
Waking the Dead

Chapter Eleven

Fellowships of the Heart

All the believers were one in heart.

Luke the Physician
(Acts 4:32)

Elrond summoned the hobbits to him. He looked gravely at Frodo. “The time has come,” he said.

“The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil. With you and your faithful servant, Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labors. For the rest, they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarfs, and Men. Legolas shall be for the Elves; and Gimli son of Gloin for the Dwarves. They are willing to go at least to the passes of the mountains, and maybe beyond. For men you shall have Aragorn son of Arathorn, for the Ring of Isildur concerns him closely.”

“Strider!” cried Frodo. “Yes,” he said with a smile. “I ask leave once again to be your companion, Frodo.” “I would have begged you to come,” said Frodo, “only I thought you were going to Minis Tirith with Boromir.” “I am,” said Aragorn. “And the Sword-that-was-Broken shall be re-forged ere I set out to war. But your road and our road lie together for many hundreds of miles. Therefore Boromir will also be in the Company. He is a valiant man.”

“There remain two more to be found,” said Elrond. “These I will consider. Of my household I may find some that it seems good for me to send.” “But that will leave no place for us!” cried Pippin in dismay. “We don’t want to be left behind. We want to go with Frodo.” “That is because you do not understand and cannot imagine what lies ahead,” said Elrond. “Neither does Frodo,” said Gandalf, unexpectedly supporting Pippin. “Nor do any of us see clearly. It is true that if these hobbits understood the danger, they would not dare to go. But they would still wish to go, or wish they had dared, and be shamed und unhappy. I think, Elrond, that in this matter it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom”

“Let it be so, then. You shall go,” said Elrond, and he sighed. “Now the tale of Nine is filled. In seven days the company must depart.”

We Happy Few

Once more, lend a mythic eye to your situation. Let your heart ponder this:

You awake to find yourself in the middle of a great and terrible war. It is, in fact, our most desperate hour. Your King and dearest Friend calls you forth. Awake, come fully

alive, your good heart set free and blazing for him and for those yet to be rescued. You have a glory that is needed. You are given a quest, a mission that will take you deep into the heart of the kingdom of darkness, to break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron so that your people might be set free from their bleak prisons. He asks that you heal them. Of course, you will face many dangers; you will be hunted.

Would you try and do this *alone*?

Something stronger than Fate *has* chosen you. Evil *will* hunt you. And so a Fellowship *must* protect you. Honestly, though he is a very brave and true Hobbit, Frodo hasn't a chance without Sam, Merry, Pippin, Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. He has no real idea what dangers and trials lie ahead. The dark mines of Moria; the Balrog that awaits him there; the evil orcs called the Urak-hai that will hunt him; the wastes of the Eryn Muil. He will need his friends. And you will need yours. You must cling to those you have, you must search wide and far for those you do not yet have. *You must not go alone*. From the beginning, right there in Eden, the Enemy's strategy has relied upon a simple aim: Divide, and conquer. Get them isolated, and take them out.

When Neo is set free from the Matrix, he joins the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar – the little hover craft which is the headquarters and ship of the small fellowship called to set the captives free. There are nine of them in all, each a character in their own way, but nonetheless a company of the heart, a “band of brothers,” a family bound together in a single fate. Together, they train for battle. Together, they plan their path. When they go back into the Matrix set others free, they each have a role, a gifting, a glory. They function as a team. And they watch each other's back. Neo is fast, really fast, but he still would have been taken out if it hadn't been for Trinity. Morpheus is more gifted than them all, but it took Neo, Trinity and Tank to rescue him.

You see this sort of thing at the center of every great story. Dorothy takes her journey with the Scarecrow, the Tinman, the Lion, and of course, Toto. Prince Caspian is joined by the last few faithful Narnians, and together they overthrow the wicked king Miraz. Though in the eyes of the world they are only gladiator-slaves, walking deaden, Maximus rallies his little band and triumphs over the greatest empire on earth. When Captain John Miller is sent deep behind enemy lines to save Private Ryan, he goes in with a squad of *. And, of course, Jesus had the Twelve. This is written so deeply on our hearts: You must not go alone. The Scriptures are full of such warnings, but until we see our desperate situation, we hear it as an optional religious assembly for an hour on Sunday mornings.

