

NOTES for talk **Community: Bah, humbug?** at MEL, 12/21/2013

Compost joke. Briefly introduce myself:

- shy guy; but being a hermit in a cave with my books didn't work.MC
- I'm going to attempt something akin to the Indian rope trick: talking about an ideal while avoiding sounding preachy, even while using two familiar religious words. If I'm successful, from atheist to Zoroastrian, you will all emerge from this event feeling respected, edified, and stimulated regarding our topic. And if not ... I'll refund price of admission. (Twain, \$5 / -50¢)
- Dangerous confession, where I'm coming from, has **a** cost:
- studied ethics at a nondenominational divinity school (which cannot make anyone ethical.) I dropped out. NB: did not study for ministry; "stealth ethics"
- volunteer most Saturdays @local prison: 1999. Captive audience?
- not a preacher; but was elected several times by a membership to conduct worship as a reader twice-weekly (5+years) while also running a business; old congregational format: "priesthood of all believers"
- Einstein>NY Regents: "biographies of the great ones" PC ALERT: mentioning my two heroes: Rabbi Jesus, and Socrates, astronauts of inner space, both of whom were executed by their communities? Why? \_\_\_\_\_(later).
- "¿Am I a Christian?" (hesitation, delay, **heretic**; a faraway god?: "[the kingdom of God is within you](#)" Luke17:20,21.)

(Michael Stein): Inspired me. Absolved? Blame him. Sorry, Mike, I lied. (We will be passing around announcements later describing study projects we might each be conducting.)

So, why are we here today? **Q:** "What's in it for me?" **Better Q:** "Who am I? What is my ideal on any particular issue?" – not today's immediate topic, but I hope we've come here to improve our doing of community together. **Our Q:** What is community? / ¿What prompted me to raise the topic, is: –"how would I feel if this library were foreclosed and auctioned off by the Mexican gov't?" (It could happen,

if we become financially unsustainable – due to “differences” for example.)

NB: clickable links online of these thoughts; perhaps video/youtube, which I hope to announce and link at my blog, MeridaGOround.com

From Stonehenge to Chichen Itzá, this is the darkest day of the year. It is also the day things begin to brighten in the cycle of light.

[Socrates:/definitions: often gave up attempting to get to the core of a deep question, [after pressing it](#) p106ff. He has been likened to a horsefly which bites the butts of horses. ¶ If I’m successful here, it’s possible that you might eventually want to swat me, or even lynch me. (Please: mostly, I only buzz; I rarely bite.) Our question, “What is community?” is before us. Now, with apologies to Socrates, due to time restraints I will suggest (rather than inquire) about 3 aspects of this question: 1. the ideal community; 2. leadership; and 3.membership. Seatbelts: The first (dont run for the exit yet) – the ideal community IS church which is not a religious word – ([ekklesia](#)) in early Greek city/state: yeoman farmers. Now, we may use names and dictionary definitions, but those can easily feed into pseudo-community – a counterfeit, where everybody is polite (mostly), but we shrink from holding each other accountable. ONE WAY street. What’s the right thing to do, Spike? “Whoa neighbor” An assembly which has dispensed with accountability is not sustainable. Community is comprised of relationships, attitudes, practices., shared values. Without accountability, it all comes crashing down: economy, last 5yrs.

“Cheers” tv show, “where everybody knows your name.” Bar-room as church? Yes, it could be: Socrates/symposium/a drinking party in praise of love **Q:** How do you spot a fake; currency, for example? Our question lingers: what is this ideal community? Form: Triangle.

[A word about my favorite book(s): The Bible. Athens & Jerusalem; science & religion; principle & awe; gravity & reverence; we are all

“believers”: just because sun rose yesterday..., “past performance is no guarantee of future earnings”]

Maybe community is having caring neighbors. (But what if they want to meddle?) So “[Who is my neighbor?](#)” Luke 10:25ff. Here is Rabbi Jesus, in your face with an antique n-word!

1. [Luke 10: 25] And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted [Jesus], saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And [Jesus] said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And **who is my neighbour?** And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. ¶ Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Confession: I’m a fraud. Merida’s afflicted are not hidden. I often pass them by, barely uttering a prayer or blessing, much to my shame. Real neighbors bless and care for each other. In category of dubious/preposterous: Mary and I blessed by neighbors who’ve become very

dear friends: avowed atheists, a gay couple, who have demonstrated to me that they are sometimes more “Christian” than I am; walls coming down. Community is blossoming, even while I don’t quite know what it is.

