

Broken Community – Andy May

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Bundoora Presbyterian

You'll be able to download an outline or the full transcript of the sermon on the live page of the Bundy website

Please feel free to use those if they will help you

Most importantly, please keep your bibles open

And make sure that you test everything you hear against the Bible.

Last week we began our series of talks on the topic of Community

By looking at How God made us for community with Him and with others

Today we'll be looking at the topic of Broken Community

Before we do that, let's pray

Superman and Batman

Before the Marvel movies

Back in my day the two biggest superheroes were Superman and Batman

You could not get two more different superheroes than these

Superman – from another planet

Strong, good, idealistic – the representation of everything we aspire to

Batman – the gritty anti-hero who fought his inner demons as much as he fought crime

The cities which Superman and Batman each represent are also very different

Superman's metropolis is a shiny city of decent people often depicted in sunlight

Where all the threats are external to the city

Super villains or alien attacks

On the other hand,

Batman's Gotham City is always depicted in darkness

Where apart from the villains, the threats are often internal threats

Including greed and corruption making the line between the good guys and the bad guys hard to distinguish

The city of Melbourne

And I wonder which city you think Melbourne is more like

Metropolis or Gotham City?

I suspect that many who don't live in Melbourne would say that we are like Metropolis

We are regularly voted to be one of the most liveable cities in the world

Currently, our community feels a bit broken

I mean the AFL Grand Final took place at night

And not at the MCG – how shocking

But many would argue that this is all due to coronavirus and our lockdown

We're just facing a big external threat

And so the rhetoric goes that if we just stand together in our war on the virus

Then we can eradicate this external threat and go back to our normal way of life

But I think the reality is more complicated than this

I suspect that we're more like Gotham City than we care to admit

That the threats are as much internal as they are external

We're tired of political spin and half truths

We're tired of greed and corruption by union officials and corporate leaders alike
Our families are broken by marriage breakdown and family violence
The most vulnerable in our community – unborn children and refugees have no voice
Rates of suicide and depression were the same before the virus
If we live in the most liveable city in the world
Well we should be the happiest people on earth
The most thankful, generous, kind people in the world
And we're not are we
You know that and I know that
Our community is broken
It was broken before COVID 19
But how do we explain it?
And what can we do about it?

This is what I want to say today from the Bible
We're broken by sin so we need to repent and lament
We're broken by sin so we need to repent and lament

Let's have a look at the first point
We're broken by sin so we need to repent

Last week we saw that God made us for community
God made us for relationship with Him and for relationship with each other
And we saw that in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis
And we saw this wonderful picture of loving, other-centred relationship
But by chapter 3 of Genesis,
We see a very different picture
The serpent poses the question that all of us have grappled with since then

Genesis 3 verse 4

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

God gave Adam and Eve everything.
And they lost it all in rebellion against God
The bible calls this sin
They wanted to be like God in verse 5
They wanted to be God's equal
Christians call this "the fall"
Sin enters into the relationships
And destroyed the wonderful community between mankind and God,
between man and woman
and between mankind and the rest of creation

And I want you to see just how far they fell in their community
God would take evening walks in the Garden to commune with Adam and Eve

But now because of their sin
Adam and Eve are hiding their guilt and shame from God
And when God points out their sin
We see the first but certainly not the last blame shifting in history

Verse 12

¹²The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

Adam is blaming both God and His wife
This is what sin does to community
Sin breaks community

God made us to be image bearers of Himself
We were meant to reflect His glory not replace His glory
But sin says no to God and yes to self
I want to call the shots
I want to be God

This is how the apostle Paul put it in Romans 1 verse 25
They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

The Bible calls this idolatry.
Idolatry is not just the worship of things.
And not just the worship of bad things
But it's often a good thing that we turn into a God-thing.
God made relationships
He made a good thing.
Community was His idea.
But community can so easily become idolatry
What do I mean by that?
We replace God with community
Instead of loving God with all of our soul, strength and mind
We expect our other relationships to meet our deepest needs
And we get to determine how we do that
Like Adam and Eve
We want to be God
We want to call the shots

