we started out our discussion times in our group last year. Now, if you read through the whole book, there are certain themes that kind of repeat themselves a lot and one of the questions that comes up in different forms all the time, in this book, and it varies in the details a little bit, but it always starts out with something like: "If you were stranded on a deserted island, would you rather?" and then it would give you two options of which you would rather do. Would you rather have food, or somebody as a companion? It would always give you these choices, but if you were on a deserted island which of these two things would you rather? And there are lots of answers to that type of question. Maybe your answer to what you would like to have if you were on a deserted island, might be something reminiscent to this. Guys on a deserted island and a pizza guy comes in the boat. Maybe that's what you would ask if you were on a deserted island. What was the one thing you'd like to have? Well, you'd like to have delivery and the good news is, if it's not in 30 minutes, it's free. So, you're probably in pretty good shape there. There's lots of different answers to the question. If you were on a deserted island, what is the one thing that you would really most like to have? And so now I'm going to give you a chance. Turn to the person beside you and tell them. If I was on a deserted island and could have one thing, this is what it is. Now, before you answer it can't be a boat, or a satellite phone, or a helicopter, or something like that, okay? Nothing that can immediately get you off the island. So, besides that, what is the one thing that you would like on the island. Go! Tell the person next to you what it would be. Just by curiosity, by a show of hands, how many of you who picked your one thing, how many of you picked a person over a thing? How many of you picked a pet? Anyone picked a pet to be on the island with them? I think probably, if we really came down to it, and we had the choice, a lot of the times we probably, especially if we thought we were going to be here for a long time, quite often we would pick a person. Quite often we would pick a friend over having flint, or fire. Maybe we would pick a companion over a a cabin over a cabana. Maybe you would

pick a fellow castaway over a freezer full of food, cause let's be honest, that's not going to do you any good cause there's no electricity on the island and all the food in the freezer is going to go bad. So, you might as well have someone there with you instead. Because, even on a deserted island, people need to be in community with other people. That's why, when you look to the movies and stuff, all of the T.V. shows and movies that come out are about communities that get stranded on the island.

That's why, way back when, we had the Swiss Family Robinson, because no one wants to watch a show about a man named Robinson. Right? They want to watch the dynamics in the community. That's why, on Gilligan's Island, it wasn't just Gilligan. It was Gilligan and the Skipper, the millionaire and his wife, the movie star, the professor and Mary Ann, they were all on Gilligan's Island together and they had this little community going on.

The more modern version of that was the T.V. show called "Lost". These people were on a crashed plane that landed on a deserted island out in the tropics. Very quickly, even in the first episode of the show, people began to start forming little communities among themselves. Almost immediately, after the plane crashed on the island they started forming communities with each other. The communities started to spread out around the island until they realized, you know what, this island isn't actually the safest place for us to be. So they all got back together and they had a little bit of a meeting and they said "You know what? It's probably safer for us to all stay in one place." And one of the guys who was kind of the informal leader at the time, he makes this passionate speech and he coins this phrase which will be the motto of the castaways for the next seven seasons of the show. Here's what he says. He says "We either live together or we die alone." And that was the motto they lived by. And whether we verbalize it or not, we all feel that kind of pull in our lives sometimes. When we find ourselves living without a community, without people around us, we kind of feel that stress and that pressure and that loneliness.

Back in the '90's there was a movie called Castaway. In that movie, Tom Hanks character, his name was Chuck Nolan. He crashed on an island and all he has is a bunch of Fedex packages that fell out of the plane with him and that's all he has to keep him company on this island. He ends up being on this island alone for 4 years. During the early stages of his time there, he's actually about to lose it and kind of go a little bit nuts when he inadvertently kind of, draws a happy face on a volleyball. He takes this volleyball and he names it Wilson. Wilson becomes his best friend on the island. Now Chuck and Wilson, they talk to each other, they argue with each other, they spend all of their time together. They actually become very close friends and they form this weird kind of community together between Chuck and the volleyball. The truth is, that without that volleyball, Chuck would have gone crazy from being alone. The saddest scene in the movie is not when Chuck get's home and realizes that after four years, life has moved on without him. I think the saddest scene in the movie is when Chuck and Wilson escape on a raft and they're out in the middle of the ocean waiting for someone to rescue them and Wilson, unnoticed, falls off the raft and into the water. When Chuck realizes that Wilson is gone and he's out in the water far beyond what

he can retrieve him, you see this desperation, this anguish on Chuck's face. Not because he lost a volleyball, but because he lost that sense of community, which was the only thing that was carrying him through his time on the island alone.