**SPEEDBUMP!** Our second characteristic: leadership IS christós. **Q:** **What** is christós? – rather than “**who** is Christ?” – (a very private question.) This Greek word signifies an anointing, done to designate a leader. The Hebrew word, from which we get Messiah, signifies the same recognition. In English, I suppose it would be crowning. (I won’t pry into your personal sense of “headship” but if you are your own king, you might want to ask yourself how that’s going. Yet, if “the kingdom is within,” is not the king already there, too?) Before you slap me down, or lynch me, let me say that I am not attempting to rearrange your spiritual or denominational furniture! I’m simply and perpetually fascinated by what moves us or leads us to do what we do. My jailbirds often want to quote Flip Wilson: “the devil made me do it.” Really? Are you sure it isn’t more basic: desire? What sort of community do we really desire? [Socrates](#) roundly rejected the notion of personal power over others (politics, leverage, unseemly gain: “the interest of the stronger”) while examining the question “What is justice.”

What does real community do? Wine tastings and chili cook-offs are merely fund raisers. (Yes, we must keep the lights paid!) These may be activities of a community, but not the heart of it. So let’s consider what that heart might be, by examining some aspects of community:

Ben Franklin: the highest office in the land is that of **Citizen**.

**Q:** “What is my duty?” Too many questions, today.

Membership / organs (koine Greek) “[We are each other’s organs](#)” v.25

Loneliness and community: allone. OED, middle English.

Why do communities struggle, divide, fail? (theodicy; “us & them”;

2nd law of thermodynamics: chaos) Will the triangle cease?

Literalism/fundamentalism/Taliban. Right? Wrong? Real? Ideal?

Population explosion adding another billion each 13 years.

Fight or flight: desire for genuine community exceeds fear of failure.

Egotism (excessive sense of self-importance) v. egoism (self-interest invested into the thriving of an entire group)

Beginner's mind. (I'm not a scholar)

Forgiveness. [Corrie ten Boom](#), on hearing from someone who had deeply offended her: 'I distinctly remember deciding to forget that.'  
Forgetfulness, defending an ego, forgetting pain, Alzheimer's joke.

Nelson Mandela, upon release from prison: "As I felt the anger rising up, I thought to myself, 'They have already had you for 27 years. And if you keep hating them, they'll have you again.' And I said, 'I want to be free.' And so I let it go. I let it go."

Mandela: "Resentment is like...poison that a man drinks; then sits down and waits for his enemy to die."

If we have nothing to defend, we cannot be attacked.

Socialism (scary, to some) v. 'humans are a social species'(fact). Bees

Schism: the butcher's trade: hacking apart a carcass. Grk: skkisma

Tension between controversy/civility: accountability/politeness

Hypocrisy, and person. Laughing/frowning masks, theater. Failure.

ONE REALITY, and the stories we tell ourselves; they're so often

about "us, and them." Beware, such suggestive divisions.

Study groups forming. Sign up sheet.

What was the crime worthy of execution committed by Jesus & Socrates?: \_\_loving too much\_\_.

So we've got three ideals: community, leadership, & citizenship – three balls in the air, which I will soon toss to you.

This is your event. If you would like to discuss this topic further with each other, I will gladly serve as moderator. Some may have brought quotes, verses, songs, music. We will want to season any discussion, by hearing these offerings. I will start things off by reading another quote from Nelson Mandela, offered by Michael Stein, this from his Inaugural speech, 1994:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. ¶ We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you NOT to



be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. ¶ There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us. It is in everyone. ¶ And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. <end>

The floor is now open to those who might wish to grace us with their their love of community. But please: right questions are challenging to arrive at. Issues are easy to snipe at. Let's not assert truth by arguing from authority. Let's stay focused and civil. What is community? What does it look like, sound like, feel like? How do we practice it?

Additional reading:

[The BIBLE](#)(multi-lingual link to many versions & translations

[A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered;](#) [People of the Lie: the Hope for Healing Human Evil/](#) both by M.Scott Peck

[When Jesus Came to Harvard: Making Moral Choices.../Harvey Cox](#)  
[Predictably Irrational: hidden forces that shape decisions/Dan Ariely](#)  
[Question of God: CS Lewis & Freud Debate God,Love, Sex, Life,...](#)  
[Surprised by Joy](#), autobiography: CS Lewis (from atheism to x'ty.)  
[When Jesus Became God/R.E. Rubenstein](#), history reconsidered

More on fundamentalism: Watch Ben Stein get Richard Dawkins to admit that Dawkins believes in Intelligent Design! film EXPELLED, 2min excerpt: <http://tinyurl.com/l6swomf> But, we need balance!

Here's Carl Sagan cautioning about our need for critical thinking:  
<http://tinyurl.com/o5p7wwn> Fundamentalism, be it religious, scientific, financial, etc, is dangerous, and needs to be disarmed.