Think again of Frodo, or Neo, or Caspian, or Jesus. Imagine you are surrounded by a small company of friends who know you well (characters, to be sure, but they love you, and you have come to love them). They understand that we are all at war, know that the purposes of God are to bring a man or woman fully alive, and are living by sheer necessity and joy in the Four Streams. They fight for you, and you for them. You have my sword; you have my bow; you have my axe. Imagine you *could* have a little fellowship of the heart. Would you want it, if it were available?

This Is Available

Leigh was born to dance.

But the story of her life is the story of that glory assaulted, stolen, and given up for lost. (This is *always* the story). She was actually the first woman ever to win a scholarship to her university for dance. That might tell you how gifted she is. But talent alone is never enough to overcome wounds, and brokenness, and whatever hell has thrown at you from your childhood. Shame and Fear hunted Leigh from her youth; they seemed larger than her heart to dance. She dropped out of school, married, had children, went on with her life. Still, the longing would not go away. When no one else was around, Leigh would dance alone in her house, like a writer composing poetry from prison, or like you see a dolphin swim round and round its tank in captivity. From behind those infamous gates and bars, Leigh's heart cried out to be free to do what she was meant to do.

Thirty years of seclusion go by. Thirty. Then Leigh took a risk. She joined the dance ministry of her church. And she shone. Even though she's old enough by now to be the mother of the other dancers, Leigh stood out. She shone so much in fact that the instructor was threatened by her glory. You can hear it coming. Remember Joseph's brothers? Cinderella's step-sisters? Satan seized the opportunity – accused Leigh of “pride” in the heart of the team leader, who turned on Leigh and shamed her openly. (The attack always comes to “Your heart is bad”). Some foul spirit was also whispering accusation to Leigh as well, until she finally quit. And there she probably would have remained, except for the fact that Leigh has a little fellowship around her.

It became more and more obvious to us that Leigh would never step into her glory unless someone fought for her. Fiercely. Over the years her husband Gary fought valiantly for her, but more was needed. “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven...if two or three of you on earth agree” (Matt 18:18-19). Off and on, over the course of maybe a year, we battled spiritual warfare for Leigh. One Saturday morning three of us men spent more than three hours coming against her tormentors, who were strong. Shame was there. So was **. On another night Stasi had a vision of a huge serpent binding Leigh's feet. Aaron sent it to hell. Can captives be rescued from the fierce? You betcha.

Leigh persevered. During our evenings together, there arose opportunities for prayer for the healing of childhood memories, too, and to mend her broken heart. This all took place in the normal life of our community. At another point the women gathered to celebrate Leigh's birthday. Their gift: Dance shoes (something she could never bring herself to spend money on). Their words of love and encouragement might have been the greater gift, though. “You can do this, Leigh. We are for you.” Those words meant something because they *knew* her. Words of life. Then, from within the fellowship, an opportunity came up for Leigh to dance – solo – before two thousand people. Understandably...she hesitated. Should she take the risk again? Was it a set-up for disaster?

Leigh asked us to pray and listen to God on her behalf. *Is this the one, Lord?* Its so hard to hear from God when your own story is tangled up in it, and the Enemy has long assaulted the very thing you are wondering about. *Yes, it is time.* As Leigh practiced for the Big Day she continued to be assaulted. She lost the rehearsal room. Her choreographer bailed. She pulled a hamstring. One physical injury after another. The Enemy laughed and mocked and threw the book at her. But her fellowship would not let her go. We slew the orcs, we found the trail, we stuck together.

After all those years, Leigh finally danced.

