

Chapter 2

Redeemed for Community

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SABBATH

Need for Redemption (Genesis 3:1-13)

Human beings were created for community with God. God made us in His own image, and He did so with great intimacy. While the rest of creation was spoken into existence by God, the first human being was molded by God's own hand. The Creator descended to the ground and, working clay with His fingers, bent even lower, face to face with His creation, to breathe into the nostrils of the first human being His very breath. Afterwards, God regularly sought the company of humans. The first human being did not know existence apart from community with God.

But God determined that human beings also needed human community. After God fashioned man with His hands and breathed life into him, the woman was taken out of man's side—she was his very own flesh and bone. In the beginning of the world, the whole human experience was marked by deep intimacy; they were naked and not ashamed.

This perfect, intimate community was shattered

Genesis 3:1-13;
Genesis 3:15; 2:18-25;
Revelation 21:1-3;
Genesis 9:8-17;
15:1-21; 12:2-3;
Exodus 20:1-17;
2 Samuel 7:11-16;
Matthew 26:26-28;
Luke 22:19-20;
Mark 15:33-39;
Ephesians 2:11-22;
Galatians 3:26-29;
1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

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when sin became part of the history. It separated us from God and from one another. The first action of Adam and Eve, following their sin, was to hide—they sewed fig leaves and covered themselves. When God sought their company, they hid themselves among the trees. Beyond estrangement, sin turned humanity against God and against each other. In one breath, Adam blamed his action on his wife and on God. Community became strained, marred by division, embarrassment, blame, and fear toward God and other human beings.

Community with God is essential to human existence. For all of humanity, God is the only source of life and to be cut off from Him means death. Since sin separated us from God, we were marching to our eternal graves. But God intervened to restore us to Himself and to one another. He set in motion a plan that was designed to gather us back into His community.

How would you describe your present attitude to and relationship with your Sligo community?

SUNDAY

The Promise of Redemption

(Genesis 3:15; 2:18-25; Revelation 21:1-3)

In his great mercy, God has not abandoned rebellious humanity. Following Adam and Eve's sin, God reached out to them. While still in the Garden of Eden, before they heard God's judgment over them, Adam and Eve heard the most hopeful promise from God: the Tempter that deceived them into disobedience, his realm, and all that he stands for

will be vanquished! God told them that a descendant of Eve will crush the head of the serpent, but this descendant will give his own life to achieve victory (Genesis 3:15). Just as Adam and Eve were covered in garments of skin to shield their nakedness, they will have to be covered in Him to have their sins removed.

While Adam and Eve could do something to cover their nakedness, they could do nothing to restore community with God and each other. To regain community with God and each other, they had to surrender to God, believe, yearn, and hope. Their salvation was out of their hands, completely beyond the reach of their own abilities and resources. If we were in their place, we might have very well attempted to seize the initiative and inquire from God what we must do to acquire redemption. But Adam and Eve remembered enough of God's character and God's ways not to do such a foolish thing, so they surrendered the initiative for redemption to God.

Adam and Eve's disobedience and failure to honor God did not change God's plan. God did not scramble for an alternative course of action or a stopgap measure. He remained faithful to His original design for humanity. His original intent was that we would be in community with Him and each other (Genesis 2:18-25), and His final intent is that we will be in community with Him and each other (Revelation 21:1-3). What He intended by creating us is what He intends by redeeming us.

As you ponder that God did not abandon his initial purpose for our lives and pursued this same pur-

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pose in His plan of redemption, what do you learn about God?

MONDAY

Redemption Begins

(Genesis 9:8-17; 15:1-21; 12:2-3;
Exodus 20:1-17; 2 Samuel 7:11-16)

God does not redeem rebellious and lost humanity overnight. He pursues his plan of redemption through a series of steps, or covenants.¹ Each one of these steps is intended to incrementally reconstitute community with God and fellow human beings. These covenants are the plan of redemption in action.

