

BECOMING A CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY 6

"SERVING GOD IS THE SPIRIT OF A C.C.C."

I've had a great time preaching this series. I've been encouraged by many of your responses. Some have suggested I copy and make this series available on CD. Some have suggested I write them into a book. A young 30 yr. old told me after sermon number 5 I ought to just start over and preach the series again! I'll likely just finish, and move on, but before I do, I want to share what I believe must be the spirit of this C.C.C. What one attitude, belief, or behavior will mark our lives in this new C.C.C? I believe it must be; it will be, one of servicing God. Not just serving one another, for that would be too self-absorbed; not just serving unknown strangers; for that would be too short sighted. The Spirit that will permeate and define our new C.C.C. will be Serving God...and in so doing, we will likely serve one another, and even unknown strangers.

Our scriptural foundation for this emphasis is found throughout the life of Jesus; from the Good Samaritan, to the Prodigal Son. From feeding 5000, to healing a blind one. From teaching the twelve to forgiving the thief; Jesus' life models our spirit... serving God, by serving God's world, and God's people. The apostle Paul captured and recorded that spirit in two places:

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tight to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Romans 12: 9-13

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had...he took the humble position as a servant. Philippians 2: 3-5, 7

I've heard it said that many people wish to serve God...but usually in an advisory capacity. Instead I'd like us to consider a different model of serving God.

For that we'll look to another of my heroes of the "faith"; Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's, who died in 2002. He once appeared on the cover of their annual report dressed in a knee-length work apron holding a mop standing over a plastic scrub bucket. The caption under the picture said; Dave Thomas earned his M.B.A! Here's how he described that picture: "I got my M.B.A. long before my Ph.D. At Wendy's, M.B.A. does not mean Master of Business Administration. It means Mop Bucket Attitude." "No matter who you are in this company, no one's too good to do the menial tasks." Dave Thomas got his M.B.A. from following the model of the Master. He modeled servant-hood by the way he treated his employees and customers; he modeled servant-hood by the way he served the public, and lived his life. We must earn our MBA in our new C.C.C.

I'd like to suggest 5 steps to developing this spirit in the process of becoming a C.C.C.

1. GET INTO OTHERS

Jesus spent his early life learning how to serve others in his dad's carpenter shop. He spent his later life serving others, while teaching his disciples this faith-skill. We've discussed already in this series the danger we see with the 21st Century Christian Church becoming so consumeristic and self-focused...at least the American version of it. I know the natural tendency for people who join a church is to begin to center their lives in their church, and that is a good/great thing. But I want you to help me hold us accountable that in the fostering of our great fellowship of believers, we will never overlook, or undervalue, or ignore others outside our community! Its fine to serve one another, but our service must eventually and intentionally extend beyond ourselves!

Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention and their aging and famous founder, Gen. William Booth, could not attend because of physical weakness. At the opening session of this wonderful collection of pastors and lay leaders; of delegates and representatives; he cabled his convention message to them, with the design it be read at their opening convocation. In his usually frugal way the telegram contained only one word. It was: "OTHERS." Here in the middle of this annual collection of friends and colleagues, gathered for fellowship, renewal of relationship, even some rest and relaxation, his heartbeat (patterned no doubt from God's own) was to be heard in one word; OTHERS.

In the midst of our joyous gatherings, the middle of our inspiring worship, and in the depths of our growing studies; we must not forget...OTHERS! We are here to serve God, by serving OTHERS! Get into Others. The second step to a "serving others" spirit:

2. GET OVER YOURSELF

I'm going to be frank with you for a minute. As important as it is for individual members of this congregation to be fed spiritually, to be ministered to corporately, to be connected relationally, to be growing spiritually; the Christian life is not ultimately about any of us! It is about God, and the primary relationship we are to have with God is one of us being Gods servants! Do you remember me saying once that SALVATION IS WHAT WE RECEIVE; SERVANTS ARE WHAT WE ARE; and STEWARDSHIP IS WHAT WE DO! I still believe that! I dream of a new C.C.C. that will be filled with servants, literally dying to serve God by serving one another, and outside others! There is no retirement for God's servants. There is no time off for good behavior for God's servants. There is a great need for humility and servant-hood to replace consumeristic individuality, and personal agendas. There is a great need for us to understand who we are and who/what God has called us to be. We are servants, and lest we think we are anything other, let me share this story.

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help them. Asked why by the rider, he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, ask for help...and I will come and help you again." The stranger was none other than George Washington, the United States commander-in-chief. A man who understood who he was in the larger scheme of this world. A man able to get over himself. I hope we will remember his lesson in servitude. Now, the third step in becoming servants in this new C.C.C.

3. GET HIGH ON GIVING

Next week I'm going to begin a new series detailing some of the intricacies of Godly and Biblical Stewardship, but this morning I want to share a personal testimony about the joy Susan and I have found in giving. Early in our marriage we made a vow to God and each other, that to the best of our ability we would tithe all the income God would give us. I know we've missed the mark perfectly, but as time has gone on, (and the boys moved on), we've been blessed beyond what we could have ever imagined 30 years ago. We have come to the place where we enjoy giving. We still try to be frugal stewards, and try not to be taken advantage of, but we have come to love giving, we've gotten high on giving.