Whether it's a Swiss family, or a group of shipwrecked tourists, or a volleyball with a face painted on it, there are a lot of things that you could take and help you survive on a desert island, but if you want to really live on a deserted island, you need a community to be a part of. That's a truth that extends far beyond the tropics. We all need that kind of community to belong to somewhere. We all need a people to call our own. We all need a place where we feel welcomed and accepted and loved and cared for. We all need a place where we feel like we are a part of something that is greater than ourselves. When we don't belong to that kind of community, when we can't find that kind of community in our lives, we become very lonely. There are a lot of lonely people in our World today. Last week we mentioned that there are a billion and one ways for us to communicate with each other. A lot of the time it's just communication without connection. It's just chit-chat without community. It's just messaging without meaning. It's just reading and writing without real relationships.

Charles Swindoll, the author, recounts a story where he saw in a Kansas newspaper, an advertisement. The advertisement said this: "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment, for \$5.00." Here's Charles' commentary on that advertisement. He says "It sounds like a hoax doesn't it? But the person was serious and did anyone call? You bet. It wasn't long before this individual was receiving 10 to 20 calls a day. The pain of loneliness was so sharp that some people were willing to try anything for a half an hour of companionship.

Perhaps it's fitting then, in our multi-media society, that we can be best summed up by the jingle from a 1980's sitcom. You may be familiar with these words. "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same. You want to be where everybody knows your name." And isn't that what community is all about? To have that place where you go and you know that you're a part of it and you know that you're welcomed and you know that the people who are there are excited to see you walk through the door.

Here's the part that many people may not expect and some people might even find a little bit hard to believe, at first. God wants the Church to be that place. God wants the Church to be that place of comfort and acceptance and love. God wants the Church to be that place of shared burdens and encouragement. God wants the Church to be that place of Community. Now, people look for that kind of community in all sorts of places. We can look for it on line. We can look for it in sport teams and athletics. We can look for it in our crafts and our hobbies. We can look for it in different kind of social clubs. We even look for it in societies. Particularly societies that are trying to raise money to cure diseases or to find ways of treating different diseases. We go to all those different places looking for community and we find some, in those places. But what we find in all those places is just a

reflection of what God wants people to be able to find in His Church. You see, God has always looked to build community among people. God started and He made a man because God wanted to have a community with people. Then He looked at the man and He said “You know what? It’s not good for him to be alone, because he needs to be in a group of people.” So He created woman and then they created a family. And it says that even then, Adam and Eve would walk through the Garden with God, talking in the cool of the evening. And that is community. And then as the World grew and as people grew, God then takes on a whole family. He takes Abraham and Abraham is going to be the example of the community I want people to have. And so, He took Abraham’s family; then Isaac’s family; then Jacob’s family and he tried to work with them and establish community, in those different families. And then, Jacob’s family go so huge it became an entire nation and so God says “All right. Let’s make a community in a nation.” And so He works for hundreds of years with the people of Israel, trying to create the sense of community among people as He desired them to have.

Then, as we get to the New Testament, God says “I’m going to try something totally different. I’m going to make a totally new kind of community.” Paul explains it this way in Col. 3:11-14, he says:

“Here in the Church there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, wholly and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love which binds them together in perfect unity.”

