

## *Community*

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We yearn for the experience of community and rejoice when we find it. It is soul-filling to find someone, or a group of people, who share the same affections and values as we do.

At times what we thought was our community can be threatened by differences, and we wonder if we can be part of those communities. In our fractured political climate, people are experiencing this disunity in the country, and it can happen in other areas too.

The experience of community is based on two things: shared values and an attitude of looking for the good in others. Shared values are very important, but for today we'll focus on the affections we bring. We can't control whether we agree with people, but we can control whether we invite the Lord into the relationship. A bad motive will cause us to find fault with everyone, and a good one can find common ground that was not obvious.

Consider his teaching: "Everything that the natural self regards as being separated from himself is considered utterly worthless by him and is cast aside; and everything that he regards as being linked to himself is considered by him to be valuable and acceptable. The natural self neither knows nor wishes to know about any spiritual way of thinking." (AC 5025:3) When we see something as different from ourselves, our lower self tends to see it as worthless and rejects it. That's a strong statement!

The Lord tells us frequently that splits that have taken place in the Christian church would not have happened had charity reigned (AC 1799:4). But because we focused on content rather than attitude, we have seen many divisions. Sometimes divisions do need to happen, but they will take place very differently when we are coming from love.

So here's the principle: Love creates a connection; self love creates disunion. The story of Joseph illustrates how much attitude affects what we see, and how much more important it is than the content of our disagreement.

Jacob loved Joseph more than the rest of his brothers and because of this, his brothers hated him and couldn't speak peaceably to him. We could understand some hurt or resentment, but instead we find a hate that led them to plan to kill him.

Joseph spent 13 years as a slave and prisoner in Egypt before rising to power. When the brothers came down to buy food, he gave his negative emotions sway and accused them of being spies, which he knew to be untrue. Then he planted his silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. His plan was to take Benjamin prisoner, send them away, and then reveal himself as the lost brother. He would have a community. But it would have been a community bought from dishonest behavior.

When the cup was found, the brothers go back to Egypt and Judah explains that losing Benjamin would kill his father. To avoid this he offers to take Benjamin's place as slave. Now things change. Instead of feeling resentment, Joseph realizes that he shares something in common with Judah. They both love their father! He chooses to focus on this instead of the past disagreements, and they discover a shared experience of community.

Lessons: Genesis 44-45 (portions); *Arcana Coelestia* 4997, 1799:4