

Jeremiah 29:1-14

A Creative Minority What is a Creative Minority? Part 2

Introduction: If it is your first time joining us - Welcome! We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. And along with that we are teaching through the Bible on Sunday mornings - the main themes and characters. We are currently doing this mini series called *A Creative Minority* using the books of Daniel and Jeremiah as Catalyst for how the people of God live faithfully as a religious minority.

When the people of God were taken into exile, as found in the book of Daniel, they refused to go into the actual city of Babylon and instead had settled outside of the city walls by the river. Two reasons for this: One - they did not want to be corrupted by the Babylonian pagans and the second is because they believed that it would only be a short while and the captivity would soon be over. God spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah and instructed him to write the letter we just read to these captives. The instruction - Go into the city, cultivate life in it, seek the peace and prosperity of it, for in it's peace you will find peace...

This is what Daniel and his friends did -they embraced and assimilated into life in Babylon without losing their distinction and influence as the people of God. Though they were Babylonian in the sense that they worked for the Babylonian government. They dressed Babylonian. They talked Babylonian. They succeeded in Babylon. They had jobs/careers in Babylonian government that they succeeded at. Yet they were very much still faithful as Jewish people. Even in the face of persecution, and death they did not move but stood firm in their jewish faith and identity.

The Book of Daniel has helped the people of God for centuries in thinking deeply and strategically about how we live faithfully to Jesus, and his kingdom in a culture that has a competing vision of what it means to be human a competing vision of flourishing. A competing vision of freedom. A competing vision of life. How do we live in a culture like this and not just exist, but LIVE, work, cultivate a kingdom of God counter culture??

Jonathan Sacks the UK's chief Rabbi, coined the term Creative Minority to describe the way the Jews have existed throughout history - beginning with the exile - they maintained their distinction but not by just surviving, but contributing to the flourishing of the world through redemptive participation. He writes, *"To become a creative minority is not easy because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith, seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part. This is a demanding and risk-laden task."* - Jonathan Sacks, *On Creative Minorities*

"A Creative Minority is a christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships, knotted together in a living network of persons who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus for the renewal of the world." - Jon Tyson, *A Creative Minority*

This morning I want to continue talking about this vision of a creative minority and how God might be directing our church and community to practice the way of Jesus for the renewal of our city.

1. The Light and Salt of the World

1. When we think about what it means to be a creative minority we should be thinking in terms of Jesus radical vision of the kingdom of God and it's people as seen in the sermon on the mount - A people who's whole world, and life is radically different - a kingdom tuned people. *"What is taught here (In the sermon on the mount) is symptoms, signs, examples of what it means when the kingdom of God breaks into the world which is still under sin, death, and the devil. You yourselves should be signs of the coming kingdom of God, signs that something has already happened."* - Joachim Jeremias
 1. We do that by living out the vision of the sermon and in that way we are salt and light.
 2. Karl Barth said, *"The church exists to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to the world's own manner and which contradicts it in a way that is full of promise."*
 1. This means that our kingdom witness isn't just about critiquing or deconstructing culture but about living out a new, kingdom of God vision for human identity, purpose, and

flourishing. This will include a radical dissimilarity and new incredible hope and potential.