And she was glorious. I mean, it was *powerful*. Her performance launched other opportunities to dance. And *it would not have happened* without her friends. I could fill a book with stories like that one, involving each member of our fellowship and the way we live in the Four Streams on behalf of one another. Its really quite normal, as ordinary as sending out for Chinese food, or chatting on the phone.

It Must Be Small

When he left Rivendell, Frodo didn't head out with a thousand Elves. He had eight companions. Jesus didn't march around backed by legions of angels, either. He had twelve men – knuckleheads, every last one of them, but they were a band of brothers. This is the way of the kingdom of God. Though we are part of a great company, we are meant to live in little platoons. The little companies we form must be small enough for each of the members to know one another as friends and allies. Is it possible for five thousand people who gather for an hour on a Sunday morning to know each other? Okay, how about five hundred? One hundred and eighty? It can't be done. They can't possibly be intimate allies. It might be fun and encouraging to celebrate with a big ol crowd of people, but who will fight for your heart?

Who will fight for your heart?

How can we offer the stream of counseling to one another, unless we actually *know* one another, know each other's stories? The reason counseling became a hired relationship between two people was largely because we couldn't find it anywhere else; we haven't formed the sort of small fellowships that would allow the stream to flow quite naturally. Is it possible to offer rich and penetrating words to someone you barely know, in the lobby of your church, as you dash to pick up the kids? And what about warfare? Would you feel comfortable turning to the person in the pew next to you, and, as you pass the offering plate, ask them to bind a demon that is sitting on your head?

Where will you find the Four Streams?

The Four Streams are something we learn, and grow into, and offer one another, within a small fellowship. We hear each other's stories. We discover each other's glories. We learn to walk with God together. We pray for each other's healing. We cover each other's back. This small core fellowship is the essential ingredient for the Christian life. Jesus

modeled it for us *for a reason*. Sure, he spoke to the masses. But he *lived* in a little platoon, a small fellowship of friends and allies. His followers took his example and lived this way, too. “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (2:46). “Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house” (1 Cor 16:19). “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4:15).

Church is not a building. Church is not an event that takes place on Sundays. I know, its how we think of it. “I go to First Baptist.” “We are members of St. Luke’s.” “Is it time to go to church?” Much to our surprise, that is *not* how the Bible uses the term. Not at all. When the Scripture talks about church, it means *community*. The little fellowships of the heart that are outposts of the kingdom. A shared life. They worship together, eat together, pray for one another, go on quests together. They hang out together, in each other’s homes. When Peter is sprung from prison, “he went to the house of Mary the mother of John...where many people had gathered and were praying” (Acts 12:12).

Anytime an army goes to war or an expedition takes to the field, it breaks down into little platoons and squads. And *every* chronicle of war or quest will tell you that the men and women who fought so bravely fought *for each other*. That’s where the acts of heroism and sacrifice take place, because that’s where the devotion is. You simply can’t be devoted to a mass of people; devotion takes place in small units, just like a family. How is it that we have come to be warehoused in Sunday services with people we do not really know, for an hour a week, separated the rest of our days of real living, and call that *church*? You might have a guess who pulled *that* off on us.

We have stopped short of being an organization; we are an organism instead, a living and spontaneous association of individuals who know one another intimately, care for each other deeply, and feel a kind of respect for one another that makes rules and bylaws unnecessary. A group is the right size, I would guess, when each member can pray for every other member, individually and by name.

This is the wisdom of Brother Andrew, who smuggled Bibles into communist countries for decades. It’s the model, frankly, of the church in nearly every country but the U.S. Now, I’m not suggesting you don’t do whatever it is you do on Sunday mornings. I’m simply helping you accept reality – that whatever else you do, you *must* have a small fellowship to walk with you and fight with you and bandage your wounds. Remember: The path is narrow, and *few* find it. Few means small in number, as opposed to, say, massive. This is essential. This is what the Scriptures urge us to do. First. Foremost. Not as an addition to Sunday. *Before* anything else.

