

Other-Centredness

Sermon – Steve Stanis

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Philippians 2:1-8; Luke 19:1-10; John 4:7-10, 15, 27-30, 39-42

Meaning of other-centredness: Seeking the best for one another - a form of selflessness

Today's sermon about discipleship focusses on other-centredness. I want to define this as seeking the best for one another. To do this we learn to take the time to understand one another. We do this by listening, by entering another's world, respecting others and being gracious to others. Other-centeredness is a broad practice of who we are becoming more than what we do!

Our Bible reading from Philippians chapter 2 verse 5 says:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus

Let me read the definition Jesus gave us of other-centredness:

Luke 10:27 "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'^[a]; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

To love our neighbour, we must understand our identity in Jesus---I urge you to read Ephesians chapter 1 over and over to imprint what God has done for us and how he sees us.

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Other-centredness starts with our mind and flows through to our heart. Other-centredness brings mind and heart together.

The Ultimate Model: Jesus, Son of God, is at the head and heart of other-centredness

We must be trying to follow the example of Christ recorded by Paul in Philippians chapter 2, verses 6-8.

- ⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used
to his own advantage;
- ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Jesus Christ left his place of equality with God. He put it aside. It could be translated 'He laid aside his privileges'. Christ surrendered his position of everything and made himself nothing. For our sake, Christ left behind heaven's glory. He took on the very nature of a servant so that he could meet our needs by being obedient to death on a cross...just for us! Jesus is the true and eternal example of other-centredness; he is the model to motivate us for one another.

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The Living Model: Jesus the man, modelling other-centredness.

Think too about Jesus, the man. The Gospels are full of encounters where Jesus models other-centredness in his conversations and encounters. He is able to empower people, whether it is Zacchaeus or the woman at the well. Wouldn't you like to be able to do this?

Think of Zacchaeus. Jesus reached out to this despised member of his community. He connected with him and conversed with him. With selfless love, Jesus changed the heart of this deceitful man.

Like most of us, we are people who live in complex, divided worlds. Right now is there a clearer example than Covid? In this single account, Jesus meets the individual – in their human struggle. “Come down, out of your hiding place!” This encounter with Jesus made Zacchaeus want to be more like Christ in his thinking and his attitude. His money truly meant nothing.

How about the woman at the well? She is a nameless, friendless, outsider woman, overwhelmed by her life tragedy. The woman becomes silent with a crisis; she meets a man ‘who told me all I ever did’. This is the key to every conversation.

How are we at connecting with people? Can we learn to focus on where they are at? Jesus engaged with her unspoken needs. This is a model for every Christian engagement with others; we meet at the point of another's need to be heard and accepted. The woman at the well

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had an encounter with Jesus that made her want to be more like Christ in her thinking and her attitude.

Disciple Model: Blueprint of other-centred discipleship expressed by Andrew

When Jesus began his ministry, he gathered around him 12 disciples. Surely these men give us a blueprint of discipleship.

We probably hear most about Peter. Today I want to mention Simon Peter's brother, Andrew. Andrew was the first to follow Jesus, the first to be called, the first to announce that Jesus is the Messiah. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist. Andrew had an encounter with Jesus that made him want to be more like Christ in his thinking and his attitude. Andrew met Jesus, followed him and stayed with him. On this journey, Andrew showed other-centredness by introducing individuals to Jesus.

At least three times Andrew is shown as one who introduced others to Jesus. First he introduced his brother, Simon, to Jesus (John 1); second, he introduced a small boy to Jesus (John 6) when Jesus fed the 5000; and third, he introduced a delegation of foreigners to Jesus (John 12). This was his primary goal. That should be ours too as a disciple of Jesus.

Learning from the disciple, Andrew, teaches us that other-centredness means we want to connect our relationships with a relationship to God. Other-centredness as a disciple means making space for people to encounter the very presence of God. Our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ must be grounded in real, human relationships that are nurtured

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through empathy and sharing that transforms lives. It is in our relationships that we show each other Jesus. All people are made in the image of God and so they are worthy of care, empathy and understanding. Our relationships should be filled with grace as we share in the lives of others, seeking to make disciples of Jesus.

Modelling Mercy: Other-centredness leads us to be merciful

The outworking of other-centredness is that, in our human struggle, mercy rather than judgement should be my response to others. Mercy is a 'love that responds to human need in an unexpected or unmerited way.'

Jesus showed mercy to us. Jesus showed mercy to us by bearing our sin and shame on the cross. Jesus showed mercy to Zacchaeus and the woman at the well through his conversation, commencing without judgement and always sharing truth. Andrew showed mercy, understanding that the ultimate relationship to be desired is between sinful people and a holy God. Other-centredness should be always about drawing people to an eternal saving relationship with their gracious and powerful God.

Let's return to the reading of Philippians Chapter 2 Verses 2-4

² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in

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humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

What about us? The theologian FF Bruce said, “Doctrine is never taught in the Bible simply that it may be known. It is taught in order that it may be translated into practice.”

To be other-centred is to show mercy, changing how I think and leading me to act. Is this what characterises our conversations, our attitudes, our actions and our lives?

Motives for Mercy

1. Show mercy to others because God has been merciful to you.

God is merciful. The Bible is the story of God's mercy and his love, his compassion and his grace.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

God wants me to act with mercy, compassion, love and grace towards other people. This is what it should look like to be an other-centred disciple.

2. Show mercy to others because God commands you.

In Micah 6:8,

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

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To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

We know these words but practising them is hard. Learning to be impartial and fair towards others within God's intentions is hard. Learning to love being merciful to others as God commands is hard. And living humbly in fellowship with God is hard.

This is what it should look like to be an other-centred disciple.

3. Show mercy as you grow in holiness.

We can look right without being right. Rules and regulations can help us look good in the eyes of others or even to feel good about ourselves. We must be right with God on the inside as we seek a genuine desire to obey him and serve him. As we become more like Christ, as we grow in holiness, to look right on the outside is to show mercy.

This is what it should look like to be an other-centred disciple.

4. Show mercy because it is a blessing.

Proverbs 14:21 says,

It is a sin to despise one's neighbour,
but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.

Being kind to other people is a blessing. Kindness should never seek to be rewarded. The blessing of kindness is generous thoughtfulness without any human measure.

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Blessings like this produce greater joy for those to whom it is shown. It is the Spirit who prompts us in kindness to be a blessing. It is the Spirit who prompts us to pray, surely the greatest blessing we can give another. Prayer should, therefore, always urge us to be other-centred.

Moving Forward

As Philippians has taught us, like Paul, I want to exhort us to be more like Christ in our thinking and our attitude as an other-centred disciple of Jesus.

As we share remotely in our relationships, let's encourage transformation that makes us more like Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit will produce his fruits in us - love, patience, kindness, generosity and the ability to forgive.

We were warned it would not be easy. Peter gave us all the encouragement we will ever need in 1 Peter 3:8-9

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

What a privilege that we get to do God's work and seek to shape a world reflecting Christ's perfect mercy around us here at KAC.

Grace and peace to you.