

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:1-12

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

Sermon March 17th, 2024

To Take Up Our Crosses and Follow Jesus is to be An Inclusive Community

Jesus spends a lot of his time and energy in communities where people have been rejected, isolated, mistreated, misunderstood, persecuted (**Image One**: someone homeless). Where they feel shame. Unsafe. Unwelcome. Alone.

Street workers, tax collectors, sinners, the mentally ill, divorcees, the poor, the differently abled. These are the people Jesus hangs out with. These are the people Jesus says to his disciples are welcome into the kingdom of God (**Image One**).

Of course, this message is at times challenging for the disciples to hear and live out. A message that contrasts other messages out there that they may have grown up learning. Messages that taught them to stay away from these very people, because these people pose a threat to their wellbeing (**Image One**).

In response, Jesus is calling out these messages. Jesus is saying these messages are exclusive messages that have created so many barriers between people and God. Created so many barriers between one another. Jesus is challenging the disciples and anyone else who holds to these messages to let go of all their fear, anxiety, hate, misperceptions and stereotypes that they hold in their minds about these people (**Image One**).

Jesus is saying that it is their fear, anxiety, hate, misperceptions and stereotypes that they hold in their minds about these people that are threatening not only the wellbeing of these very people, but threatening the well-being of themselves. Not the street workers, tax collectors, sinners, mentally ill, divorcees, poor, differently abled (**Image One**).

It is their fear, anxiety, hate, misperceptions and stereotypes they hold in their minds about these people that get in the way of them being a gracious, hospitable, loving community. That get in the way of them experiencing God's love.

And before Jesus walks the line to Golgotha, he wants to make sure his disciples understand what it takes to be ambassadors of the kingdom of God. They need to let their seed die before they can bear the fruit of new life. They need to let their fear, anxiety, hate, misperceptions and stereotypes they hold about others die before they can live out the grace, hospitality, and love Jesus is calling them to live out.

On Thursday we acknowledged PIE Day (**Image Two:** the mathematical PIE answer). A day where we are invited to celebrate our diversity. A day where we are invited to envision what it would look like to become an inclusive community where everyone feels safe and welcome. An inclusive community where we welcome the street workers, tax collectors, sinners, the mentally ill, divorcees, the poor, the differently abled, women, children, the aged, the visible minorities, the many Indigenous people of this land, the people who identify with the LGBTQIA2+ community (**Image One**). Where we welcome and celebrate our diversity. Instead of fear it. Where we become the gracious, hospitable, loving community Christ calls us to be.

Today, we commemorate this day in our worship, in our community. We recognize that we carry with us fears, anxieties, hate, misperceptions, stereotypes about some groups of people, that hold us back from being all God created us to be (**Image One**). From being all Christ invites us to be. From being all the Holy Spirit empowers us to be.

We repent. We let this seed die. So, that we can experience life (**Image Three:** a split pic with seeds on one side and full-grown grains on the other). So, that we can grow in our capacity to love one another as Jesus loves us. So, we can grow in our commitment to seek out resources to learn about those who are different from us. To challenge the very stereotypes that stunt our growth as humans. So, we can grow in our effort to meet those we have perceived as the other at the table. Breaking bread together. Sharing and listening to each other's stories. Going from strangers to neighbours.

And yes, through living out this hospitality in the world, we will face pushback from the principalities and powers who continue to spread fear and hate. We will be confronted by those who continue to teach misperceptions and stereotypes about the people in our society who have been rejected, mistreated (**Image One**). We will have to take up our crosses to follow Jesus. Suffering with the marginalized people. We will have to give up our life to save it.

This is an unfortunate consequence in following Jesus into the margins of our society. Some people won't like us. Some people will hold up signs and call us names. Some people will even threaten us with violence.

But, like Jesus, through our grace, hospitality, and love, we will heal and redeem the street worker, tax collectors, sinners, the mentally ill, divorcees, the poor, the differently abled, women, children, the aged, the visible minorities, the many Indigenous people of this land, the people who identify with the LGBTQIA2+ community from their pain. From their loneliness. From their shame. We will show them a place where they feel safe. Where they feel welcome. Where they too are empowered to stand with us in this community of people who don't fear diversity, but celebrate it (**Image Two**).

When we let our seeds of fear, anxiety, hate, misperceptions, and stereotypes we hold about others die, then we can grow into the gracious, hospitable, loving people God has created us to be (**Image Three**). Then we can feel empowered to walk the line with Jesus to Golgotha. Then we can find ourselves standing before the resurrected Christ. Enjoying the new life we experience living in a community that celebrates and appreciates diversity.

Let us pray, gracious God, thank you for PIE, not just the delicious pie baking in the oven, but the mathematical anomaly PIE that shows us just how diverse our community is, and how we are called to celebrate and appreciate this diversity. Revealing to people your kingdom come. A kingdom where everyone feels welcome and safe. **Amen.**

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