It Must Be Intimate

Of course, small groups have become a part of the programming most churches offer their people. For the most part, they are disappointing and short-lived – by the very admission of those who try them. There are two reasons. One, you can’t just throw a random group of people together for a twelve week study of some kind, and expect them

to become intimate allies. The sort of devotion we want and need takes place within a shared life. Over the years our fellowship goes camping together. We play together; help one another move; paint a room; find work. We throw great parties. We fight for each other, live in the Four Streams. This is how it was meant to be.

I love this description of the early church: “All the believers were one in heart” (Acts 4:32). There is a camaraderie being expressed there, a bond, an *esprit de corps*. It means they all love the same thing, they all want the same thing, and they are bonded together to find it come hell or high water. And hell or high water *will* come, friends, and this will be the test of whether or not your band will make it: If you are one in heart. Judas betrayed the brothers because his heart was never really with them, just as Ciphers betrays the company on the Nebuchadnezzar and as Boromir betrays the fellowship of the Ring. Good Lord – churches split over the size of the parking lot or the color of the carpet. Most churches are *not* “one in heart.”

Secondly, most small groups are anything but redemptive powerhouses because, while the wineskin might be the right size, they don't have the right wine. You can study Proverbs or Colossians till you're blue in the face, and it won't heal the brokenhearted or set the captive free. We come, we learn, we leave. It is not enough. Those hearts remain buried, broken, untouched, *unknown*. It is the Way of the Heart and the Four Streams that turns a small fellowship into a redemptive community. It is knowing you are at war, that God has chosen you and evil is hunting you and so a fellowship like Frodo's must protect you. How many small groups have you been a part of where what we did for Leigh is what happens all the time?

On a Tuesday evening last January our fellowship was sitting around talking about our need to see the rest of the picture, how we cannot make good decisions or even know what's really going on without eyes to *see*. That led into a conversation about the power of myth to open the eyes of our heart. I suggested we do this: “Write down on a piece of paper five words or phrases that capture your life right now. What does it feel like? Don't edit, don't make it sound better than it is. How are you doing?” It began an incredibly eye-opening journey.

Once we had our words or phrases (many of us couldn't keep it to five), I then asked, “What stories or scenes or characters help you *interpret* those words, help you see what's going on, give a context to your words for your life right now?” You see, no experience or feeling provides its own interpretation. You feel besieged on all sides; are you Elijah on Mt Carmel, on the brink of great victory? Or are you Paul in Thessalonica, and you'd better get out of town, *fast*? We have to find something that gives our experiences meaning and context. And that's when the really good stuff took place. First, we shared our words, and the stories that we felt interpreted them for us. Then the fellowship offered to each other the characters and scenes that *we* saw for each other.

Misty had moved to our community a year earlier, and had gone through a pretty tough time. New apartment, new job, all that. Would she fit in? Does she really have anything to offer? Her words were: “Newness, uncharted territory, yellow brick road, fighting, a

page turned, warfare.” She thought that, maybe, there *might* be some truth for her in Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, at least early in the story: “She sees things in others and calls them forth, but she’s desperate to come home.” The other story Misty chose felt more true; she really felt like the young woman in *Ever After* who “poses as royalty to save a servant friend, but she is exposed as less than royalty.” As we listened first to her words, and then to her interpretation, we all quietly jotted down our own stories for her.

When it was our chance to offer back, five different people all said “Arwen,” from *The Lord of the Rings*. It fit perfectly. She is beautiful (what woman doesn’t long to hear this?), she is a warrior, and she is regal. And that is so true of Misty – all of it. Three folks also had Dorothy from Oz; not because she’s lost, but because she is right where she needs to be, and especially because she has a heart of gold. (By this point Misty is in tears. Did I mention she moved here from *Kansas*?). Then a real home run came – at least two of us offered Joan of Arc. I was one of them, and I had no idea where it came from. Misty was speechless. “I’m reading a book on her life right now. She’s who I so *want* to be.” God was speaking. What made it so powerful is that we see here, she knows she’s exposed to us, and what we saw was her glory. She felt called into something Great and Weighty, with a beauty and courage to match it.

