

Message Notes October 18th, 2020

The Good and Beautiful Community Week 6: The Reconciling Community (Matthew 18:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:32)

• The Family Resemblance

- Family resemblance is a pretty cool thing. Our kids are now 6, 4, 3 and almost-2. This fall, as Julia started Kindergarten—Covid-era Kindergarten, that is!—our boys also moved up a class in Pre-School here at Trinity Childcare. And do you know what we are starting to hear from the classes when our boys move up? Now that they've had Julia and then Edison, when Gideon and Joel come along the teachers are saying things like, "*Oh, he's definitely a Laysers!*" Yes, they certainly are.
 - What is it about family resemblance that's so clear you can even detect it in preschool? All four of our kids are unique: they really do have distinct personalities, gifts, even looks. Julia and Edi are lanky blondes; Gideon is a ginger football player; Joel is somewhere in between. Julia loves creativity, Edison loves math, Gideon and Joel just love to tackle each other. All from the same family, all so unique.
 - But then, there's also something about them that makes people go, "Oh yeah, that's a Laysers kid!" Maybe it's a personality thing, because they're all part of the same zoo that is our home. They have the culture of "the House of Laysers." Maybe it's their big eyes that light up with that same twinkle. Maybe it's their mom's cute nose. Maybe it's their dad's long fingers. Maybe it's all of the above.
 - Do you know what I'm talking about? Have you had those extraordinary experiences where you've known someone for a long time, then for the first time, you meet their parents, or their siblings or their cousins—and this lightbulb goes off: *oh, they have their mother's smile; they have their dad's eyebrows; they use the same quirky mannerisms when they tell a story; they use the same inflections when they say these certain words.* It's the family resemblance.
- You know, in a way, Jesus spoke about the family resemblance of the Kingdom of God. He highlighted one particular trait; do you know what it is?
 - I'm talking about Matthew 5:9 towards the end of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are the way Jesus opens up his famous Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel: he begins this radical, world-changing sermon with this series of mysterious, provocative statements about what life in the Kingdom of God is like, what the good, blessed life really looks like.
 - In the second-to-last line, he says, "Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for they will be called children of God."
 - *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* Of all the potential characteristics to choose from—he doesn't go with, "Blessed are the righteous, blessed are the rule-keepers, blessed are the self-controlled, blessed are the pious..." he says, "the peacemakers." These are the ones Jesus says bear the Kingdom family resemblance. The peacemakers are the ones who we look at and say, "That's a child of God right there, that's what God is like," according to Jesus.

• Shalom

- I don't know about you, but when I hear the word "peacemaker" what first comes to mind is like, mediators in a civil dispute or ambassadors between opposing nations trying to cool down a conflict. And certainly, that could be part of this. But I think the peacemaking Jesus is talking about here is more than just mediating between opposing parties, helping people get along.
- The word Jesus uses here is the only occurrence in the Bible, it seems to be a compound word he made just for this occasion: it's literally mashing together the noun for "peace" and the verb for "make" or "do." Peace-doers, peace-makers.
- When we hear the word "peace" in the Bible, we have to think much bigger than just mitigating a conflict. Peace in the Bible goes all the way back to that amazing Hebrew word, "Shalom." And when you think of "shalom," you need to think back to the Garden: when everything was "very good." Shalom is when everything is as it should be, everything is right. Shalom is about

wholeness. In a broken, sin-stained world, shalom means *restoration to the intended glory of creation*. When the Kingdom of God is evident somewhere, you're seeing "shalom," you're seeing the world as it should be, you're seeing the earth look a little more like heaven.

