

Neighborhood Communion Group
Discussion Questions
The Church, part 3

Background

The idea of neighborhood communion groups arose from the earliest Christian communities that gathered regularly in homes for a time of eating and talking, something often missing in our busy lives. As you gather with friends, think of it as a throwback to the early church, or a dinner party in our day. Below, you'll find a Scripture passage, along with some suggested questions. Neighborhood Communion is a chance to enjoy food as well as food for thought.

Scripture Passage

Luke 5:17-26

"One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; ¹⁹but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. ²⁰When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' ²¹Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' ²²When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ²³Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? ²⁴But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.' ²⁵Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. ²⁶Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'"

Discussion

Thus far, we have considered Paul's teachings on the church, which makes sense given that he established and wrote letters to those congregations. But by the time the Gospels were written down, small house churches had formed. This means that stories about Jesus, although set in the past, could say something about these gatherings. Scholars refer to these as "house stories." In Luke's many house stories, for instance, women are included (4:38-39; 10:38-42) and outsiders are welcomed (5:27-31; 14:1-24; 15:25-32). Other Gospels include children in their "house stories," or describe it as the place where Jesus explains parables.

- 1) In this house story, Jesus heals a man which symbolizes how in the church all are made whole and well. But in this case, room must be made by removing the roof and lowering the man down. The removing seems to indicate how the church must creatively make room and remove obstacles so that all may be included. What does this say about churches today, and ours in particular? What obstacles can keep people away today?

- 2) Healing is only one issue in this story; the other is the forgiveness of sins. The point is not to connect the two but rather which is easier to declare. The issue of sins, however, points to how in the house we call church our sins are declared forgiven. For a lot of moderns, sin is an uncomfortable category. How do you think of sins being forgiven? Does it help that sin is defined as both what humans do wrong as well as a condition that we live in as a society?
- 3) This house story also contains tension between Jesus and some of the Pharisees. This sect included some of the most committed and dedicated Jews of the time. However, some, though not all of them, had lost sight of what matters in God's economy. How do religious people today, with the best of intentions, sometimes lose sight of God's intention that all should be included in the church?