

Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Psalm 119:1-8
1 Corinthians 3:1-9
Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon February 16th, 2020

A Picture of What Jesus' Welcoming Community Looks Like

This morning as we hear our gospel we are invited to sit on the mountain with the early followers of Jesus and envision the welcoming community Jesus talks about. A community where people who hurt other people genuinely repent for what they have done. A community where people who have been the recipients of hurt find it in their hearts to offer forgiveness to the one who repents. A community that has good conflict resolution protocols in place. A community where people live in stable and healthy relationships loving one another as Jesus loves us.

A community where all people are empowered to be participants. A community where no matter what gender expression you identify with you are accepted and valued. A community where you are respected, and not objectified, or judged as being lesser to someone else. A community where you are given the same rights as everyone else. Not left desolate due to some bias rule or regulation or unwritten code. A community where honesty and trust prevail.

This is the community Jesus invites us to be a part of. This is the love we are to imitate in our community and in our lives. Unfortunately, we struggle at times to live this love out in our communities. We get angry with each other. Our pride gets the best of us. We justify instead of apologize. We seek out revenge instead of forgiveness. We divide instead of unify.

Anger is one of the most common emotions we experience in our day to day lives. And it is also one of the hardest emotions to deal with. How many communities have we seen severed or completely broken up, over an inability for people to work through their anger? How many of our personal relationships have suffered, because of our struggles with anger?

We all know the challenges that come with trying to be a community where repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are lived out. Yet, Jesus continues to encourage us to be this kind of community. To strive for reconciliation where possible. To humble ourselves to repent when we wrong someone. To find the grace to forgive when someone has hurt us.

Now, sometimes Jesus' words around anger and even loving one's enemies has been interpreted in a way that excuses someone's abusive behavior, and turns us into martyrs. Jesus is talking about an environment where there is both a person or persons who express genuine repentance, and a person or persons who then offers forgiveness. Jesus isn't talking about us staying in unhealthy communities and relationships where we continue to be abused.

Even when Jesus challenges us to love our enemies, Jesus invites us to do this through prayer. To let go of the need for revenge and forgive so we can move on. Not to re-enter into an abusive relationship or to forgo justice for that matter.

What Jesus is encouraging us to be is a community where all participants are able to reflect the repentance and forgiveness that Jesus models for us.

And as much as we have seen communities fail at living this out, we have also seen communities do this well. It is truly life giving to be part of these communities where people genuinely care for each other and find healthy ways to work through their conflicts with one another.

Like anger, we struggle at times with respecting each other as equals. Our egos can get the best of us. Our attraction to someone else can turn into obsession and objectification. Interfering with our ability to respect that person. Our selfishness can impact our ability to think of someone else's needs.

Now, sometimes Jesus' words around divorce can be used as a weapon to guilt and shame people into staying in relationships that are harmful to themselves and others.

Jesus isn't expecting us to be in a relationship with someone who is intentionally hurting us, whether it is physically, emotionally, mentally, or through some form of neglect. Our relationships are supposed to be life giving empowering us to love others as Jesus loves us.

What Jesus is advocating for is all the women who are left desolate if a man chooses to divorce them, because according to their laws, a woman who is divorced can't remarry. And in those days women couldn't work to receive an income. Their survival was tied to their spouse. Jesus is advocating that women should be given the same rights as men. Or in other words, they should have access to the same things.

The community Jesus wants for his followers is a community where everyone can participate. Where everyone is respected and loved. Where everyone's rights and freedoms are protected.

We all know the challenges that come with trying to be a community that is inclusive to others. A community where everyone is accepted for who they are. Yet, Jesus continues to encourage us to be this kind of community. To strive for equality where possible. To humble ourselves enough to know that someone who is different from us has something valuable to offer. To find grace to accept people where they are without judgment.

And as much as we have seen communities fail at living this out, we have also seen communities do this well. Communities who are inclusive to others. Where you feel welcome once you walk through the door. Where you are amazed by how much you learn from the diversity that surrounds you in these communities. Where people stand up for each other when faced with injustice.

Jesus stands on the mountain top and gives us a picture of what the kingdom of God looks like, and how we are to reflect this kingdom in our world. Jesus does this not only with words, but also with actions.

As, Jesus listens to our hurts. Forgives us when we repent. Treats us as equals.

Respects us for who we are. Stands up for our rights and freedoms. Even hanging from a cross so that we can live in a world not ruled by Empires, but by a loving God who gives us spaces where we can be a community that reflects Jesus' teachings above.

Jesus loves us in these ways and encourages us to do the same to others.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for listening to us. Forgiving us. Welcoming us as we are. Standing up for us. Encourage us and give us the tools we need to live out your humility, forgiveness, welcoming love, and justice in our community and in our world. **Amen.**

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