This is God’s recipe for community. He says, community is going to happen in this place where there is no division by race or by education or by economics or by social status. There is only Jesus. It is a community that is not limited by geography, or chronology, and as a collection of Christ’s followers, the Church is meant to be a place of....look at the list that Paul gives us. A place of compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other. Forgiveness, love and unity. Well, what does that actually look like? Well, to me, that looks an awful lot like: Unloading moving trucks. It looks an awful lot like, cleaning houses. It looks an awful lot like parties that celebrate when new babies are born or when marriages are announced. It looks a lot like meals that are taken to the home of someone who has been into the hospital. It looks a lot like cards and flowers sent to those who are mourning. Giving out handshakes and hugs to the people in the foyer as they enter Sunday morning. Teaching our little kids in Sunday school class to know who God is. Visiting those who can’t get out on Sunday morning to worship. It looks a lot like times of prayer in our prayer room after Sunday morning service. Or in homes around the City all week long. It looks a lot like moms hanging out at the spray park on Tuesday afternoon, raising up their children together. It also happens on a very individual level. It looks a lot like one-on-one conversations that we have. It looks a lot like welcoming a

visitor before running over and chatting with my close friend. It looks like having someone into my house for a meal. It's a call that says "You know what? I haven't seen you around in awhile and I miss seeing you. What's going on in your life? It looks a lot like helping a teenager learning to drive a car. It looks a lot like giving stressed out parents a night off to go and be themselves for an evening. It looks a lot like stopping at the hospital for a quick visit for someone who is stuck inside those walls. It looks a lot like a genuine "How's your week going this week? How have you been?" It looks like getting to know someone new and getting to know their story. Like creating an environment where the "we" becomes more important and takes priority over the "Me". And all of that, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg. When we intentionally, purposefully, resolutely, set out to build community within the Church, something incredible starts to happen among us. Suddenly the Church becomes a place where people feel like they belong. A place where people feel at home. A place where people feel that they are drawn to, not because the people inside the Church are so incredibly awesome, but because, Christ in his people, is creating community inside the Church.

Many of you have probably looked up, and especially at this time of year, you see the geese flying south for the winter. You notice they are always in a V shape. I did some research this week, do you know why one side of that V is always longer than the other? There's more geese in it, that's why. Anyways, we can learn a few things from the geese flying in this V shape. If you've ever wondered why they do that, when they fly in that V shape the goose in front of you actually creates an uplift for the birds behind it. They say, I don't know how they've done the math on this, but they tell me that, flying in that formation can actually allow the geese to fly 71% further than a goose could fly on its own. Second thing that happens in that formation is that, when the lead goose gets tired, he falls down to the back and someone else moves forward to take the lead. And so, by this, they kind of all share the burden of being the first goose in the front taking the lead. If you watched the Olympics a few weeks ago and you watched the cyclists doing the road races, you'll see them doing the same thing. They're not in a V but they'll kind of follow behind each other to get the wind draft from the guy in front and they'll kind of take turns sharing the load of being the guy in front.

That's what the Christian community, as God designed it, does for us. It uplifts us. It helps carry us when we get weak or tired or overwhelmed. Now, I kind of knew all of that stuff before but what I learned this week was that when one goose gets sick, or tired, or shot down, two other geese will fly down to the ground with it and supposedly they will stay there and stand guard over the goose that got shot down until that goose is ready to get up and fly away again. And again, that is what God says. God says I'm going to put you in a community of my people so that when you get sick or wounded or you get shot down by life, you will have someone to sit with you and stand by you until you're healed and refreshed and ready to go again.

How many of you have seen the giant redwoods? The California redwoods? Has anyone

seen those? I have never actually seen them myself, I want to because Return of the Jedi was filmed in that forest so I want to go down and see it for that reason. But there's actually a more important reason to go see the redwoods and that is they are huge, they are massive. These redwoods live over 1000 years long and they grow over 380 feet tall. I tried to find pictures that would give you a sense of the size of these things. I found this one with a guy standing at the base of one. That kind of gives you a sense of it. How about a car driving through a tree? Now you get a sense of how massive and how huge these things are. So you would think that with trees that are so tall and so big that they would have this kind of enormous root system to keep the thing from falling over, right? Well, apparently, the roots of these trees only go 4 to 6 feet deep and the reason they survive and they don't all fall down is because the roots spread out and they intermingle and they interweave and they connect and tie themselves up to the roots of the tree beside them. And so you don't just have the root system of one tree holding it up, that tree is anchored to the entire forest, tied together and held down by the entire root system of the forest. Now, that's how God designed the Church community to work. God says "I'm going to take this bunch of people and I'm going to put them in close proximity with each other and I'm going to let their roots grow, and tangle, and interlock so that when the storms of life come along, that tree is anchored into the forest. And what really makes this community different is that, God Himself is the common soil that we've all been planted into.