I wonder how many of you still think that marriage will meet your deepest needs
That special someone who will satisfy your deepest longings for community

I prepare young couples for marriage as part of my role
And one of the things I get to do is I get to break their hearts
They're full of hope in their eyes for marriage
And then I put forward this scenario to them:

You've been married for several years
And then one day
Your spouse comes home from work and says
I want to talk to you about something

I want to assure you that nothing's happened
But I've been attracted to someone at work
And I wanted to tell you because I want our marriage to work
I don't want anything to happen with this person
I just wanted to be honest with you
Well can you imagine how everyone has responded to the scenario
They're shattered
The shiny gloss of their marriage is gone forever
I thought we would be different
I thought that if we just found the right person
We would never look at anyone else in that way
Well you need to get real, I say
Because it's probably going to happen to your marriage
Sin is real
Sin will tell you that your spouse can meet all your needs
And you can meet all their needs
And you can ignore God
That's idolatry
Sin will also tell you that you married the wrong person
And that your needs can be met by someone else
If only you could be together with them.
And you don't need to listen to God's picture of marriage
And you see that's idolatry too.

Even though every couple is shattered by my scenario
They still prefer their spouse to be honest with them
You see that's being real about sin
But it's not just marriage which is broken by sin
Sin takes hold of all of our relationships and causes havoc

Listen to how Paul describes the effects of our sin in Romans 3
Verse 13

¹³ "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."
"The venom of asps is under their lips."
¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."
¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."
¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Sin warps our speech so that we cut others down
Sin drives us to violence
Sin destroys peace between people
Sin causes us to shake our fist at God
Sin breaks our community with God and with each other
And Paul conclusion is that all of us are guilty of sin
All of us are Adam's descendants
We are stamped from the same mold

Let me ask you again

Do you think that the greatest threats to our community are external or internal?
Jesus says internal.

Mark chapter 7

²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

The problem is not external
It's your sinful heart

The Times of London

Posed a question to eminent thinkers and writers of the day

To write an essay in response to this:

"What's wrong with the world?"

The author GK Chesterton wrote two words in response

I am

Chesterton nailed it

With humility and honesty

"I am" the problem with the world

Sin in me

Sin the problem between you and God

Sin is the problem in our community with others

The apostle James puts it this way

James Chapter 4

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

The sin that lurks in your heart

The lustful thoughts you have about others

Your deep-seated envy of your friend

Your burning anger at those you share a road with

Your fearful pride that never admits fault

All of these flow from your heart and poison your relationships

For some of you facing the corona virus

This is the first time you have felt so helpless

Let me assure you

You were helpless before this

All of us have faced an infection much worse

Except this virus – sin – has been killing people since Adam

The infection rate is 100%

The mortality rate is 100%

And this virus has already infected your heart

And it is breaking all your relationships and you are utterly helpless.

But the good news is there is a cure to sin

Not a vaccine but a cure

And His name is Jesus

Mark chapter 2 verse 16

¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The cure does not work for those who do not admit they are sick

The cure does not work for the proud and the self-reliant

The cure does not work for those who think they are better than others.

The cure is for those who are sick and who know they need help.

Is that you?

If it is, then please keep listening.

But let me speak to those who are not yet ready to admit it.

You might be listening but not convinced

Maybe you think that all our pressing problems are external

What we need is a vaccine to COVID-19

Population growth

Economic growth

What we need are jobs

We need to get businesses going again

More social workers

And mental health professionals

I want these things too

And they are all good gifts from God

But none of these things are a solution to sin

Nor a solution to sin's terrible companion – death

Eventually we *will* get through COVID-19

But all of us will still face death

Right now, can you imagine anything worse

Than dying in a hospital bed

Alone, separated from those you love

Struggling for every breath on a ventilator

Racked with guilt and regret about this life

And uncertain of what awaits you after this life

What's the answer then?