- So, when the Bible talks about "peace," it's not just a general feeling of serenity or an amicable relationship coming between two previously opposing parties—it includes those things, but it's much bigger—it's the wholeness that comes from Holiness. *Peace is the wholeness that comes from holiness*. And it's a foreshadowing of the Life to come.
- So, Jesus is saying, when you *do that*, when your life *makes that*, you look like a child of God—you bear the family likeness. Followers of Jesus who are being transformed by His grace and who are living for the Kingdom live in such a way that they bring *shalom*, peace, into the world in which they dwell—into their homes, into their neighborhoods, into their towns, into their schools, into their jobs, into their cultures. More accurately, I should say *God brings it* through them. You can live this way apart from God's grace. When we do that, God looks and says, "That's my boy, that's my girl."
- **The Ministry of Reconciliation**
 - But why is this so central to the Christian life? Why would Jesus highlight this as the primary trait of "family resemblance" in the Kingdom? Let's go now to one of our readings for today from 2 Corinthians 5 and I think this will start to come together. Paul says, "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"
 - Reconciliation is so central to the Gospel that Paul says his calling is to a "ministry of reconciliation." He is a minister of reconciliation with a message of reconciliation.
 - Reconciling what? Answering that question reminds us of just how BIG the Gospel story is: the Gospel is the true story of how God is reconciling heaven and earth, reconciling humankind and Divinity, by His own initiative and at His own expense.
 - Because, the bitter truth is, we became enemies of God. We turned away, we rebelled, we decided to try and be our own gods. As a result, we created enmity, hostility, between ourselves and God, between one another, and even all creation. This is what we mean when we talk about "the Fall."
 - Reconciliation is God making our wrongs right: "*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*"
 - Reconciliation is a part of our story, it's who we are: reconciliation, peacemaking, forgiveness, mercy—as the old hymn goes, "This is my story, this is my song..." It's the central piece of this thing we call Salvation.
 - What are the values Americans talk about that are central to our nation? Things like freedom, independence, equal opportunities for all to flourish, right? It's part of our country's story, it's embedded into our cultural narrative. It's the same thing with reconciliation and the Church: for people of the Kingdom, reconciliation should be embedded into our lives because it's the central part of our narrative. If this is the case, how ought we to live in this world, at such a time as this?
- **Vertical and Horizontal**
 - You see, one way to put this all together is to recognize that the Gospel has a vertical element and a horizontal element—and both are inseparable. When Paul is talking about the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5, he's talking more about the vertical part: first and foremost, reconciling our relationship with God, this vertical relationship of us and God. But the rest of the New Testament, whether you're talking about Paul's writings or Jesus' teachings or others, make it clear that there are essential horizontal elements of the Gospel.

- Just as enmity with God means we'll have enmity with others and with ourselves and with creation—when you mess with the vertical piece, everything gets out of alignment—so also when you talk about reconciliation with God, there are inescapable consequences for how we must live with others. Once you heal that vertical peace through the blood of Christ, you can start to see healing in that horizontal piece that was once impossible—you start to see *shalom*.
 - Reconciliation works its way out from the heart of every believer who's been made right with God into their relationships with others, if ever so slowly at first. What was it that Jesus said was the greatest commandment? "Love God with all your heart...and love your neighbor as yourself." What was it that Jesus taught us to pray? "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."
 - And this is how the ministry of reconciliation for us becomes about both seeking to make people right with God *and* seeking to make people right with one another. Peacemakers. The reconciling community.
- **What's Our Contribution?**
 - Now, let's bring it down to earth: think about our society right now. One definition of reconciliation is, "to put an end to hostility." Wow. Look around these days! Is that just a little bit relevant?
 - Where are the peacemakers today? Where are the peacemakers in the church? Where are the peacemakers in this nation? Where are the children of God in this moment, in this hour? How are we contributing to this moment of history in this nation? In the days leading up to and after November 3rd, does the contribution of us Christians look like reconciliation, like *shalom*? I see a lot of political flags and signs, and that's fine, but I'm looking for believers who are most concerned with carrying banner of the Gospel in all this mess.
 - Is the deepest part of your story, of our story, the reconciling love of God, such that *peace* is starting to work its way out of your life in this age of bitter hostility? Whatever our politics, whatever our convictions, do people look at us and say, before anything else, "There goes a peacemaker, there goes a child of God,"? Or do they just see our political labels?
 - I'm not saying we go to the deep divisions of our day and patronize them with a pat on the head, "There, there, it's not a big deal, can't we all just get along?" I'm saying, do we really love our neighbors as ourselves right now? Are we listening to people who say they are hurting and experiencing injustice—listening first and speaking less? Are we seeking the Kingdom or are we seeking to preserve our own sense of control?
 - You can see the horizontal element of the Gospel when Paul says in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." This is what it looks like to live out the message of reconciliation. Just before that in verse 31, Paul describes the opposite way: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."
 - I am distressed when I look around at this moment we're living in, because whether it's people who identify as Christians or atheists or some other belief system, I see *bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and every form of malice*. Christians, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
 - Christians, people of the Kingdom, I am asking you, I am urging you today, in view of this historical moment and in anticipation of all that is potentially to come: will you recommit your life today to the ministry and the message of reconciliation? Will you give your life to this Gospel, that people might be reconciled to God and reconciled to each other, regardless of your politics and your convictions?
 - This Gospel has the power to reconcile black and white, conservative and liberal, democrat and republican—because Christ is all and Christ is in all. Let's bear that family resemblance, even if it costs us greatly.
 - As we approach this pivotal time, would you pray with me that we the people of God would be known as makers of peace who live out a Gospel of reconciliation? Only God can do this, let's surrender to Him again. Amen.