

# A Fresh Perspective on Coffee

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Stan Abell/Brenda Freije

Oak Hill

- Yeah, I suppose acceptance makes more sense...and I think that's kind of the heart and soul of their community there.
- Yeah because I know that when we did the Podcast other places...when we set up with your laptop and the camera...we did feel a little self-conscious...at the Monon not so much

STAN: Good morning, welcome to The Garden Coffee House. So, that Friends clip has absolutely nothing to do with our service today, it just showed a coffee shop. Okay, okay so it does have a tangential connection...which we'll get to in a moment. Anyway...if you were lucky enough to be with us last week, you'll recall I mentioned The Garden is like a box of chocolates...you never know quite what you're going to get. I mean, last week we had a haunted house...this week a coffee shop—what's next?

STAN: Exactly, and there at the Monon with our goofy looking set up...right there in front of God and everybody...we have a conversation about the Bible passage we use here on Sunday mornings...

If this is your first time here, welcome. My name is Stan Abell, I'm the pastor here for The Garden at Oak Hill and this is my friend Brenda Freije. If you've been around for a while you may recognize Brenda...she's sung with the band before and preached here last summer...Brenda works with the Later at St. Luke's service and is getting dangerously close to finishing seminary. Now, if you've been to The Garden website lately and checked out the link to Fresh Perspectives...you'll notice our smiling faces there on the video Podcast. Brenda...welcome.

STAN: So, that's it...that's what we do. Our intent isn't to convert anyone...to preach...just to have a conversation about the Bible passage where people are...living their daily lives...their everyday community.

BRENDA: So Stan, the video clip?

BRENDA: And, Stan, I think for both of us, one of the most fascinating pieces we've wrestled with is what it means to be community. I think we've both asked the question...what does a church have to learn from a coffee shop like the Monon?

STAN: Ah yes the video clip...This morning we will be talking about fashion eyewear and its social implications...

STAN: Absolutely Brenda...If you've been around this place long enough you've heard me say there is just something unique and special about the community that is created here. It's more than a bricks and mortar, furniture, local art on the walls, etc....Like said before, I think we've both been fascinated at the sense of community created at The Monon Coffee company...

BRENDA: You see what I have to put up with when we film our Podcasts? I think, Stan, the subtle point from the Friends video clip in a COFFEE SHOP that Chandler's friends didn't see Chandler for the person he is. And, that is an essential element...if not the heart of what it means to be community. . And Stan, I think really that is the heart of what we are talking about today. What is community, how are we in community with one another...

BRENDA: It seems the Monon has created a safe place for people looking for a place in the world where they can be themselves...And frankly, I think that is the intent of the owner of the shop William Powell and his employees.

STAN: Brenda that's right. And it occurs to me that while we've been there every Friday for the last 18 months doing our Podcast—We've really both become fascinated with the sense of community there at the coffee shop.

**Callie** enters from outside, comes "into" the coffee shop —puts her things down and goes to counter to get coffee...takes seat

STAN/BRENDA: And it's funny how we ended up there...we tried several different places...Starbucks, the Brew Pub, but somehow that felt the most comfortable...I think because we felt like we could be anonymous

Callie: Maybe this is what it's like to go crazy-to keep looking for a world that isn't there. Oh, I've got a world here. No, I've got plenty of worlds, and I go all through them. Home, store, work, school, errands, bank, back to work, home, out again-my days seem like a barreling train. I do it all. And this is the real world, and none of it is me. I can talk all day and not say anything that's me. No one knows me. They think I'm a happy person. I know how to smile. I keep looking for a world where I can be me.

- Stan do you really think it was anonymous or more like we were just accepted for who we were...I mean, most people there seem to be comfortable with who they are and weren't bothered by what we were doing.

Callie: What am I supposed to do with myself? I mean, I talk her sometimes, but I don't say anything that's better than saying nothing. I mean, yes, I could stop in the middle of it all and get up in his face and see about us getting to know each other, but . . . even though there's

plenty of stuff inside me, I don't always know how to say it or even if I want anyone else to hear it, really. It's the hardest thing in the world to be yourself with other people, because what'll they say? "No, I didn't want to hear that. Just go back to being nice, smiley Jane Doe, thank you."

STAN: What a very empty feeling it is to feel alone...to feel as if you don't have a place where you are accepted for who you are. Brenda, I think at one time or another each of us has felt like an outsider. So often we find ourselves in a world where we **are judged**—judged by the way we dress, our house, our car, our job, our friends...I think we'd like to believe that kind of stuff was reserved for high school...you know cliques, clubs, etc.

BRENDA: Yeah...sometimes we make ourselves the outsider simply by not being comfortable with who we are. We want to belong and think we need to change ourselves in order to fit in. When we get older, we may be better at managing those feelings, it's amazing how sometimes our insecurities can get the best of us. There's a restaurant that I love to go to . . . let's just say it's somewhere on the north side of Indy. It's kind of swanky inside and has a great "vibe." Yet I always feel a little self-conscious when I walk in there. Because, there are a lot of beautiful people who eat there. You can look around the restaurant and see one well-manicured, well-dressed person after another. I have to give myself a reality check. I don't have to be beautiful like that to belong. At least in the type of authentic community I really want to be part of.