Here's the reality

You are as helpless now as you will be then

But Jesus says to you

"If you would believe in me"

"Then I will be with you always"

"You will never be alone"

"I will never leave you or forsake you"

"I will help you cross from death to eternal life with me"

Only someone who has destroyed the power of sin and defeated death

can provide any comfort on your deathbed

And Jesus alone has the answers

if you're willing to admit that sin is your great problem
Then what do you need to do
The bible provides us with one simple answer
You need to repent.

In Acts chapter 2

The Apostle Peter confronts the people of Jerusalem with the devastation of their sin
They crucified Jesus Christ – God's Son

Verse 37

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of your behavior
It is to change your mind that Jesus is Lord of your life and not you
And then to change your behavior by bowing your knee before Him
Repentance is to change your mind that Jesus is your Saviour and not you
And to change your behavior by accepting his gift of forgiveness
Through His death on the cross
Repentance is to change your mind that you have the power to clean up your act
And to change your behavior by working with God's Spirit
To change you from the inside out

Put simply

Repentance is Sorry, Thank You, Please
Sorry Jesus for my Sin
Thank you for dying in my place
Please forgive me and be my Lord
Sorry Jesus for my Sin
Thank you for dying in my place
Please forgive me and be my Lord
That's repentance

And it isn't a one off decision

Repentance is a daily posture in your relationship with Jesus
It's not just doing stuff but an attitude of humble dependence
Which leads to a daily dying to your self-centred sinfulness
And a commitment to giving your life to Jesus

Repentance is an acceptance of your brokenness because of sin
A recognition that you need Jesus all the time as your Saviour and your Lord
And repentance is the path to healing broken communities

Let me give you an example

Let me speak to the men watching
You find it hard to say sorry don't you
You're the man
You don't admit it
But all the time you feel pressure

Pressure to be strong
Pressure to perform
Pressure to provide
Pressure of your own self-doubt
But you never admit you feel pressure
Unlike women, we men never talk about it
We bottle it up
We're scared of talking about it
We don't want to be dependent
We don't want to be weak
But we're stressed
And we take out our stress on those around us
We get angry
Our housemates, our wives, our children, our co-workers
Feel that anger
And here's the thing
We won't say sorry to them
Because that would be admitting we're wrong
even though we know we're wrong
Instead we do just what Adam did
We blamshift
We accuse other people for our sin
Our kids are too noisy
Our wives don't listen to us
The people at work don't pull their weight
Let's be honest
Our households are broken because of *our* sin

If you're willing to admit that
Then the first thing you need to do
Is to repent
You're not the man
Because Jesus is the man
He has always been the man
You are weak and dependent
You are broken by your sin
You need Him
So say sorry, thank you, please to Jesus

The second thing that you should do
Is to go and say sorry to the people you live with
If you want to see brokenness in your community start to heal
The next time you get angry with your kids because of your stress
Get down on your knees
Look your children in the eye
And say sorry to them
And ask them to forgive you

Not only do we need to repent
but because we are broken by sin we need to lament
If infection numbers stay low in Melbourne

We will see more easing of restrictions
And if we get a vaccine in the next 12 months
Then we might see life returning to normal
By sometime next year
And we're all looking forward to this

But the danger is that when life goes back to normal
We forget how broken we really are
How weak and helpless we truly are
We'll get busy with all our plans and commitments
And we will think that we're in control again
And all of that control is an illusion
We live in a broken world

In Romans chapter 8

¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Creation has been groaning.
Subject to futility
Because of Adam's sin in the garden
God cursed our relationships
In other words
God let us face the consequences of our sin
The world is broken
Until such time when Jesus returns to fix everything.
Until then we and our world are groaning.
We cry out to God in helplessness
We lament.
That's what the Bible calls it
Lament.

Lament is to experience something of the sin brokenness of this world and of your life.
Then it is to cry out to God with the grief of this brokenness
Lament is not just tears
Lament is to trust in God's character and His works
And to put your hope in God's promise to right every wrong
To heal the brokenness and to wipe away our tears.