By the time of Noah, the world had gone so far away from God's design that it had to be destroyed and re-created, so to speak. Violence, wickedness, and evil filled human hearts and turned them against God and against each other as never before (Genesis 6:5-7). To redeem humanity, God had to destroy the world with a flood and begin again: "What had been done at creation is undone with the flood. The world is brought back to its pre-creation state—'formless and void.'"²

After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah that extended to all of humanity, because Noah was the representative of the entire human race (Genesis 9:8-17). As He had told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, so God told the same thing to Noah. God reaffirmed His relationship with humanity, as the intimate and personal relationship for which He created us.

Later, after God had been forgotten, He found a new man through whom He would continue to

redeem the fallen world to Himself. God called Abram (whose name later changed to Abraham) out of his home and established a covenant with him (Genesis 15), as He had done with Noah. Abraham became the father of the nation of Israel through which God planned to redeem and bless the rest of the world (Genesis 12:2-3). Out of his offspring the Descendant of Eve was going to come.

Over time, the descendants of Abraham grew into a nation and found themselves in bondage in Egypt, and it appeared that their condition frustrated the plan of God. But God raised another man—Moses—to redeem his people from slavery. With mighty acts that would never be forgotten, God freed His people and made a covenant with them on Mount Sinai that defined their relationship with Him and each other (Exodus 20:1-17). God showed them that He is the One who redeems and restores His people to Himself and to each other. The people of Israel became a focus of the rest of the Old Testament, because it was through them that God planned to redeem all of humanity.

The greatest manifestation of God's desire to be with His people in the Old Testament was the tabernacle, or Sanctuary, God directed the Israelites to construct. The tabernacle became the center of life for this new community and the place where God interacted with His people. Although the realities of sin and the searing holiness of God kept the people of God from encountering Him directly, He still wanted to dwell in their midst. The Sanctuary provided a way for God to remain close to His people, while protecting them from His awesome

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¹See Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

²Ibid, 144.

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holiness. It was the closest form of community sinful humans could enjoy with their Most High God in the Old Testament. It testified that God is very serious about restoring His people to the community and to Himself.

The final covenant in the Old Testament was the one with King David, the greatest of all Israelite kings. In 2 Samuel 7:11-16, God promised David an eternal dynasty, a seemingly impossible pledge. As decades and centuries passed and one disappointing king replaced another, the Israelites wondered whether there would be a descendant of David that was going to redeem his people. To the great joy of the entire human race, the answer to their wondering was an unequivocal *Yes!* God will indeed fulfill the promise of eternal dynasty through a descendant of David—the eternal Messiah whose reign will know no end. The way to the fulfillment of the promise was paved by the new covenant, established by Jesus the Messiah.

Explain in your own words how God built community in each of the covenants mentioned above.

TUESDAY

Redeemed through Brokenness

(Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; Mark 15:33-39)

Just as God announced in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the new covenant was going to redeem a people for God. This new covenant was established by Jesus. In Matthew 26:26-28 and Luke 22:19-20 we learn that

His sacrificial death on our behalf sealed the new covenant, the last in the series of biblical covenants that constitute the plan or redemption in action. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the culmination of the plan of redemption; it was the pivotal point in God's persistent and gracious initiative to gather us to Himself and to each other.

But this watershed point in the history of the world came at an unimaginable cost. Some of the most distressing words of the Bible were uttered by Jesus as he hung on the cross and cried, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). The Triune God, who had always known perfect community and oneness, was now torn. The Son of God was separated from His Father. While sin destroyed intimacy and community, it was going to take nothing less than the ultimate separation of divine community to make return into community possible.

The price of sin—death—could not be circumvented, and only the death of the Son of God could redeem sinners. Jesus destroyed sin and death through His own death and resurrection. This was the cost that the community of the Triune God paid for our redemption, for our restoration to community with God and each other.

In Himself, by the way of His broken body and poured blood, Christ forged a new community. At Christ's death, the veil in the temple, which prevented sinners' access into the presence of God, was torn in two. This event symbolized an end to the separation

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between humans and God. Because He offered His own body to be torn, He tore down the wall that sin put up between human beings and God and between human beings themselves.

Contact someone in your Sligo community, in person or on the phone, this week. Share the thoughts and feelings you have when you consider that your community with God and fellow human beings was forged at the price of Jesus' separation from His Father.