“Longing, fear, lonely, waiting, thwarted.” Those were Aaron’s words. He chose Boromir from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “Because he’s the one that gets taken out, he’s unstable, a mess.” Aaron has fought a long, hard battle against a lot of oppression – some pretty fierce stuff. And his deep brokenness has often made him feel like he’s just a mess. It’s not true – but you know how when you’re in need, it feels so shameful, like you’re always in need. There was a moment of silence. Then every last one of us said, almost in the same breath, “Strider – Aragorn.” Early in the story isn’t he also longing, lonely, waiting, thwarted? Aaron was speechless. “You’re a good man, Aaron. You’ve walked a lonely trail, fought many hard battles. But your heart is good. You *are* Strider.” Very, very quietly, like the dawn, he said, “That’s who I want to be.”

Stasi’s words for her life were, “Persevering, hidden, misunderstood, weary, mundane tasks.” She chose Lucy from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, “because she wants to be faithful and true.” (You’ll recall that Lucy was also rather plain and not too pretty). She also wrote down Lucilla, the empress in *Gladiator*, “because I long to be a beautiful, courageous empress.” Notice that nearly always *our* interpretation of our days will reveal both what we long to be, but fear we really are. Then it was our turn. Someone offered Cinderella, and *everyone* said, “O my gosh – Yes!” She, too, was persevering, hidden, misunderstood, given mundane tasks. But she’s also beautiful, and didn’t know it. We know Stasi’s story; her glory *has* been assaulted. Remember how the wicked stepsisters tore the gown off Cinderella, so she couldn’t go to the ball? I reminded Stasi of the time her sisters actually did that very thing to her. She burst into tears. “I forgot all about that...O my.” The truth was reaching her heart.

It was an incredible evening. All of us had chosen words that were hard (life is *hard*), and all our interpretations of our own lives were off. Each of us were in the process of making subtle agreements with the Enemy and we weren’t even aware of it. It was only through

the eyes of our friends that we recovered our hearts, our true place, reality. But the real power of living in community is, we remembered those stories for months, and used them for each other at crucial moments in the battle ahead. Jenny later said, “What makes this community so powerful is that you remember my story for me. I don’t have to carry the burden of remembering alone.”

It Will Be Messy

The family is...like a little kingdom, and, like most other little kingdoms, is generally in a state of something resembling anarchy.

Chesterton could have been talking about a little fellowship (our *true* family, because it is the Family of God). It is a royal mess. I will not whitewash this. It is *disruptive*. Going to church with hundreds of other people to sit and hear a sermon doesn’t ask much of you. It certainly will never expose you. That’s why most folks prefer it. Because community will. It will reveal where you have yet to become holy, right at the very moment you are so keenly aware of how *they* have yet to become holy. It will bring you close and you will be *seen* and you will be *known* and therein lies the power and therein lies the danger. Aren’t there moments when all those little companies, in all those stories, hang by a thread? Galadriel says to Frodo, “Your quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all. Yet hope remains while the Company is true.”

We’ve experienced incredible disappointments in our fellowship. We have, every last one of us, hurt one another. Sometimes deeply. Last year there was a night when Stasi and I laid out a vision for where we thought things should be going – our life-long dream for redemptive community. We hoped the Company would leap to it with loud “Hurrahs! Hurrah for John and Stasi!” Far from it. Their response was more on the level of blank stares. Our dream was mishandled – badly. Stasi was sick to her stomach; she wanted to leave the room and throw up. I was...stunned. Disappointed. I felt the dive towards a total loss of heart. The following day I could feel my heart being pulled towards resentment. Its moments like that which usually toll the beginning of the end for most attempts at community.

