We all know the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Growing up, there are many people who influence our lives and help shape who we are as adults. It’s not just our parents, but grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, teachers, coaches, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and pastors. These are just a handful of the members of our “village.” These people help us define who we are, shape our view of the world, love us, support us, discipline us, and many times they tell us the same things our parents have said in a way that makes it seem like the best idea, ever!

We need a village to help us grow up because raising a child is difficult. We need a village because we are social beings, designed to thrive when in contact with others—not in isolation. To quote the great philosopher- John BonJovi- “No man is an island.”

I am a grad student, but not your typical one. I am 35 years old and have lived some life. I did not finish my undergrad right after high school, then transition to a master's degree program. For me, there has been a lot of life experiences between high school and grad school. But, some things are the same for me—I pay large sums of money to do insane amounts of homework, get graded and critiqued on a regular basis, and submit myself to tons of stress.

When I started grad school, I moved 1500 miles away from my family, friends, job, and church to do it. In addition to the stress of the move and starting an intense graduate program, I began to lose my hearing making school even more of a challenge. I share this not for sympathy, but to help you understand where I was in my life and how it shaped me. Not surprisingly, the stress began to build. A friend I had met through school found out that I was ELCA Lutheran. She was ELCA Lutheran! She invited me to come to church with her.

Over the years I have lived in many places and have tried many churches—once. I struggled to find a place to worship that made me feel as comfortable as my home congregation- the one my family and I have been members of for over 20 years. I agreed to join her and her family for worship the following Sunday, but was apprehensive. What if I didn’t like the church? Would that affect my new friendship? To be quite honest, I kept my expectations low. I showed up that Sunday, and have continued to show up every Sunday that I am in town.

What I found was a group of people ready and willing to bring me into the fold, a pastor who spoke to my heart and was willing to give me printed copies of her sermon
since I couldn’t hear her preach very well, activities to get involved in, and a general sense of warmth and love—I had found that feeling I get when I go to my home congregation! I found what I didn’t know was missing—a village.

Repeatedly in scripture we hear about our role as “child of God.” Not once does the Bible say, “And now that you are an ADULT of God, you are on your own!” I am forever a CHILD in His eyes and I NEED a village. I need people to love me, help me, celebrate with me, cry with me, pray with and for me, and be there to help shape my view of the world. Until I walked into this new church, I didn’t even know it was missing. My stress level lowered just sitting in the pew in the company of God and my new village.

Not only did I need a village to help raise me as a child of God, I needed to be a part of other peoples’ village. I needed to find the group of women who do yarn crafts so I could go sit, knit, and share once a month— an opportunity for me to be surrounded by these women, but also be a part of the group surrounding each of them. I found opportunities to get involved—to participate in the lives of the congregation and the Church as a whole. I was welcomed and given the opportunity to do many things, including: help with the Sunday School Christmas Program, serve communion, and be a part of the Lenten service speakers.

It does take a village to raise a child of God. I need people to participate in my spiritual life and I need to participate in theirs. But more than this, I started to think about Jesus. We are approaching his persecution, death and resurrection in the liturgical year. A few weeks ago the pastor in my new “village” preached about Jesus’ baptism and the voice of God that came down from heaven and said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22)

A couple weeks later she preached about the Bible passage from Luke chapter 9: the Transfiguration. Jesus is on a mountain and Moses and Elijah appear. In front of 3 of Jesus’ disciples: Peter, James, and John, a voice from heaven says, “This is my Son, my Chosen;- listen to him.” Maybe you noticed, as I did, that in both of these, God refers to Jesus as His Son. Jesus is not just A child of God, but THE child of God.

We are now in the season of Lent. As this liturgical season progresses, we will hear about Jesus’ death on Good Friday—a day that is always a powerful one for me spiritually. We will mourn with his followers at the death of a savior and share in their grief and the fear that there is no longer hope for us. On Easter morning we will hear the miraculous story of Jesus conquering death and resurrecting. This “child” of God...who lives, dies, and returns—all for us-broken sinners struggling each day with our humanness-continually falling short of our goals. Jesus comes to earth so that we no
longer have to experience the shame and punishment of our sin—he bares that burden for us.

This is a powerful thing, but we have a responsibility in all of this. We MUST be his village. If it takes a village to raise a child, our responsibility is to raise THIS child of God—Jesus. It is our calling to bring the resurrected Christ to the world. Without believers sharing this message of hope and forgiveness and love, the scripture becomes just another story in just another book.

We are called to demonstrate through love, action, prayer, and forgiveness. We are the village that raises Jesus up. We show the love of God in the resurrection of Christ. In Matthew 28:19-20 it says, “Therefore go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus tells us to be his village—to raise the resurrected Christ for the world.

I need people in my village. I need to be a part of other peoples’ village.

Most importantly I need to be a vessel for shaping the world—sharing the message of Christ’s death and resurrection with anyone and everyone in my actions and words, in my thoughts and prayers. I am baptized into the village of Jesus—who saved me from sin and death. It is my privilege, honor, and blessing to bring the resurrected Lord to the world—to the village.