STAN: And Brenda, I think the most lonely many of us feel is when we are **disconnected spiritually**...when we can't find a place to go to share and explore our deepest questions of faith, God, and well...just life.

- I walked away from the church because of a painful period of **spiritual bullying** by a person I really trusted...Distorted image of God

STAN: Brenda, I think our jaws about hit the floor when that young woman finished the interview. Both of them really, but she just seemed to say in words perfectly what you and I have been struggling to describe as the unique sense of community built at the Monon and how it is really similar and connected to what we are doing here at The Garden...

BRENDA: Jennifer described what we do preach about as pastors – she summed it up in a few short phrases. Darn, and I spent 3 years in seminary trying to find that type of clarity!

STAN: Now Brenda, here is the funny part of the story with that young woman...her name is Jennifer. I spend most of my Monday mornings at the Monon...just kind of hanging out, doing light work. Well a couple of weeks ago, I was sitting at the big round table in the back...yes, finally, the big table open...all by myself...I can spread out laptop, external hard drive, coffee...earphones in,

KEXP live from Seattle on the internet radio...I was set! Well just as I was about to enter introvert Nirvana, this young woman came up to the table and says, is anyone sitting here? And before I could come up with some good off-putting remark, there was William acting like a mother hen..."So, Stan...is it okay if Jennifer shares the table?" Uhhhh...SURE.

So she sits down opens her backpack and pulls out a titanium covered Apple laptop...okay, she can't be all bad. But I have to tell you she did annoy me...she began making phone calls. I was so annoyed that I decided I'd fix her little red wagon...I began eavesdropping. As it turns out, she was writing an article on specialized agriculture for a newspaper she edits for in Texas, AND...it turns out she is a food writer for Nuvo.

Now, here's the thing...did I mention I'm an **introvert**? Did I mention I'm painfully shy? Most folks are surprised to find out that I'm shy...so what happened next well...astonishing. I summoned up all my worldly courage and peered over the top of my titanium covered Apple laptop and said...so, you're a food writer for Nuvo? Really, well, I love to cook...and boom, off to the races having lovely conversation about areas of mutual interest cooking...sustainable agriculture.

BRENDA: But you know Stan, what I find intriguing...is that it's like the Chandler and his glasses thing kind of...it's kind of like we see what we want to see...or maybe just assume things or not about people. You and I are very low key at the Monon...you may be the shy one in the bunch, but you always seem to want to be right in the mix...I prefer to hang back and a bit and not bother other people.

STAN: That's right Brenda...but here is the real kicker...every time one of the Monon regulars would come to the shop the day we filmed for today's service, they'd ask William...what's going on? Because...you know, we had invaded their space. Instead of just having the laptop computer, we turned their coffee shop into a movie set. So they'd ask...what's going on...William's stock response was to call for the pastor..."Pastor...tell them what you all are doing." Well, I began explaining to this one woman, **Amy**, that our church uses film and secular music in our services, and that this week we were doing a service on what it means to be community...what churches could learn from a coffee shop and what coffee shops might learn from a church. She said, oh gosh that's so neat...I think a lot of churches could learn a few lessons. So I said, do you have a church...Oh yes, we have a wonderful church...what church...Oh, we go to St. Luke's, you know, the big one up on 86<sup>th</sup> and Meridian. Umm, yes, I am familiar with that church...I'm a pastor there. You know Brenda, she and I got a big laugh out of that one...but it really wasn't lost on me that I met a member of our church at the Monon...it reconfirmed for me the blurred lines of community and that community occurs when we are intentional about being in relationship with

others...and that...for me Brenda, we experience God when we open ourselves to experience others authentically.

BRENDA: In thinking about community, I realize that's what authentic community does for us. It cradles us, provides support, and then launches us with the strength we need to face our real lives. We can't run from our lives – it's a lot easier to live our lives knowing we are not alone – we can be in community if we choose. And, hopefully when we choose to be in community with someone else, we'll find out more about ourselves along the way.

STAN: You know Brenda, for me, that song evokes such a strong universal yearning for a lot of us...I think many of us continue to yearn and search for **a better part of ourselves**...and struggle to find a place...people...where we can find that...people who accept us for who we are...

And, as I step back and reflect on what it means to be a community...what it means to have a deep, authentic, life-changing experience of God...I truly believe *that* is the intangible so many of us feel here at Oak Hill. When we come here together on Sunday morning...together in this space, in relationship with one another we build a deep connection with a mystery none of us completely understand. And Brenda, that really is what our bible passages today point towards...

Brenda: **Matthew 18:20 (NRSV)**

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

BRENDA: Community, whether here, at the Monon, or wherever we find ourselves is possible. If you are willing to be community. If you are willing to be vulnerable and open up to those around you. For, as the Ecclesiastes text says, we are better together than we are alone:

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NRSV)**

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

STAN/BRENDA: You know Brenda, that first passage from Matthew...where two or three are gathered in my

name...that is one of those passages that I heard over and over...

BRENDA...hopefully today, we've heard it in a new way.

STAN...Yes. I don't think either one of us have ever intentionally walked into the Monon and said...gee let's invoke the presence of God...

BRENDA: Or geez, let's try to create community today.

STAN: Here at Oak Hill, at The Garden...maybe it is a little different, sure we intentionally talk about God...but the community, the deep experience of God happens because of the people here...the people here being willing to experience God through others...willing to be in this journey together...