Seriously, now – how often have you seen this sort of intimate community work? It is *rare*. Because it is hard, and it is fiercely *opposed*. The Enemy hates this sort of thing; he knows how powerful it can be, for God and his kingdom. For our hearts. It is devastating to him. Remember divide and conquer? Most churches survive by mutual agreement that everyone keeps a polite distance from one another. We keep our meetings short, our conversations superficial. “So, Ted, how’s everything going on the stewardship committee?” “Oh, just great, Nancy. We’ve got a big goal to reach this year, but I think we’ll be able to get that gym after all.” No one is really being set free, but no one is really at odds with each other, either. We have settled for safety in numbers – a comfortable, anonymous distance. An army that keeps meeting for briefings, but never breaks into platoons and goes to war.

Living in community is like camping together. For a month. In the desert. Without tents. All your stuff is scattered out there for everyone to see. C'mon – anybody can look captured for Christ an hour a week, from a distance, in their Sunday best. But your life is open to those you live in community with. Some philosopher described it like a pack of porcupines on a winter night. You come together because of the cold, and are forced apart because of the spines. *Here we go again. Why does Jim always have to be discouraged? I'm sick of encouraging him. And what is it with Mary and her inability to stop talking about herself? How come Jeff is always so guarded? These people bug me.*

However, there are two things you now have that you didn't have before, and those are what enable this sort of fellowship to work. First, you know the heart is good. That is the missing key in most churches. Your heart is good, and their heart is good. This makes it so much easier to trust, and to forgive. Whatever may be happening in the moment, whatever the misunderstanding might be, I know that our hearts towards one another are good, and that we are for each other. Craig says something that stings. If I thought, *You know, he meant that; he's trying to hurt me* it would pretty quickly trash the relationship. But I know that is not his heart towards me; that is not who he truly is. If I thought it were, why, I'd turn tail and run.

Secondly, we know we are at war. That thought that goes, *O geez, here goes Frank again. Why can't he just drop it about his mother? What is it with these people? They're not really my friends. I'm outta here.* That's the Enemy. We *must* remember that the Enemy is always trying to pull everyone else do to you what *he* is doing to you. He creates a kind of force-field, a gravitational pull around you that draws others into the plot without their even knowing it. Gary walks in the room, and suddenly I'm irritated at him. Its not me, and its not him. I have to know that. His life-long assault has been, "If you can't get it right, we don't want to be with you." It's a lie. It's the Enemy. I don't feel that way toward him *really*. But unless I live with this awareness, and keep a watchful eye out for it, I'll get sucked into the pull, start making agreements with it, and there goes the friendship.

Fight for It

Be kind, for everyone you know is facing a great battle.

A true community is something you will have to fight for. You'll have to fight to get one, and you'll have to fight to keep it afloat. But you fight for it like you bail out a life raft during a storm at sea. You want this thing to work. You *need* this thing to work. You can't ditch it and jump back on the cruise ship. This *is* the church; this is all you have. Without it, you'll go down. Or back to prison.

Suddenly all those "one another's" in Scripture make sense. Love one another. Bear one another's burdens. Forgive one another. Acts of kindness become deeply meaningful because we know we are at war. Knowing full well that we are all facing battles of our own, we give one another the benefit of the doubt. *Leigh isn't intentionally being distant from me – she's probably under an assault.* That's why you must know each other's

stories, know how to “read” one another. A word of encouragement can heal a wound; a choice to forgive can destroy a stronghold. You never knew your simple acts were so *weighty*. Its what we’ve come to call “lifestyle warfare.”

We check in regularly with one another, not out of paranoia (“Do you still like me?”), but in order to watch over each other’s hearts. “How are you doing?” But be careful about what you are looking for from community. For if you bring your every need to it, it will collapse. Community is no substitute for God. I left our annual camping trip absolutely exhausted and disappointed. As we drove home, I realized it was because I was looking to them to validate me, appreciate me, fill this aching void in my heart. Only once in ten days did I take time to be away with God, alone. I was too busy trying to get my needs met through them. Which is why community cannot live without solitude.