I used to preach that we ought to give till it hurts, but I think that was wrong. Today I believe we ought to give till it feels good! I've heard it said this way: "If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving." A great quote, rendered greater by its author: Mother Teresa!

In his classic book about being Disciplined, Richard Foster shares a wonderful thought about the different ways people give and serve. I've changed the word service to giving; Let me share it with you.

Self-righteous giving comes through human effort.

True giving comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside.

Self-righteous giving is impressed with the "big deal."

True giving finds it almost impossible to distinguish the small from the large gift.

Self-righteous giving requires external rewards.

True giving rests contented in hiddenness.

Self-righteous giving is highly concerned about results.

True giving is free of the need to calculate results.

Self-righteous giving picks and chooses who will receive.

True giving is indiscriminate in its ministry.

Self-righteous giving is affected by moods and whims.

True giving ministers simply and faithfully because there is a need.

Self-righteous giving is temporary.

True giving is a life-style.

Self-righteous giving is without sensitivity. It insists on meeting the need even when to do so would be destructive.

True giving can withhold the giving as freely as offering it.

Self-righteous giving often fractures community.

True giving, on the other hand, builds community. And I would add:

Self-righteous giving looks at what is being given, to whom, and in what amount, and with what fanfare shall it be recognized; while,

True, Godly, joyful giving looks at what's left, and what other needs can be met!

In our new C.C.C., our spirit will be high on giving!

4. GET PAST YOUR PREJUDICES

I don't have time to point out and discuss each of our prejudices, but we must at least admit that we have them, and must continually be working to overcome them. In this C.C.C, skin color should not matter, economic status on either end of the spectrum should not matter, social standing; up-standing or out-casted; should not matter.

Religious affiliation or lack thereof; should not matter. Ethnic heritage should not matter.

In this new C.C.C. there will be a return to God's original plan manifested in Christ

Jesus:

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28

We need to get past our prejudices, and that begins by admitting that we have them. Our community is rife with prejudice against Native Americans; but we can create a new community where that is not true...if we will! Our community is rife with prejudice concerning newly released prisoners from the ND State Penitentiary; but we can create a new community where that is not true...if we will. Our community is rife with prejudice against the poor, the homeless, single parents, welfare recipients, sex offenders, and addicts of various stripes; and a decision to create a new community where "THOSE PEOPLE" might find comfort and hope is well within our grasp...if we will!

Think about that as I share this story. In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior. Think of how much greater his amazing life might have been, had he been able to meet Jesus that morning in church. Think of that every time you look at someone "different", this week! We must get past our prejudices.

5. GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Serving God is not always easy, and it's not always hard; sometimes it's just different; out of our comfort zone. I remember the kids returning from St. Gabe's with head lice...that made some people uncomfortable, some even left our church because we subjected their kids to such conditions.

I remember praying and pleading for money to send our first group to Bolivia, a long distance from our comfortable “lets just send them the money”. Imagine those 300 in worship right now in Santa Cruz, and where they might be had we not gone. I remember telling Barb she better listen to God telling her to go to Ghana; but little could I imagine how uncomfortable her life would continue to be, as she listens and serves!

My friends, not all our discomfort will take us overseas, or to the reservation; but we must get over the impression that serving God is safe, easy, inexpensive, and certainly ‘comfortable’. It doesn’t have to be hard, but sometimes it is! I love this story.

Douglas Maurer lived in a small Missouri town when he got sick. He was 15 years old. His temperature ranged between 103 and 105. Finally his single mother took him to the hospital in St. Louis, where Douglas was diagnosed with leukemia. The doctors told him in frank terms about his disease. They said that for the next three years, he would have to undergo chemotherapy. They didn't sugarcoat the side effects. They told Douglas he would go bald and that his body would most likely bloat. Upon learning this, he went into a deep depression.

After a few inconsolable weeks past, His aunt called a local floral shop to send Douglas an arrangement of flowers. She told the young clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who had leukemia. When the flowers arrived at the hospital, they were beautiful, and they were hand delivered...by the florist who took the order. Douglas read the card from his aunt, then looked broodingly at the young girl in the florist apron. She said: "Douglas--I took your order. I work at Brix florist. I had leukemia when I was 7 years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you, my name is Laura. His face lit up, as she left the room, and left Douglas with hope.

It's funny: Douglas Maurer was in a hospital filled with millions of dollars of the most sophisticated medical equipment. He was being treated by expert doctors and nurses with medical training totaling in the hundreds of years.

But it was a salesclerk in a flower shop, making \$6.50 an hour, who--by taking the time to care, and by being willing to go with what her heart told her to do--gave Douglas hope and the will to carry on.

My friends, we must move beyond our comfort zones, and go with what our hearts tell us to do! God's not writing much on the walls these days, but God is still prompting you to go visit the nursing home, offer forgiveness to that estranged son, lend a hand to that stranded stranger, fix a meal for that single mom and family, baby sit for free this weekend, give more than you can afford, buy that soldier in uniform his lunch; serve with all your being because its in your nature, your God inspired nature...to do so!

Serving God will be our Spirit when we Get into Others, Get over Ourselves, Get high on Giving, Get Past our Prejudices, and Get out of our Comfort Zones. Bring it on!

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1. GET _____

2. GET _____

3. GET _____ ON _____

4. GET _____ YOUR _____

5. GET _____ YOUR _____

