

Message Notes October 4th, 2020
The Good and Beautiful Community Week 4: The Serving Community
(Philippians 2:1-5; Luke 22:24-27; John 15:13)

• **The iCulture**

- So, we're continuing to work our way through this series called "The Good and Beautiful Community" based on the book by James Bryan Smith. So far, we've talked about the importance of faith *and* action, finding the proper balance between the two with God's grace. We've talked about being a "peculiar community," being a different kind of people who live for a different Kingdom. And we've talked about being a "hopeful community," who live with such hope that people ask us "why," learning to share our faith more and more.
- Today, we're going to talk about being "the serving community." *The serving community.* "Service" might sound like kind of a bland, overused topic, but I believe this could be one of the most important things for us to think about during this current season we're in.
- I want to make an observation about our society that I have no ability to prove empirically—there might be someone with a degree in world history that could validate or invalidate this, but I think general awareness and experience make this so clear that I'm just going to state it bluntly:
 - *I believe we live in the most "Me-Centered" society in the history of civilization. We live in the most self-centered culture the world has ever known.*
 - Even if you could present evidence that this is not 100% accurate, that there have been other cultures that are *more* self-centered, I think it's indisputable to say that at least we are *one of the most* self-centered cultures to exist. Is that fair?
 - Look at how we operate as a society. Look at every single message sent to us through marketing. Look at the narratives that run through our media. Look at the political discourse. Look at the technology we create: one of the most influential pieces of technology created in this century starts with the letter "i". Everything is "i" today. It's not just iPhones—we are the *iCulture*. We have been groomed through every step of our lives in modern times to be individually-focused and centered on ourselves.
 - It wasn't always this way. Some people in our church can remember a time when our cultural focus was a bit different. But in recent times, *"it's all about me."* That doesn't mean that every person lives like this; you can find plenty of people and sub-groups who operate differently. But in terms of the dominant narratives and focus of our broader culture, it's pretty apparent.
- So, on the one hand, as Christians, we belong to a community that is meant to be the most *other-centered* people on the planet. But, on the other hand, as 21st Century Americans, we live in a culture that is one of the most *self-centered*. What do we do with this contrast? How do we take this opportunity to be *different* as people in whom Christ dwells, who live for God's Kingdom?

• **Service Projects**

- What's interesting is that, while we're a Me-Centered culture, it's very common to talk about service projects and causes in our day. More than ever, it's very popular for all kinds of organizations to advocate social movements and charities. Major companies frequently engage in community outreach and community service. Think of any professional sports team you follow and I'll bet that franchise or that league has regular projects and causes.
 - I remember in college every year we had a major Day of Service where students would take a whole day off class and serve somewhere in the surrounding community. And that was a Christian College, but I see non-Christian colleges doing it, too. Churches of all sizes have their regular events and programs that serve the community. It's very easy to find local, regional, national, and global opportunities to serve—they're everywhere.
- To be clear—this is a good thing! It's wonderful that it's "cool" for companies and organizations to be community-minded and service-minded, it's a good thing for our world today!
 - But I think there's a really important distinction we have to make if we're going to talk about Christlike, biblical service—if we're going to talk about being a *serving community*: there is a difference between doing *service projects* and *being a servant*.