I was so struck by the layout of the early Irish and Scottish monasteries when we visited there last year. First, they knew they *had* to live in community. They needed each other. But in every single location, set apart from the community buildings by a about a twenty minute walk, you’d find little “cells,” small stone huts designed for one member to get alone and be with God. They knew community could not survive without solitude. There is a rhythm to life together, as Bonhoeffer said. We first go to God, alone, so that we have something to bring back to the community. This is part of lifestyle warfare. I know my community needs me; they are coming over tonight. So I’d better get with God this afternoon. I want to contribute. I want to play a vital role.

The Time Has Come Again

It’s the little platoons that change the world. This has always been true.

In 564 St. Columba (Columcille in Gaelic) left his beloved Ireland in a coracle, sail unfurled, willing to let God lead him wherever he might for the sake of the Gospel. With him were twelve disciples, friends, warrior-monks as they would later be called. They landed on a small island off the coast of Scotland (at the time a dark, vicious, pagan country) and there they established what they called a “little heavenly community.” The place was Iona, and it became the center of a new and vibrant Christianity.

Now, in order to realize what Iona was and what it means for us, you must understand the context of that moment in history. First, the world around them had grown very dark. Night had fallen with the fall of Rome; the Vandals and the Goths and the Visigoths and all those predatory gangs had swept down upon Europe and basically ransacked the place. Western Europe was like L.A. during the riots. Paganism flourished; law and order were long gone. It was barbarous.

But you must also know that at the time of Iona, the Christian church based in Rome was already becoming institutionalized, hierarchical, far more an organization than it was an organism. That living and spontaneous association of individuals who know one another intimately, and care for each other deeply was giving way to a large, centralized, bureaucratic church where rules and bylaws become necessary. Sad, but true. And so I

hope you see that it was a time very much like our own: A world under shadow and a Church turned organizational, corporate. A world, come to think of it, very much like the one the early church also found itself in. The synagogue was dead, and the cultures around them pagan indeed. What did they do? They came together into little fellowships of the heart.

Iona and its warrior monks began to carry their light into that darkness. Columba won to Christ the king of the Picts, the notorious pagan warriors of Northern Scotland who painted their faces blue before battle (the precursors to *Braveheart*). In winning him, Columba won over a great deal of Scotland. Iona also became the staging point for missionary raids into England and deep into Europe. In this way, Irish monasticism and Celtic Christianity began to change the world. Everywhere they went, they established communities like their own, little “colonies of heaven” along the way. It was the book of Acts, all over again. It was a spirituality of the heart, based in a community that knew it was at war, and it was unstoppable. Historian Thomas Cahill said Iona “Forever changed the course of western history.”

Celtic spirituality is not a top-down form of church, but bottom-up. It allows spirituality to flow from the heart. It allows the five senses to be used. Its creative. It’s a flowering of creative arts. Its an expression of Christianity which believes that to be Christian is to be fully human. (Ray Simpson, Lindisfarne Community)

They believed that the glory of God is man fully alive.

Our trip to Iona last year was a sort of pilgrimage, and I can tell you it is still a remarkable place. The veil between the worlds is very thin there. As we strolled among the ruins, read their accounts, looked at their way of life, I realized. This was not the faith of some good people applying biblical principles to their lives in a fairly benign, though disappointing and fallen world. Here was the burning-heart conviction of a group of increasingly glorious men and women who wanted the freedom and life and restoration Christ promised, and who were willing to fight for it because they knew this is a world at war. A community of people living in the Four Streams, because they knew the Christian life as an *epic*, no less than the greatest myths the world has ever known.

We paused by one of the ancient Celtic crosses. God spoke, and this is what he said:

I am doing this again.

God is calling together little communities of the heart, to fight for one another and for the hearts of those who have not yet been set free. That camaraderie, that intimacy, that incredible impact by a few stouthearted souls – that is available. It is the Christian life as Jesus gave it to us. It is completely normal.

Or, on the other hand, you can go it alone.