2. **How do we actually do this?** - Covenantal Community; Compelling Narrative; Counter Cultural Ethics; Counter Formational Practice; Kingdom Allegiance; And Redemptive Participation..
 1. Last week I rushed us through the first two points of Covenantal Community and Compelling Narrative - for which I apologize (Talk about this - my excitement resulted in a kind overwhelming and flooding with information - an information dump. I am sorry for that. I don't want to just speak to brains, I don't want to rush through things - I want to slow down and to speak to hearts, and I believe God is not just after our minds but also our hearts, our desires. And I want to speak to that. So, in light of that we are going to slow down this morning and only talk about Counter Cultural Ethics.
2. **A Creative Minority is defined by Covenantal Community** - Our influence will be determined by the level of our self-sacrificial commitment to one another and our neighbors, and our willingness to see things through even when things get hard.
 1. *"The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is....a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community, that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history."* - Will Willimon
3. **A Creative Minority is fueled, driven and framed by a Compelling Counter Narrative** - the full biblical story of God's loving relationship with his people (Made by God, we are made for God). Out of that flows a substitute vision for the economy, education, human sexuality and many other areas - all of these larger issues fit into this all encompassing story. How we view God's relationship to humanity and his desires for us changes everything.
4. **A Creative Minority is defined by Counter Cultural Ethics/ A Distinct Moral Vision**
 1. The people of God or a Creative Minority are not formed by the culture around them whether modern, post modern/secular, spiritual or religious. God's people are formed by the word of God - the redemptive narrative of scripture, and the way of Jesus. Jesus our redeemer, savior and king defines right and wrong, goodness and truth for us. In Jesus' life and teachings he give us a distinct ethic and principles of the kingdom of God - Specifically laid out in Jesus'

vision for life and flourishing as found in the sermon on the mount.
Often referred to as the Kingdom Manifesto

2. In this sermon Jesus lays out a vision of the character and ethics of his people.
3. Even right out the gate when Jesus describes who the real flourishing, thriving, people of the world are, you can see where this is so countercultural to the way our world thinks.
 1. Jesus says, The needy and dependent, broken-hearted and mourning, little lowly people, are the ones who are truly flourishing. To them belongs the kingdom, ultimate comfort and the right to the earth.
 2. He continues listing those who's soul desire is for righteousness and justice to be done in the world (that's social justice language from the Bible - It especially concerns God's quadrilateral of Justice - the fatherless, the widow, the poor and the foreigner. It's sacrificing our goods, and our comfort for the worthless person), those who practice mercy, making it part of their identity - who they are - THE MERCIFUL.
 3. Those who make peace amongst enemies, to be a true, sincere, genuine people. A people who suffer for the good that they do...
 1. Jesus goes on to talk about anger, lust, fidelity, non violence, forgiveness, loving our enemies, praying, seeking, and implementing God's kingdom values and ethics. Living that kingdom as reality in the here and now. What we find in the Sermon on the Mount is so countercultural that even the church has many times concluded - that it must be written only for life in the future kingdom of God. "Jesus Kingdom vision is so countercultural you can't actually live this way."
 2. But isn't that the whole point - Shouldn't the people of God live in a way that defies the common practices and perspectives of the world and our culture? As a matter of fact yes, Christians lives should be lived in a way that both resonates with the deep longings of our culture yet simultaneously defies the power, practices and idols of that culture. As Eugene Peterson says, "*The Church is to be a colony of heaven in the country of death*".
 3. We witness the kingdom of God, we bring disruptive witness-when we value people over profit - whatever their color, creed or class; when we love and serve and protect "the worthless person" (The widow, the single mother, the poor, the unborn,

the foster child, the mentally ill, the cripple, the elderly) The more our culture moves into personhood theory the more threatened these image bearers of God will be, but the greater opportunity to show the values of the kingdom of God.

4. When we forgive and love our enemies - A community that restores face - A community of peace and real reconciliation
5. When we sacrifice our own comforts for the sake of serving and blessing others.
6. When we care more about truth, honesty and right doing in the work place rather than popularity and praise.
7. When we live out kingdom ethics that is when the kingdom of heaven and the gospel are affecting the social fabric of our world. When we live this way we are a colony of heaven in the country of death..
 1. *We are witnessing the distortion of God's creation, the bending out of order of what the world was called to be. it is our (calling), out of a deep commitment to one another and an alternative story to begin to use those "created goods" in their proper order so people see an alternative way of flourishing. Rightly ordered hearts lead to rightly ordered lives. When our hearts have been changed by the person of Jesus, the good news of what he has done for us and a vision of the Kingdom of God, these reordered hearts will begin to impact the culture around us."* - Jon Tyson, *A Creative Minority*
4. We see the distortion of God's good creation all around us especially in sex, money, power. - It is the calling and responsibility of God's people to use the worlds resources and goods, properly and, in their proper place, so people around us can see God's kingdom way of flourishing.... It's not that we stop doing the normal things of life on planet earth; but it is how we do them - not our sameness but our difference.. all of this being shaped by the self-giving love of God supremely displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus...
5. I think about recent conversations in our culture - through the "me too" movement - "the future is female".. why is this happening in our culture? Because our culture has failed to honor the opposite sex, we have either disregarded or objectified and abused power in doing so.. yet when we think about the solutions to all of this the answer isn't to get rid of men, or any other swinging of the