- *There is a difference between engaging in service projects and having the heart of a servant.*
- It's popular, it's cool, it's common to do service projects—and that's great! But it's not popular and it's not common to see people, let alone whole groups of people, who have the heart of a servant. It's pretty easy to do a service project for a couple hours, or a day, even a few weeks. It's very hard to become a servant. There's community service, and then there are communities of service.
- A culture of service projects says, "This is cool, this makes me feel good, this makes me look good—now I'm done." A culture of servanthood says, "Because Christ lives in me, I no longer live for myself, I live for others; because Christ, the highest King, stooped down to wash feet, I will stoop down to serve others in my neighborhood, in my office, in my church, in social media, and in my own home."
- A culture of service projects says, "I'm going to serve in this time and place for this program, but when this event is over, it's about me." A culture of servanthood says, "I don't need to make much of myself because Christ is my all in all He loves me with an everlasting love."
- A culture of servanthood says, "All my needs will be cared for in the Kingdom of God; therefore, my concern for my needs is secondary to my concern for the needs of others." A culture of servanthood says, "...do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves..." (Philippians 2).
- This mindset is absolutely foreign to our culture of Me-Centeredness. This is the culture of the Kingdom of God and this is meant to be the culture of the Church.
- **Pride**
 - If we're going to talk about serving, we have to talk about humility.
 - C.S. Lewis wrote a fascinating fiction book called *The Screwtape Letters*. It's a satirical, witty collection of imaginary letters between a senior demon and an understudy demon in the work of tempting a human away from God. In one of the letters, this high-ranking demon, named "Screwtape," is writing to his nephew, "Wormwood," about the idea of "humility" in the life of the "patient" Wormwood has been assigned to tempt. Here's what Lewis writes about humility here:
 - *"Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is especially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble,' and almost immediately pride—pride at his own humility—will appear. If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt—and so on, through as many stages as you please." It goes on, "You must...conceal from the patient the true end of Humility. Let him think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character...The Enemy," by which this demon means God, "wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it too be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another. The Enemy wants him, in the end, to be so free from any bias in his own favor that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbor's talents—or in a sunrise, an elephant, or a waterfall. He wants each man, in the long run, to be able to recognize all creatures (even himself) as glorious and excellent things."*
 - Did you get that? We falsely think of humility as merely having a low opinion of ourselves, thinking lesser of ourselves. In fact, humility is just *thinking of ourselves less*—it's a kind of holy, blissful self-forgetfulness. It's a condition in which we come to treasure the value of others equally and greater as we value ourselves. It's where we come to see everything, including our own lives, as a gift from God and for God. That's it. And that's the core of servanthood.
 - You can't become humble by trying to become humble. You can only become humble by thinking of yourself less and living more for others—by serving. And you can only do that if you know you are already loved completely and cared for completely by a perfect God.
 - Things are not as they seem. God's ways are not our ways, God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Fame on earth and fame in heaven are not the same thing. The way God evaluates our lives is completely different from the way the world evaluates. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The greatest in the Kingdom of God is the one who serves.

- **Other-Centered People**

- We follow a Savior who is *other-centered*. He said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves,” (Luke 22:26-27).
- In the same way, Paul wrote to the Philippians, “...in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:4-5).
- Our society has a lot of problems. Sometimes, looking around, it feels hopeless and helpless—what will it take for us to be changed, to be healed? Honestly though, when I think of all the divisive issues we’re wrapped up in right now, I think our greatest problem is not many things, but one thing: *Pride*. We’ve become too proud to listen. Too proud to compromise. Too proud to work together. Too proud to serve another. Too proud to care. Too proud to live in peace.
 - What would it look like to become servants, Christlike servants, in our current cultural climate? Maybe, just maybe, if the Church could live this, we could be a community of hope in our nation once again. Can we, in a culture of pride and division and hate, *serve one another* in our differences and serve the world around us, with the heart of Christ? In this chaotic season of election, division, and pandemic, can we conform to Christ, rather than conform to the world?
 - We can. And we must. We must follow our Savior. Look to Jesus, love like Jesus, be like Jesus, surrender to Jesus—that’s the only cure.

- **True Happiness**

- Albert Schweitzer in the early 20th century said, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” It sounds similar to some of the things Jesus said, doesn’t it?
- When I stand with couples on their wedding day, somewhere in the ceremony I like to say something like this: I look at the groom first and I say, “Do you want to know the secret to a happy marriage? It’s not about you, it’s about her (pointing to his bride).” I leave a little pause and people often chuckle, thinking that’s all. Then I look at the bride and say, “Do you want to know the secret to a happy marriage? It’s not about you, it’s about him (pointing to her groom).”
 - The same can be said for life as a whole: if you really want to be happy, really want to be fulfilled, really want to live a life that counts, then live in love with the mindset of a servant. Live with the attitude, “It’s not about me; it’s about Him and them.”
 - As you go from here, don’t just think about it, do something about it:
 - Be a servant at home—do something that you wouldn’t normally do, expecting nothing in return; let others choose where you’re going to go or what you’re going to do without complaining.
 - Be a servant at work—take time to listen to a coworker; do a project that helps someone else.
 - Be a servant at church. Be a servant in everyday life.
 - Keep doing those service projects! Keep doing those mission trips! But don’t just do that stuff. *Become* a servant. Look for the little things and keep doing them until it’s not just something you do, but someone you are. In the name of Jesus. Amen.