WEDNESDAY

Redeemed for Oneness

(Ephesians 2:11-22)

Not only did Christ's death and resurrection purchase our redemption, but they were the sacred means by which He redeemed us for Himself and each other. Ephesians 2:11-22 is a powerful text that brings to our attention the consequences of the life and ministry of Jesus. It argues that Jesus Himself is the peace of the people of God. While we have Him in our lives, while we trust Him and embrace Him with all our being, we live a life of harmony with God and each other. Jesus removes all existing disharmony, enmity, and hostility with God and other human beings. He accomplished this reconciliation "in his flesh"—by his death on the cross. By his death, Jesus brought together two estranged groups of people, Jews and Gentiles, and made them "one" (v. 15). Jesus created one new human race out of two divided groups of people, a new people who live in Him and under Him.

Paul argues that reconciliation with God takes place "in one body" (v. 16). Jesus made His followers into one body by sacrificing His own flesh and blood, and the Christian church became the body of people reconciled to God. This community that Christ created through His brokenness is one that ends enmity between people. It was not simple socializing and friendliness He was after. He ended the division, prejudice, and self-interest that estranged us from each other. What sin separated, Christ united in Himself, in the church.

Through the church, the world should see the kind of unity and oneness God intended. Our identity in Christ should inform and supersede any other identity we may have. In Him we become one with everyone else who is in Him. We were not simply redeemed for salvation; we were redeemed for community.

What does it mean to you that you are a member of one body, reconciled and united in Christ and living under Christ?

THURSDAY

Redeemed for Restoration

(Galatians 3:26-29)

Our redemption is the way by which God removes various divisions among us. Galatians 3:26-29 is an often-quoted text to describe the new family Christ has forged through His death and resurrection. In short, the text says we are all children of God because we have been baptized in Him and are covered in Him; we are no longer primarily Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, male or female, because we are all one.

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It is most interesting to note the reference to Abraham in this passage. When God made a covenant with him, Abram (Abraham) was told that in him all the peoples of the world will be blessed. Here in Galatians, we see not only that those who had been divided by ethnicity, gender, or social and cultural constructs are no longer to be separated, but also that they are actually one, equally Abraham's offspring and heirs to the promise made to him.

These divisions that the passage addresses are deep, obstinate, and long-standing. Jews did not associate with Gentiles. Many cultures had laws and regulations that divided slaves and free people and governed how they related to each other. Women, at the time, had no place or standing among men. In this new community redeemed by Christ's blood, however, those who are in Christ are decidedly one.

In our time, it still is difficult to see beyond these separations into which we are born or socialized, but, as Christians, we have a new identity in Christ. We need to begin seeing ourselves and others in this new light, if we are going to be restored and participate in restoring others to Him. The expectation for Christians is that, since we are restored to God and each other, we also become restorers. Christ broke down the barriers, and we have to live this new reality in practice. He made it possible through the cross; we have to make it real in our lives. It is Christian duty to be restored to and be a part of the restoration of those who have been separated by race, gender, ethnicity, age, money, education, or any other division that keeps anyone from experiencing the oneness Christ purchased by his own blood.

How can you promote the unity and restoration of diverse members of Sligo church to one body?

FRIDAY

Redeemed Community

(1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 offers one of the greatest analogies of how a redeemed community should work and exist—that of a body. As the passage explains, each member of a body is a part of the whole, each member plays a role, each member works for the greater good, and each member is necessary. Although some body parts are more visible, and therefore receive more attention, less known and less seen parts can be even more vital to the health of the body. It is the same in the church body. Every part of the body, every member of the church, has a role to play and work to do. It is only when each part works properly that the whole body works and exists as it should.

If the church is to function as God intended, each member must be in harmony with the rest and be willing to participate in the ministry to which they are called by God. Christ does not call any member into His body without assigning them a work for the health and growth of His church. When parts of our physical bodies don't work, in many cases, the body can still function but not with the ease and to the level it was designed; something is lacking and it is felt in multiple ways. When members in the church are not functioning, their church in most cases keeps going, but it is not working to increase God's kingdom to the extent He intends.

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