The writer of Ecclesiastes explains it this way in Ecc. 4, 9-12:

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls down and has no one to help him up. Also, if two lie down together they will keep warm but how can one keep warm alone. Although one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not easily broken."

And that's the community that God wants to build in our Church. That's the community that God wants to build in our Church. That's the community that God wants to make available to people to come in and find and know Him, inside out.

Now, being a part of community isn't just about finding a place to belong. Finding a place to belong is very important, God wants His Church to be that place. But once you've found a place to belong the next step is to discover your part to play. Xavier read for us earlier, out of 1 Cor. 12, Chapter 12. We'll read it again.

"The body is a unit though it's made up of many parts and though all it's parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, we've all been given one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but many. The foot should not say, "Man because I'm not a hand I don't belong to the body." It would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say "Because I'm not an eye I don't belong to the body." It would not

for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would it's sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would it's sense of smell be? But in fact, God has arranged all of the parts of the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If we were all one part, where would the body be. As it is, there are many parts of one body. The eye can't say to the hand "I don't need you." The head cannot say to the feet "I don't need you." On the contrary those parts that seem weaker are indispensable. The parts we think less honourable, are treated with special honour. Parts that are unpreventable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lack it so that there should be no division in the body, but that it's parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now, you are the Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it."

Paul is writing and he says the body is made up of many different parts. They all have their purpose. They all have their function. They all have their part to play and that's what happens in the community of the Church as well. Everyone has a part to play. Everyone has a role to fill. If you are part of the community, you have a part to play. If you are doing your part, then all of us are blessed by that. If I am not doing my part, all of us are hindered by that. Everyone has a part to play, everyone has a role to fill. And Paul said "all of the parts should have equal concern for each other." We've looked at that passage in 1 Corinthians 12, before. We reflected on it and some of you might remember maybe two years ago, I think. He talks about some are eyes and some are ears and some are hands and some are feet. We kind of went through those. So which of those do you think you are? How many of you are hands? How many of you are eyes? How many of you are ears? How many of you remember that, at all? Good. I was going to ask how many remembered what they were, but apparently, we need more ears and that would help us out. No...I'm just kidding! You're fine. I had to actually look up and see which parts we were that day, as well, so don't feel bad. But this week, I thought let's look at this same passage but let's look at it a little bit differently this year. So, today I want to reflect on that in a different way and how that all plays into community and to do that, we've got to go back to the passengers of the S.S. Minnow. Now, just for the record, Gilligan's Island is no more a spiritual T.V. show than any other show that's been on T.V. in the last 50 or 100 years or... But I hope that by connecting some of these traits to some of these characters, maybe some of that will stick in our minds just a little bit longer. So let's give this a try and see.

Now, which of these people do you feel like you are in our Church community? We'll start with Gilligan. Gilligan was the servant. Gilligan was the guy on the island who would do anything for anyone. Anyone would come up to Gilligan and say "Gilligan, we need you to go and get water from the lagoon. Gilligan we need you to do that." Gilligan would say "Okay" and he would go do it. Whatever anyone asked, he would go and do it. He would do all the jobs no one else wanted to do. Most of the time, he would do his work with a big smile. With a whistle, with a song. Gilligan was the servant. How many of you, and I

know there are a lot of you out there...How many of you are servants? Are you one of the servants in this community? The people who are just out there doing stuff. The people are working behind the scenes. The people who are giving, who are involved, who are doing all those little things that make this community what it is, but no one often sees or recognizes. Perhaps you are the servant in this community.

Next was the Skipper. The skipper was the leader of the group. He was the one who would take responsibility. He was the one who would make sure things got done. He was the one who was always trying to co-ordinate the plans and the efforts to get off the island. He was the one who just organized people and kind of moved us all along to our goal. How many of you are leaders in our group? How many of you are the one's who are out there organizing and rallying people and leading people and heading up the drive to get things done. Perhaps you are one of the leaders.

