

Philippians 2:3-11

Essential Church The Jesus Way of Life

Introduction: Good Morning Church! We miss you dearly. Though we are separated by distance this morning we are so thankful that our bond is stronger and deeper than any distance or situation. Our's is a bond of the Holy Spirit, through the shed blood and broken body of Christ. We are the family of God, whether gathered or scattered.

A few weeks back we began a new series we're calling Essential Church. And the idea is that at this moment many of us are despairing and lamenting the loss of what the church had become in the west (our large gatherings, corporate worship, sunday school, etc). But we see this as an incredible opportunity for renewal. By asking ourselves questions like what is the church; and what is essential to the life of the Church, we believe that the church can and will go through a necessary renewal process and come out the other side of this more vibrant and more fruitful. And we believe the way forward is actually to go backward, to the beginning of the church. We need to look at the early church and see what was essential to their life. And what we find in Acts 2:42-47 is that the church made a liturgy - a habit and practice of devoting themselves to the Apostles doctrine, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And throughout the ages this has been a constant liturgy of the church though the manifestation of it may have taken different shapes or forms over the centuries.

By practicing this liturgy, and centering their lives on these essentials the early church was able to continually adapt, being both flexible and fruitful amidst the constant changes that they faced whether through growth dynamics, politics and persecution or the leading of the Spirit into new ventures. So we are spending the next 4 weeks looking at their liturgy -

The things that they habitually observed and practiced together. Last week we looked at the Apostles doctrine or Jesus Story - Seeing how it must be the framework for understanding the world and our own place in it. We need to be a community who disciple one another in the story of Jesus by telling and retelling it to ourselves and to one another in order to live it out before the watching world.

The Next practice or piece of Liturgy for the early church was - The Fellowship or Common Life.

1. The Jesus Way of Living

- a. The Jesus story wasn't just something that the Church subscribed to intellectually, it was a way of life. It was something they practiced. For quite some time now at Refuge we have been talking about our Discipleship to Jesus - Being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, Doing what Jesus did. I think this idea of The Fellowship or the common life in the early church really comes into play with becoming like him - That's what people were doing - everyone was seeking to practice the way of Jesus, to conform their life to the pattern of his life.
- b. We read from the earliest chapters in the book of Acts that this community was marked by bearing one another's burdens, making sure that no one lacked anything, no one considered anything their own. They had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them - for as many as had land they sold it and gave the proceeds to the Apostles and it was distributed to each as any had need... The way they did this was through modeling their lives after Jesus' own life. Jesus was a servant. Jesus' life was about others. He said of himself, **“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.” - Mark 10:45**
- c. Paul the Apostle many times exhorted the churches to live out the way of Jesus - in one instance he says - Bear one another's burdens and in so doing - you fulfill the law of Christ. - Galatians 6:2

- d. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. **“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”**
Philippians 2:5-8
- e. Most scholars and theologians believe that Paul is quoting an already well known hymn among the churches. This then was a summarized version of the career of Jesus recited again and again to bring about spiritual formation in the life of the church. What Paul is saying is - this is how you live as a Christian - you follow THIS example.
- f. Of course when I think of the servant posture or nature of Jesus I always go to that scene that took place on the night he was betrayed - Jesus, the rabbi, messiah, the king, God incarnate got up from dinner, clothed himself with a towel and proceeded to wash the feet of his disciples. Jesus picked one of the most culturally degrading, humbling acts to show his followers how we are to live our lives - foot washing. Service to others is the continual posture of God’s people.
- g. God’s people, disciples of Jesus, are people that proactively go low. Disciples of Jesus seek out opportunities to make themselves the servant of others.

2. A Liturgy of the Jesus Way of Life

- a. A liturgy of the Jesus way of life then is a servant/others oriented posture in our community and gatherings. It is determining that we will have the mind and posture of Christ in our interactions with one another - That this is the way to live! So this means, when we gather it’s not only about reminding

one another about the Gospel, and the grand narrative, but it also living that out toward one another

- i. This is done in a myriad of ways - But I think first it takes paying attention. And that comes by first realizing that God in Christ has paid attention to us, to our plight, to our salvation, to our ultimate happiness... We must become a people who pay attention and by paying attention then we will see the opportunities we have to bear one another's burdens and practice the way of Jesus. It brings back to mind the idea of Liturgy - it is something that is done by me but it is for us. What would it look like in our community if each of us determined to have "the mind of Christ" - in our interactions with one another? When we all have this mind and posture it creates a culture of service and grace, or hospitality and generosity, of welcome and acceptance.
- b. It's that question again - What would Jesus do if he were me? If Jesus lived my life, with both its opportunities and challenges, what would he do? The idea is to live the way Jesus lived. You take his life and teachings as your template, your model, your pattern. It is practicing the way of Jesus as our way of life.
- c. What might this look like in our everyday lives? Paying attention; Listening well in conversation in order to understand and serve; good hospitality - looking to fill people up, and bring healing and comfort.. It's remembering that like Jesus we are called to serve rather than be served..
 - i. It's a determination that when I spend time with someone they go away with a sense of being refreshed, loved, heard, and helped, as though they had been spending time with Jesus himself. (Hear that again!)
 - ii. It's taking time out of your day to check in on someone else. It's taking time that is "me time" and using it to pray for the needs and comfort of others. It's cooking a meal for an individual or family that is burdened by

circumstance. It's using your tax return to support someone's financial need rather than satisfying your desire to have more... It's a sacrifice, but it's a worthy sacrifice because it is modeled after the sacrificial life of our king and savior Jesus..

- d. If this servant posture of Jesus is a liturgy, a practice, and a habit of our community it will not only shape our hearts and desires, but it also prepares us for mission. As we practice this servant posture with other followers of Jesus, we will begin to practice it with those who are not Jesus followers, those who are outsiders. We will begin to see those outside the church as people to be loved and served, not ignored, judged or condemned..
- e. As we practice this posture with one another it trains us to see the rest of the world from this position - people to be loved and served, people to be redeemed.
- f. Just as Christ loved and served this world, and gave his life for it..
- g. *"The church is elected to responsibility, called to be the church to and for the world - not in order to save it or conquer it or even transform it, but to serve it by showing what redeemed human community and culture look like, as modeled by the One whose cultural work led him to the cross. In short, were sent out to be martyrs, witnesses of the crucified one."* - Craig Hovey, *To Share in the Body*
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