

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**Sunday June 20, 2021. "Does church still matter? Sharing life together. Can NCC thrive as a community again...again? Why church matters and what our values are."**

### **I Intro.**

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's and youth areas have been fully open also and we are seeing a good response. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

### **II Recap.**

This is our third Sunday of our look at what church is, has been, and can be. It's an honest self-evaluation of where the church gets 'it' right. And by 'it' we mean being the force for good and for others, it was commissioned to be. And also where the church gets it tragically wrong. And many of the ways the church gets it wrong can be summed up in two ways. One, the tendency to drift towards institutionalization. This means like most organizations, once it reaches a certain size then in order to run more smoothly and effectively it creates a structure that is more concerned with protecting the organization than sticking to the original vision. Two, churches tend to turn inward, because that's where the finances come from, those are the people whose complaints you will hear, and those are the people you know and love. This is not always a bad thing. You want to take care of your people. But if not managed well, this inward turn is almost always at the expense of the vision and people not in the group. Which of course in the church world is the opposite of the purpose of the church. The first week we looked at what it means to be 'devoted' to each other. Both inside and outside of the church. Last week we hit what we need to incorporate into our lives to grow our compassion. You can find both of those here.

### **III Sunday.**

This Sunday was a different and more nuanced topic. A huge part of the draw and warmth of the early church was their desire to "*share life together*". We saw in our conversation about compassion that it calls us to share our resources. However, a shared life is an even higher calling of growing a culture of equitability and being 'for' each other. People outside of this movement of Jesus followers saw how much they enjoyed being together. And this community was so compelling and winsome that it drew others in. This wasn't just a church. It was what Dr King called **The Beloved Community**. Coretta Scott King describing Dr King's idea of The Beloved Community said this.

***“Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.”***

**-Coretta Scott King**

This was both a vision for something greater than we have now, is deeply rooted in Dr King’s understanding of scripture, and was built around this idea of sharing.

**So, what would “*shared life*” look like for you?**

**What would it require from you to be a part of something like this?**

The scripture was our series passage found in **Acts 2:42-47**. Reread it again, focusing on verse 46.

**What do you envision that description of ‘shared life’ looks like?**

Dr. King said there were 5 things that make up this shared life Beloved Community.

**1. Look critically yet gently at the way our actions and behaviors impact other people**

**(intentionally and unintentionally)**. No one is an island. The early church knew everything we think, say, and do will affect others. To live in community, to thrive and flourish as a church, we have to see that everything we say, do, do not do, affects the entire family, and even those outside of it. Beloved Communities, sharing life, are born out of knowing how others experience us.

**2. Check our assumptions**. We all hold beliefs we think are true, self-evident, but are we confident enough to make sure? Questioning our assumptions is the ultimate sign of faith. We can question our beliefs, and trust God and truth will still be there. Most, which really means all, of what we believe are actually just words, and phrases of what we understand or explain something we’ve experienced. Doing this well, checking our assumptions, is the true sign of courage and faith. Beloved Communities, sharing life, are born out of making sure things we think are true...are actually true.

**3. Cultivate humility**. Again this is the; *“I could be wrong, and I am open to hearing from others”*. Humility is the ability to place the needs of others above our own, a lessening of self. And that is a natural byproduct of checking our assumptions. Humility creates a servant’s heart, turns charity, which no one really wants, into real sharing. Humility must be both what we believe and how we view ourselves within the body. Beloved Communities, sharing life, are born out of selfless humility.

**4. Give and receive honest feedback**. There are times for open and real conversations...in love. What don’t I see about me that you see? This is; *“Grace and Truth”* in practice. This has to be grown within the culture of a family, church. There will always be disagreements, issues to be dealt with. In a culture of sharing, we can say the hard things because we are **for each other**. Beloved Communities, sharing life, are born out of honest, real, clarifying conversations.

**5. Make mistakes and learn from them.** For some reason we equate mistakes with bad. However, growth only comes from an environment of safe risk-taking. Only doing things that are completely proven to be true is an unfulfilling life. A shared life gives us permission to ask questions that feel stupid, and wrestle with things you don't understand or know about. **Ignorance is cool. "I never knew..."**. You give others the privilege, if you're a genuine learner, to teach you something new. Beloved communities, sharing life, are born out of creating such an incredibly safe to fail culture, that people know they are okay to stretch their wings and grow.

#### **IV Challenge.**

This was an interesting and different topic to understand in the larger picture of what a thriving/flourishing church, community of faith, can look like. It takes a lot of intentional effort, keen awareness, honesty, trust, and a commitment to each other and the body, to make this element work. But...once you create a Beloved Community, growing a culture of sharing life together, there will be no stopping people who want to be a part of that. This is what will keep the church and NCC relevant and something to give to the world.

As always...the final question.

**What one thing could you do in your corner of the world to add to growing your own Beloved Community?**