Then there was the Howells. The Howells were the millionaires on the island and so I have called them the ones who were resourced. They were resourced because somehow, on this three hour tour, on this little tiny boat, they managed to bring crates and crates and crates of stuff. They had clothes and they had accessories and they had all sorts of things stacked in their little grass hut. And so, they were the people on the island who were resourced and whenever someone on the island needed something, what did they do? They went and saw the Howells to see if maybe they had something that would help. Well, maybe you are one of the people in our community who is resourced. Sometimes resource can mean, having money, having funds to be able to do some things because sadly, like it or not, we need money to get things done. But resource goes a lot farther than that. Maybe you are resourced with skills. Maybe you have talents and you are able to do some things that we are just not able to do. Maybe you are resourced with time. Maybe you are someone who has time so you could go to the hospital and sit with someone who is just bored out of their tree because they've been stuck in that little room for hours and hours. Maybe you have the time to do that. Maybe that is your resource. Maybe you are resourced in one of those areas.

Next was Ginger. She was a movie star and so I kind of had a hard time figuring out where she fit in all of this, so I called her 'the creative one'. Because if you watched the show, she is the one who was always going around and she was always decorating things. She was always fixing up the huts and hanging flowers and when someone was down she was the one who would come along and sing them a song. Or she would put on a show for everyone. So she was the creative one in the bunch. You need that. So, maybe you are one of our creative people in our community. Maybe you are one of the ones who is artistic and has skills in that department. Maybe you can draw, or you can paint, or you can make things that the rest of us just don't have the skills to do. Maybe you are creative in music and you're able to help in those ways. Maybe you are creative in the way that you're a baker. Maybe you're a baker or you're a cook and so, you may not be able to do a bunch of these other things, but you can put out a bunch of buns or you can put out a bunch of lasagna. Maybe that is where you are creative and part of our community in that way.

The next one was the Professor. Professor was the problem solver. He was the man of vision. He was the one who was always thinking up these new and whacky ways for these guys to get off the island and usually creating some high-tech thing out of coconuts and palm leaves and sand and all of this. He was the problem solver. He was the one, whenever they needed to figure something out they would go to the Professor and the Professor will find out the answer and how to do it. He was the ideas man. Maybe in our community your and ideas man or an ideas woman. You are someone who can look at a situation and say “You know what, we could get in here and we could do this. Or we could change what we’re doing here and it would be so much more effective. Or we could do this a little bit differently and it would totally come across different to people we are trying to reach out to. Maybe you are an ideas man or an ideas woman.

The last one was Marianne. Marianne was the encourager. She was the comforter. She was the cheerer-upper. Whenever someone was sad or downhearted on the island, Marianne was the first one who was the first to track them down wherever they were sitting and she would come up and she would cheer them up and she would encourage them and she’d bake them a coconut cream pie and hand it to them. She was the one who was the encourager on the island. If it wasn’t for Marianne, everyone else on the island would have given up hope a long time ago. Maybe you are one of the encouragers of our community. I know there are a lot of you out there who are encouragers. People who see people who are feeling a little bit down, people who have some needs and you are the one who will rush in there and give them a hug or give them a phone call or say “Is there anything I can do to help you out, to help you along.” Maybe you are one of the encouragers.

Which one of those are you? Maybe you are several of those, maybe you’re a few different ones. Maybe you are something that isn’t even up there. Maybe you find a different category, maybe you say “You know what, this is my role. This is my place. This is what I do really well in our community together.” Well, whichever one you are, we need you and we all need each other. The problem solvers need the creative people. The leaders need the encouragers. The resourcers need the servants. And so on, and so on.....This only works when we all work together. We all need each other and our different personalities and our skills. Which is why God has brought us together in this community in the first place, to be united as one body where everyone belongs, where everyone plays their part and where the mission of the Kingdom is carried out. Paul writes in Ephesians and gives them this encouragement, which is my encouragement for you this week. Eph. 4:15-16:

“Instead we will seek the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ who is the head of the body, the Church. He makes the whole body fit together, perfectly, as each part does it’s own special work, it helps the other parts grow so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

Whatever role you identify with the most, there is a part for you to play in our Church Body.

There is a place for you here in our Church Community and there is a Home for you in our Church Family.