

Gospel Blueprints: Our Christian Witness, 11/7/21

As we wrap up this series comparing modern secular worldview with a Gospel Worldview, I want to thank you for your openness and feedback. For some you have loved this series, others you have been patient and you can't wait to get back to our normal rhythm of preaching through books of the Bible- Ruth is coming. As we finish this series I want you to reflect on a question. Who did you lose over the last 2 years? Not to the COVID-19 Virus...but to the cultural virus of Tribalism...to views on President Trump, politics, to masking, to vaccines, to social issues like the ones we have talked about justice, race and gender? In order to land in a helpful and hopeful place in this message, it is important that we start with some needed lament. We are living through a profoundly divisive time in our society when our relational fabric is being torn apart.

Distrust and Fear of One another: 71% of Americans believe that interpersonal confidence is much lower than it was 20 years ago.¹ How many of you over the last couple years held back sharing what you think or believe with friends, coworkers, family- for fear of being misunderstood, judged, yelled at or losing them? One woman I spoke to said, "Every relationship now has an additional 10 landmines to navigate." **Tribalism and Contempt:** Researchers tell us we are more divided than before the Civil War. Survey- 60% of voters said the other side is a serious threat to America, 40% Evil, 20% Animals. 1 in 3 believe violence could be justified to advance their party's political goals. "Much Pluribus and little Unum."² **Isolation and Loneliness:** Robert Putnam- *Bowling Alone*, his recent work on friendship. Americans have lost friends- avg-3.2-1.8 in just a few years, 40% of American adults- 0-1 confidant. "Loneliness is the greatest pathology of our time. All the data suggests that Americans are the loneliest people in the world."³ **Detachment:** Year over year decline since the 1960s in participation in mixed social environments like PTAs, Rotary Clubs, Civic associations and other neighborhood charities. Social Scientist, Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, "Communities are eroding- families, neighborhoods and even the polity is falling apart- people are less willing to participate to do their part and they are less trusting of others, indeed of any institutions and any authority of any kind." **Church Decline**- Rise of the Nones, unaffiliated, In 2019, 100% of practicing Christians and churching adults had gone to church within the past 6 months. Six months into the pandemic, 22% hadn't gone to church at all — digital, physical, or reopened. These numbers are also consistent with trends seen early in the pandemic when as many as 50% of Millennials said they'd stopped attending church of any kind.⁴ Many cite the overall meanness and hypocrisy of Christians on social media as a primary reason they have been turned off to church.

Again Robert Bellah- (not a Christian) talking about the disintegration of social fabric- "Human beings have treated one another badly for as long as we have any historical evidence, but

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/the-state-of-personal-trust/>

² John Mark Comer Quote

³ <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1207822,00.html>

⁴ <https://careynieuwhof.com/new-exodus-4-reasons-so-many-people-including-christians-have-suddenly-left-the-church>

modernity has given us a capacity for destructiveness on a scale incomparably greater than in previous centuries. And 'social ecology' is damaged not only by war, genocide, and political repression. It is also damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone. It has been evident for some time that unless we begin to repair the damage to our social ecology, we will destroy ourselves long before natural ecological disaster has time to be realized."⁵ This was several years before the Pandemic...

When Bellah is talking about modernity gives us a capacity of destructiveness- the context is modern secularism- radical individualism which is accelerated and weaponized by the digital age we find ourselves in. For entire groups of people, their sense of truth, sense of purpose, sense of identity, their morality comes almost entirely from the digital, virtual world... not the real world of relationships, friends, family, neighbors, local church.

The same way that weapon advancement made war impersonal, social media has made relationships impersonal. Speaking at a recent event, a former vice president for user growth at Facebook (now called Metaverse) – said that social media platforms have become “tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works. When we can disassociate the individual from their social media account it’s easier to mistreat people.”⁶ Francis Haugen, whistleblower at Facebook, after massive research found that Facebook was hiding reports that using Instagram has significant negative impacts the mental health of teenage girls. The platform’s algorithm is designed to foster more user engagement in any way possible, including by sowing discord and rewarding outrage. Testifying before congress she says, “I’m here today because I believe Facebook’s products harm children, stoke division and weaken our democracy.”⁷ End of Rant and Lament. This isn’t a message about boycotting social media, there are some good things that it does...Let’s pivot.

Into all this distrust, division and tribalism enters Jesus of Nazareth. Who literally died to turn enemies into family. Romans 5:8 *While we were still sinners Christ died for us.* Not only to reconcile us to God, but to reconcile us to each other. Ephesians 2- To create a new humanity, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-political, multi-class family based on Jesus as Lord. There is a better way to be human than what digital modernity has given us. What better way than to learn from the one who made us, Jesus.

Mark 2 Jesus calls Levi into a relationship, Levi invites Jesus to his home- ¹⁵ *While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.* ¹⁶ *When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

⁵ Robert Bellah- Habits of the Heart, 284

⁶ <https://futurism.com/former-facebook-vp-social-media-destroying-society-hes-right>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/06/facebook-scandals-social-media>

Matthew was a social pariah because he was working for the enemy, Rome and defrauding his own people. We usually eat meals with people we like and who are like us, social class as us...We certainly don't eat with enemies...how much more true in Jesus' day. No rabbi would have been caught dead eating with Levi and his kind.

