

## **“The Conversation We Are Not Having”**

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"What we have here is a failure to communicate."

That famous line from “Cool Hand Luke” has echoed through our culture for decades, and for good reason. It captures something we all experience but rarely examine closely enough.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "assume the position"? It can mean taking over someone's role, or it's what law enforcement might say during an arrest. But there's a third, more insidious meaning: assuming we know something about someone or some situation without really having all the facts.

And if we're honest, that's the position we assume far too often. When we think we know something we've only heard and not sought to understand fully for ourselves.

I've been thinking a lot lately about how assumptions cloud our relationships with others. We "think we know" what someone believes, what they meant by that comment, why they made that decision. Or worse yet, we listen to someone else who "thinks they know" without ever seeking first to understand the person themselves.

A neighbor doesn't wave back at you one morning, and suddenly you've constructed an entire narrative: they're upset with you, they're unfriendly, they've always been standoffish. But what if they simply didn't see you? What if they just received devastating news and were lost in thought? What if their mind was a thousand miles away? No one is ever in that situation, are they?

Someone at work supports a political candidate you oppose, and you assume you know everything about their values, their character, their intelligence. But have you asked them “why”? Have you listened to their story, their concerns, their hopes?

A family member makes a choice you don't understand, and rather than asking about it, you fill in the blanks with your own assumptions—and those assumptions create distance, resentment, even division.

This is how communities fracture. This is how communion breaks. When we use words and cursory knowledge to make decisions about who others are, we are demeaning the others in our lives and selling ourselves short.

Words can bind us together or tear us apart. Use caution with your words.

Here's something fascinating: the words “communion”, “community”, and communication all share the same Latin root—*communis*, meaning common, "shared," or "public." They derive from *com-*(together) and *munus-*(gift, duty, or service).

Think about what that means: Communication is the act of making something common—sharing thoughts, information, emotions with another person.

Community is a group of people who hold things in common, living and acting together.

Communion is a close relationship, a shared bond, the experience of partaking together in something sacred.

These words describe a beautiful progression: we use communication to build community, which allows us to experience true communion. They're inseparable. You cannot have genuine community without communication. You cannot experience communion—whether with God or with one another—without the foundation of honest, humble communication.

But when we assume instead of ask, when we fill in the blanks instead of listen, we short-circuit this entire process. We create the illusion of community while actually building walls.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote:

***"The only intelligible human controversy is a disagreement upon a basis of agreement. Our whole trouble in most modern controversies is an attempt to get an agreement upon a basis of disagreement."***

Read that again slowly. It's brilliant. It's saying we must agree what the problem is before we can ever agree on a solution to resolve it.

If we don't even agree on what our words mean—if we're not communicating clearly and listening carefully—how can we possibly understand one another? We end up like the builders of Babel, speaking what sounds like the same language but unable to truly comprehend each other.

I see this everywhere. In comment sections where people argue past each other. In family gatherings where everyone talks but no one listens. In churches where members assume they know what "those people" believe without ever having a real conversation.

This isn't a new problem. Decades ago, theologian Joseph Ratzinger observed a similar fragmentation within the Church itself—people remaining in the same institution but speaking entirely different languages, assuming they knew what others believed without ever truly communicating. He called it "a veritable Tower of Babel" (Gen. 11:1-9).

There has to be a different way and I Believe Christ leads us in that "different way."

So what do we do? How do we rebuild what assumptions have torn down?

We start by admitting we don't know as much as we think we do. We ask questions. We listen—really listen—not to formulate our response, but to understand. We seek clarity instead of assuming clarity. We give others the gift of being heard and understood before we judge or dismiss.

This is deeply Christian work. Jesus constantly asked questions: "What do you want me to do for you?" "Who do you say that I am?" "Do you want to be healed?" He knew the answers, but He invited people into communication, into relationship, into communion.

When we assume, we're essentially saying, "I don't need to hear from you. I've already decided who you are and what you think." But when we communicate—when we genuinely ask and listen—we're saying, "You matter. Your thoughts matter. Your story matters. I want to understand."

That's how community is built. That's how communion becomes possible.

Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

Notice He didn't say, "Where two or three assume they know what the others are thinking." He said gathered—brought together, united, in communion. And that requires communication.

When we truly communicate with one another—when we stop assuming and start listening—we're not just building better relationships. We're creating space for Christ to be present among us. We're participating in something sacred.

So, this week, I invite you to catch yourself when you start to assume. When you think you know what someone meant, what they believe, why they did what they did—pause. Ask. Listen. Seek to understand.

You might be surprised by what you discover. And you might just find that genuine community—and true communion—was waiting on the other side of that conversation all along.