And the Bible is full of lament.
Not only the Psalms but Jesus himself taught us the importance of lamenting.

Jesus said in Matthew 5

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize just how powerless you really are
To recognise how dependent you are on God for everything

People who are poor in spirit recognize their need for God.
There is a difference between someone who has low self-esteem or self-loathing
And the person who is poor in spirit
The person with low self-esteem is stuck looking at themselves
The person who is poor in spirit has moved on to looking at Jesus.
Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Those who mourn recognize the devastation of sin
Their own sin and the sin of the world.
Those who mourn have surrendered their pride and their entitlement
Those who mourn are real about their frailty
And the frailty of others
Those who mourn look to the cross of Jesus
And look to the return of Jesus

I had a friend who lost a child through stillbirth
And I asked Him how he felt at the birth and death of his daughter
And I thought that in his answer
He might have said that he was angry at God
His answer floored me
He said that when he held the body of his lifeless daughter
All he felt was the heaviness of a world broken by sin
And his own contribution to it.
Blessed are those who mourn.

In John chapter 11
Jesus knew that his friend Lazarus was going to die
And Jesus knew he was going to raise him to life again
But at the tomb of his friend
It says that Jesus wept
He didn't just shed a tear
Jesus wept.
Ugly, gut-wrenching cries at the devastation of sin and death.
Jesus lamented with Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha

On the cross, Jesus lamented to God
With the words of Psalm 22
My God, why have you forsaken me
And it was on that cross that Jesus could purpose to our lament
For we have a God who hears the cries of His people
And who has done something about a broken world

We need to learn to lament
And we need to help each other to lament.
Romans 12 tells us to us mourn with those who mourn.
And to be honest, we still struggle in our churches to do that
We're not good at handling each other's struggles with sin
We still think that we need to fix each other's problems
We avoid other people when we know they're suffering
Because we don't know what to say

We need to learn don't we?
We need to learn to sit with each other's grief and tears
To learn how to listen and not to speak
To learn how to point each other to Jesus and not provide a quick fix
We need to learn how to be vulnerable
To let the walls of self-protection down
To learn how to cry together as we cry out to Jesus together
And to depend on each other as we help each other to depend on God
It takes practice and it's not easy
Please help me as I help you to lament

As we come out of lockdown restrictions can I ask you to do one thing.

Leave room for lament

Busy people who like to get things done
Leave little room for lament
Like Martha we can be so busy doing things even for Jesus
Not recognizing how much we need Jesus
I know because I am one of those busy people
But Jesus said the better thing we can do is to sit at his feet
And listen to him in humble dependence
So make sure you leave room for your own brokenness
Because he is waiting for you.

Make sure you leave room for others to lament

As we come out of lockdown
We are all going to be at different places
Some will be excited and want to go back to meeting again in a hurry
Others will be scared
Others will be cautious
You might share a different opinion
about how many people can meet together and how often
You might share a different opinion about whether people should come to your house
Or you to theirs
Don't assume that everyone will be where you are at
Don't assume that everyone is strong
Because we are all as frail and broken as each other
So be patient, be kind
Everyone will be grieving
So take time to grieve with those who grieve

Leave room to lament for those without Jesus

One of the things Jesus did before he entered Jerusalem in the week leading to his death
Was he wept over Jerusalem
Because he knew the judgement that was awaiting the people for their sin
One of the things this lockdown has exposed
Is how hopeless and helpless people in our city are
What is this city without footy and shopping?
What is this city without theatres and restaurants?
What would Jesus think of this city of 5 million people?
Jesus would be moved with compassion
And he would weep

Because so many are helpless and hopeless like sheep without a shepherd
And what this city needs more than footy and barbecues is Jesus
Leave room in your life like Jesus did
To lament for those without Jesus

Gotham City had Batman
Metropolis had Superman
Melbourne, more than ever, humbled and broken by sin, needs Jesus.

Let me pray for us.