pendulum - What will bring true healing is when we live as God created us to be - God's vision of flourishing - Male and female in complement to one another, naked and unashamed (vulnerable and trusting) ruling over creation all under his gracious rule! Church we need to model this in our marriages, and in our friendships, for the culture around us, - A culture that either wants to get rid of the opposites sex or redefine sex altogether - we are called to show the glory and goodness of what it means to be male and female - image bearers of God in compliment to one another... We need to model leadership and power that shows the gracious and compassionate rule of God, rather than the domineering, objectifying, abusing power of our culture...

1. *"Many in the wider culture do not share the stories and metaphors that shape us as Christians. Our Christian lives are lived on the border between the world into which we were born and another country, another city. The church is shaped by a vision of God's kingdom, the ordering of human life by an alternative vision. Christians belong to the church, the body of Christ, a community that confesses loyalty to Jesus Christ, who calls it to live a way of life that places Christians in profound tension with many of the fundamental values of the larger culture. Christians belong to an alternative culture - the people of God.. though they share many of the cultural identities with their fellow North Americans, their existence as citizens also makes them 'aliens' in their own country. To put it another way, Christian existence involves polarities that pull us in opposite directions and sometimes seem like contradictions, yet must be held together in creative tensions."* -Duane Friesen, *Artist, Citizens, and Philosophers*
2. Another example of how we use this worlds goods in a redemptive kingdom ethic way would be what Tim and Kathy Keller, talk about in their book the meaning of marriage. The early church was strikingly different from the culture around it in this way - *"The pagan society was stingy with it's money but promiscuous with it's body. A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everybody their money."* - Tim and Kathy Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*

3. I mean, if the church simply lived this way now it would radically stand out in our culture - Sexually conservative and financially liberal? - Who are you? You don't fit into our categories.
 1. As I mentioned last week every human is trying to make sense of the world around us - what is wrong with the world, what will make it right and where everything is heading...
 2. When we live distinctly as the people of God especially in the vision of the sermon on the mount it brings this disruptive witness, this cross section and collision of people's world view and reality - We are witnessing the kingdom of God that is both radically dissimilar and yet brings incredible hope and meaning to the world
 3. What if our church and the churches of SOCO actually lived as signs of the kingdom? What if we actually put into practice, in our hearts, in our homes, at our work, around our neighbors, in our politics the upside down kingdom ethics of God? We would have an impact! People would see God, and his kingdom on display.
5. **Closing:** The focus of a *Creative Minority* is not economic systems, sexual morality or maintaining positions of political power. Rather, the tangible focus is on creating disciples of Jesus in radical community who are financially promiscuous, remarkably faithful and humbly in the service of those around them, who not only tell, but live by their ethics, a powerful and more compelling narrative than the culture around them.
6. ...And in this way God uses us as Salt and Light in the world, as a community that is disrupting the natural order, and status quo of things around it - we will be right in line with our spiritual parents and family of whom it was said - **“These (people) who have turned the world upside down have come here also...and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.” - Acts 17:6-8**
 1. What a powerful description of Creative Minority bring Disruptive Witness to the status quo in the Roman empire.
 2. **I think C.S Lewis is describing something like this in Mere Christianity when he says...**
 1. *“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists.... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in*

this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country (the kingdom of God), which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same." - C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity