

Communitas

Kirsten shared this quote with us at Kingdom Community. It's from Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch's book 'The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of risk, Adventure & Courage'.¹

*We were always meant to venture out, but we were never meant to do it alone. When Jesus kicked off the mission that we are continuing now, he didn't commission rugged, individualistic swashbucklers haphazardly forging their own destinies in life, but rather he initiated a movement destined to be the community of the faithful who are in the end found worthy to worship before the throne.² It is a widely recognized fact that Westerners tend to distort Jesus' intent by reading the Bible as written to, and about, individuals. Not so. **The Bible is written to communities**, be it Israel or the church, and **it is written to foster community**, whether it be the national identity of Israel or the faith community of the church. Just as there is no such thing as an Israel-less Jew, there is no such thing as a church-less Christian.³ **Our very identity as God's people is bound up in the collective identity of being an ecclesia – a group of people called, named, redeemed, ruled, and loved by Jesus.**⁴ We are never going to be the church that Jesus built if we do not take community seriously.*

*In *The Forgotten Ways*⁵ Alan suggests that missional movements that actually transform their world comprise a dynamic network of communities that overcome their innate human instinct to "huddle and cuddle" and form themselves around a common mission that calls them onto a dangerous journey to unknown places. Movements happen when the church manages to shake off its collective fears and plunges into the mission of God in the world, where, while experiencing liminality⁶ and disorientation, they also get to encounter God and each other in a new way. Similarly, in *Exiles*⁷, Michael explores the relationship of discipleship and community in calling us to live as exiles – followers of Jesus who operate from the margins of culture and, because of liminal circumstance, are recovering a much more biblical form of community. Either way, we were trying to describe the kind of community that is able to integrate adventure and movement, a community that experiences a togetherness that happens only among people inspired by the vision of a better world and attempting to do something about it. The name we gave to the communal phenomenon that forms in adventurous mission and liminal discipleship is communitas⁸.*

Allow us to briefly reintroduce the term here. The best way to think about it is to imagine the kind of band of companions that form in the context of adventure, around a common ordeal, a challenge, a task, or in pursuit of a mission. This entry into a verge-like experience is called liminality. Liminality, remember, involves adventure, risk, journey, engagement, and courage and was explored as the subject of the previous chapter. When liminality "happens" (it can be deliberately cultivated), it fundamentally restructures the nature of preexisting relationships, friendships emerge from mere associations, and comradeship evolves from preexisting friendships. Being immersed in a communitas, participants experience an almost mystical togetherness that occurs only among a group of people engaging in a task bigger than itself. A different genre of love emerges from the experience of communitas – one that

1 - Material based on: Michael Frost (2006) "Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture" Henderickson Pub: Peabody p:108-125 & Alan Hirsch (2007) "The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church" Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, chapter 8

2 - Revelation 21

3 - 1 Corinthians 12:13

4 - Romans 1:1-3; Ephesians 4; Colossians 1:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 1-3

5 - Alan Hirsch (2007) "The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church" Brazos Press: Grand Rapids

6 - In anthropology, **liminality** (from the Latin word *limen*, meaning "a threshold") is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete (Wikipedia)

7 - Michael Frost (2006) "Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture" Henderickson Pub: Peabody

8 - **Communitas** is a Latin noun commonly referring either to an unstructured community in which people are equal, or to the very spirit of community. It also has special significance as a loanword in cultural anthropology and the social sciences (Wikipedia)

cannot emerge in the more static form of associations. The bonding is deep; people get to need each other; they get to know and rely on each other. They have to (sometimes for sheer survival), to overcome the liminal challenge in whatever form it is experienced.

Keep in mind that there is a direct and indissoluble link between liminality and communitas; they are two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, we can't have the one without the other. Therefore we will often join the two terms (liminality-communitas) to ensure that we appreciate the necessary dialectic inherent between the two aspects.”⁹

Kingdom Living Community
(www.CanberraForerunners.org)
20-3-2016

9 - Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch (2011) “The Faith of Leap” Baker Books p:53-54