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus came to make enemies into family and he started with a meal. This was not unusual for Jesus, Zacchaeus. Mary and Martha, Peter and His Mother, a variety of pharisees. Jesus used ordinary means- sharing a meal to draw people to himself and ultimately to the heart of the Father. In the next chapter, notice that Jesus not only is bringing people to himself but to one another in relationship that would otherwise never be in the same room together.

Mark 3. ¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter),

¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Simon the Zealot, a violent insurgency group of Jewish nationalists who used guerilla tactics against Rome. Matthew, the Roman supporter and Simon the Rome hater are at the same table, can you imagine their conversations...other disciples are like (this is getting awkward, can't we just talk sports or weather?). This isn't just Eagle fans eating with Cowboy fans, blue eating with red, this is Proud Boys and Antifa at the same table. These are mortal enemies who become brothers and founders of the church. What happens to their politics? We don't really know much about Jesus' politics. They were far more concerned about another king and coming kingdom than Caesar. They became swept up into the greater story of soul reconciliation to God that made their political or social differences seem silly in comparison.

This is what Jesus does and this is what the Gospel does. And now he does it through his church. Jesus hinted at this when he said in *Matthew 5:9, Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons and daughters of God.* You are acting like your father...Paul says it explicitly- 2 Corinthians 5: ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

His primary purpose in us is to bring people who are far away from him into a relationship with God. And Jesus' primary method was not only through his teaching, but through face-to-face, neighboring and relationship building using ordinary means like meals and unhurried afternoon

walks. We are being relationally deformed by the digital habits in our world. The digital world gives us thin, largely faceless connections to a global community while we neglect the real community that we actually live and work in...that 100% of us are called to be ambassadors of Christ in. Following Jesus for Christ followers means we follow him into Enemy and neighbor-reconciling relationships and I would submit to you that what the world needs is not another loud, angry, snarky, confrontational voice on social media trying to win virtual arguments in a virtual world, but through the ordinary and ancient means of local community, hospitality. People are lonely, starving for someone who cares about them in the real world, to be loved, accepted, needed- becoming more human in the way God created us.

The historian and sociologist: Why can't social media ever deliver on the promise that Mark Zuckerberg sold to the world of bringing people together? "Because the main thing people want is a family. The main thing they want is a few deep friendships, where you go after work in the evening, and there's somebody who actually wants you bodily present to break bread with them and say you're needed." What I am calling us to is not necessarily to abandon the virtual world or social media, but is to recover the ancient way of Jesus: Hospitality.

Hospitality, Philoxenia- Love Stranger. The exact opposite of xenophobia. "Expressing the welcome of God to all through tangible acts of love-- namely through giving food, shelter and relationship." -John Mark Comer Hospitality was not some fringe idea for rich, extroverted few. It was expected and part of what marked Christianity in the 1st few centuries.

Romans 12:13 *Practice hospitality.*

1 Peter 4:8-10 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* (to all you neat freaks and introverts)

Hebrews 13:22 *Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing.*

[Picture] Rosaria Butterfield was a lesbian Lit professor at Syracuse U, specialized in Postmodern Critical Theory, she was writing a book about how Bible believing Christians are the source of evil in the world today. She wrote an angry op-ed against the Promise-Keepers movement back in the day. A local pastor wrote her back and said "I read your article, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. My family would like to have you over for dinner." She had to do some research anyway so she thought, why not? This began a relationship, she would come over to their house on a regular basis. She found their life and their faith to be incredibly compelling and sincere. They were flawed like anyone else, but they were different- an other-worldly love shined through. Overtime, she became a follower of Jesus. She's a brilliant author, particularly on this subject of hospitality. Her thesis is that we need to recapture this ancient idea as a way of life, as core to following Jesus.

Butterfield- Those who practice hospitality "They recoil at reducing a person to a category or a label. They see God's image reflected in the eyes of every human being on earth. Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality open their homes not as theirs at all but as God's gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom.

They open doors; they seek out the underprivileged. They know that the gospel comes with a house key.”⁸

The need is more now than ever. **How are you practicing hospitality?** How are we practicing reconciliation through radically ordinary hospitality? We should be the first to throw a backyard BBQ or open up our homes, gather people together. Not just for rich, extroverts...it doesn't matter if you have cool furniture, extra square footage, fancy dinner plates, whether you are a good cook or not. Doesn't have to be in your house. Go on a walk, out to eat, get coffee, start a book club or painting club, biking, hiking, fishing...radically ordinary. Start with your own home, people you know, branch into neighbors and people you see as the other side. Chuck Colson- “The world is not changed through arena-sized rallies but through backyards and BBQs.” Rebuilding our trust. One meal at a time, One conversation at a time, one act of love, one hearing, one hug, one apology at a time.

We can't fix all the problems. **Andre Trocme**, French pastor whose town resisted the tide of Nazi Germany- “**Look hard for ways to make little moves against destructiveness.**”⁹ Every time we avoid a rant, online fight, mean tweet, repost of a shady article and instead invite a neighbor to play cornhole and eat some burgers in the backyard is a little move against destructiveness.

Communion Reflect on how Christ reconciled you through his blood and invited you into a relationship. Reflect on who the Spirit is inviting you to pursue. Prepare your heart for communion.

Not just personal hospitality, but it is why coming together and being a welcoming church is so critical. Because presence, singing together, taking the Lord's supper together demonstrates and points to the reconciliation that Christ accomplished for us that brings us together regardless of the many things that the world would say should tear us apart.

⁸ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*.

⁹ As quoted by John Mark Comer