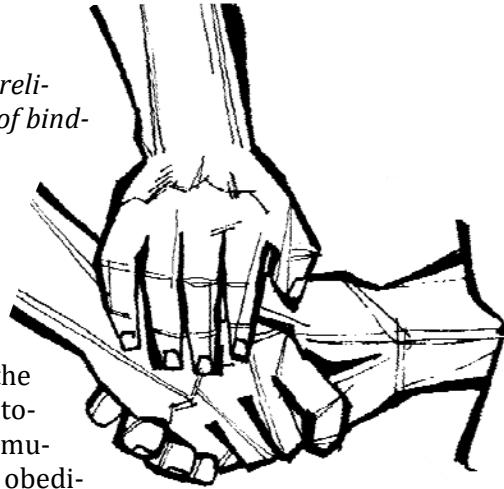


# The Grace of Community Life

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Parker Palmer writes, *“Community is finally a religious phenomenon. There is nothing capable of binding together willful, broken human selves except some transcendent power.”* And I would add that no reality can lead us into the heart of forgiveness and open us up to all people except a loving, forgiving God.

Henry Nouwen says that, “True solitude, far from being the opposite of community life is the place where we come to realize that we were together before we came together and that community life is not a creation of human will but an obedient response to the reality of our being united. Many people who have lived together for years and whose love for one another has been tested more than once know that the decisive experience in their life was not that they were able to hold together but that they were held together. That in fact we are community not because we like each other or have a common task or project but because we are called together by God.



God seems pleased to call together in Christian communities people who are, humanly speaking, very different, who come from different cultures, classes, and countries. The most beautiful communities are created from just this diversity of people and temperaments. This means that each person must love the others with all their differences and work with them for the community.

These people would never have chosen to live with each other. Humanly speaking, it seems an impossible challenge. But it is precisely because it is impossible that they believe that God has chosen them to live in this community. So then the impossible becomes possible. They no longer rely on their own human abilities or natural sympathies, but on their Father who has called them to live together. He will give them the new heart and spirit which will enable them all to become witnesses to love. In fact, the more impossible it is in human terms, the more of a sign it is that their love comes from God and that Jesus is living. *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.”* (Jn. 13:15)