

Seeing Our Way to Beloved Community  
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
March 15, 2026  
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We're halfway through Lent and I'm wearing out. As much as I had wanted it to be, this Lenten journey isn't about private, self-reflection. It's not enough that world around us is insane, but Jesus keeps entangling us with other people and systems.

First, it was the visit with Nicodemus in the middle of the night, and then the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, and now back to the city of David, to find this blind man, who is an outcast from his community, first for being blind and then for being healed.

This Lent is all about systems and community. Today in particular, it's about sight. What we choose to see. What we choose to perpetuate and participate in - personally, and systemically. And opening our eyes to see the bigger picture.

Every act of healing that Jesus does throughout the Gospels, is about more than healing. It's always about restoring people to community. It is God's dream that we live in healthy, beloved community.

When Jesus heals someone, it's a moment of healing for an entire community - showing the community what wholeness looks like. That's where Jesus gets into trouble. Because acts of healing disrupt the established boundaries - they redistribute dignity and agency to those who have been marginalized by the community and the authorities that oversee them.<sup>1</sup> Healing challenges the social fabric that defines who belongs and who doesn't. Challenges the authorities who determine who deserves to belong and who doesn't.

The underlying sin here was never the man's or his parents' - but that of the system that blames and excludes, a system threatened by inclusion of the marginalized. Then and now, the authorities prioritize order and predictability. They engage in victim blaming, and dehumanizing of the suffering - in order to maintain systems that secure the privilege of those in power. When Jesus heals this man's sight, he exposes the blindness of communities and institutions that normalize the exclusion of anyone they consider "other." Jesus warns that it's not the blind man who should fear God's judgment, but those who obstruct the ways of God, by excluding and persecuting the vulnerable. It is God's dream that we live in healthy, beloved community.

This Lent, we've been walking with Hanna Reichel's book, *For Such a Time as This*. Today we are in part three of the book, which focuses on Communion. Let's consider just one of the chapters in this section, Chapter 17, "Break Bread / Nourish Community."

Reichel suggests that the greatest danger to real community is the wishful image of ideal community. They point out that the community we experience will always be limited, and it will always be temporary.<sup>2</sup>

Friends, we know that real community is always imperfect. Because we are human and imperfect, our communities are imperfectly human.

A quick story. At a prior parish, an older gentleman came to my office to talk about joining the church. During our introductory conversation, he proudly described the various churches in which he'd been a member, before he moved on from them. This was more than church shopping, he had made a career of church-hopping - full membership, then leaving.

So, I wasn't surprised when after a year or so he came back to my office describing all the things he was dissatisfied with, and informing me that he was leaving. I didn't bother defending our parish, or begging him to reconsider. Instead, I wished him well, reflected his pattern to him without judgment, and told him I hoped that at his next church, he would give himself the gift of imperfect community. So he could experience the joys of really being a member of a community. He was taken a back, though unsurprisingly, he still left.

Many months later he came back and asked if he could rejoin our parish. I told him he didn't have to ask, just come. Though I hoped he would allow himself to join fully. To be all in, for his own sake. (And he did that, committed fully to being a member of our congregation. He only left when I and his wife moved away.) It is God's dream that we live in healthy, beloved community.

Friends, being together in intentional community is more than a respite from the reality of our world. It has power to shape and change us. Reichel writes, "Intentional community participates in God's reality in the midst of this reality."<sup>3</sup> And Reichel suggests that "real community encounters us as a miracle and transforms us into new beings."<sup>4</sup>

I believe that intentional community makes a difference in this world. That by gathering week in and week out, hearing the word, and praying for the world God loves, and taking communion together - our community has the power to shape the world. When we embody God's dream, we bring that dream one step closer to becoming reality. Not just for us, but for those beyond these walls. When we choose to live into God's ways, even in the midst of our current reality - we disrupt the injustice around us. We shine a light on the systems and authorities which victimize the vulnerable. If our participation in real community can transform us into new beings, then it can also be a catalyst to transform our systems into something new as well.

On Saturday morning, I read a post from Diana Butler Bass, in which she described her podcast earlier this week. It focused on two things: (1) how we're managing the stress of hard news, and (2) an analysis of the Iran War in relation to the Christian tradition of Just War theory. I cringed, really that seemed like more than I could handle on a Saturday morning, but I read on, and I'm glad I did.

Butler Bass reflected:<sup>5</sup>

The discussion was hopeful, honest, and informative. In the midst of it, I think I coined a phrase: "normalcy as resilience." I realized that all year I've been reaching toward this

idea — how everyday life, lived with intention and attention, informed by but not afraid of the news, grounded in gratitude, faith, and love, is our strongest force for goodness against authoritarianism.

Indeed, the beauty of normal may be our superpower in the face of evil.

Friends, I would add to her wisdom. Everyday life in healthy beloved community, lived with intention, and grounded in gratitude, faith, and love, is our superpower in the face of whatever brokenness we face. Together is always the way forward.

As we wind this down, a small excerpt from Jenny Smith's poem, "judgment + accountability."<sup>6</sup>

root in your integrity  
community  
healing  
compassion  
strength

we aren't here for  
shame and blame

we're here for human connection  
accountability and repair

we're here to co-create  
beloved community

Friends, may we continue to be blessed with real community, and together, live into healthy beloved-ness that shapes the world from what it is, to what God dreams it will be. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Thayer, "The Blindness Institutions Prefer; A Lectionary Reflection for 4th Sunday in Lent," Mar 11, 2026, posted on Andrew Thayer Studio, <https://andrewthayer.substack.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Hanna Reichel, For Such a Time as This, An Emergency Devotional, Eerdmans, September 4, 2025, p 85

<sup>3</sup> Reichel, p 86

<sup>4</sup> Reichel, p 83

<sup>5</sup> Diana Butler Bass, "Normalcy as Resilience; Live your live. The beauty of the everyday as your superpower." posted on the cottage, Mar 14, 2026, <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Jenny Smith, "judgment + accountability", gently fierce; poems of faith, rage & holy imagination, published Oct 2025, pp 126-127.