

A Saturday morning in my community

Last Saturday morning for some reason I decided to take my two boys to our local park for a play and then to a café. When I arrived, there were two other people there, a young guy on a seat reading “Wild at Heart” – a well-known Christian book aimed at guys and masculinity. The other guy had obviously got there early to secure some space and a BBQ for a birthday party because he was sweeping away glass, hosing down a BBQ and setting up a “Happy Birthday” banner and some trestle tables. I picked up a broken bottle near him, put it in the bin and he gave me a “thanks mate” type of grin. I then had to chase after my 2 year old who had climbed up some stairs on the playground. Over the next 45 minutes of playing on the flying fox and other playground attractions, I had four short but interesting conversations with other dads who had come to the park to also give their wives some relief and to enjoy the sunny spring morning. All four guys were friendly and chatty and we discussed everything from the issue of broken glass near the BBQ area to how our wives deserved the break they are getting at that moment.

I then took my now hungry boys around the corner to the local shops, which has a small mall section with a café and bakery. We got some croissants and the boys were given a pink balloon each (to celebrate pink ribbon day I think). We sat near the café seating on a wall kind of thing. There were at least three other families there “like us” – which means they had young children and were quite, well, they looked like my wife and I ... (whatever that means).

As always, the kids all found a way of playing with each other, mostly centred on the flying balloon that had previously been in the clutches of my two year old. I exchanged smiles and “nice day isn’t it?” with the other parents before I took the boys to the supermarket to get some things. On the way an older dishevelled man came and tugged on my five year old’s balloon and asked my two year old’s where his was. My oldest son pointed to the sky and said “in space” at which the old man and I laughed.

Why am I telling you all this?

Well, it has taken too long for me to really hang out in my local community. We often go there to “get some things” etc... but not really hang out there. Interestingly enough, other people do hang out in these places. It is us who are missing out. While hanging out there, you find that everyone is actually “just like us” in different ways. We give and received friendship and happiness there and we understand each other’s lives as we recognise that we all leave only streets apart. I would even go as far as saying there is something akin to “family” as you spend time in your local community.

My aim is to do this as often as I can, every Saturday morning if possible. I am hoping that regularity may bring longer conversations, smiles with deeper understandings, collective action (pick up the broken glass) and a greater sense of being part of this Mitcham* family. By being a follower of Jesus, my involvement in this community takes on a ‘kingdom’ context. I want to be seeing what God is doing in my community and be involved with that.

My challenge to you is to discover what it is like to 1. Simply hang out in your community, be a part of in and in it, not just observe it. 2. Commit to your

community and to the people within it by being involved on a regular basis. 3. Be aware that as you do this, you are bringing the kingdom of God to your community.

I think this is what Jesus did. He travelled around. His community was wherever he was and with whom he was doing life with. He impacted the world one person at a time, in their own community context. Let us do the same.

Mike Hamilton

* Mitcham is a suburb in the east of Melbourne.