

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday November 24, 2019. "The Most Excellent Way: People not like us".

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II Recap.

We're in the final Sunday of the series, "***The Most Excellent Way***" a look at how to live like a believer in America. Most of us can feel the tension between being a good citizen, and living out the teachings of Jesus. If we're truly honest, we have to admit those two don't always overlap. In fact, if we can push ourselves from 'truly honest' to 'fearless brutal introspection' we would admit a lot of what we consider spiritual is actually justification of living in our culture. And we're ALL guilty of this. So the purpose of this series was to realign our hearts, and actions with the teachings of Jesus. And begin to move the direction of our lives towards this "***Most Excellent Way***".

The first week we began with the understanding that there is this "*third way*" Jesus lived and calls us to live based on love, inverting power, and caring for others generously and graciously. It is the harder way, but a fuller and more meaningful life that truly impacts the world.

The second week we wrestled with the tension of living as a citizen of this country and a believer. And saw even though the scriptures do call us to obey the laws of the state, we are not actually citizens of this country but just ambassadors. Our citizenship belongs to a different kingdom.

And last week, Kristen taught us that laws are important to define the edges of our behavior, but they do not call us to living like Jesus taught. And at times they can actually do harm, so we have to be careful in how we elevate laws to the same status as the gospel.

III Sunday.

This Sunday we talked about how we are to relate to others that aren't like us. For some reason, the practice of having to agree with people in order to do life with them has crept into our understanding of living out our faith. Unless a person believes, has the same values and lifestyle as we do, we treat them differently. And it often comes out of our discomfort of knowing how to relate to people who have radically different lives than we do. And as we'll see, we use our understanding of scripture to support an 'us' and 'them' mentality and unfortunately how we treat others.

So, let's get this conversation started.

Who are some people groups or lifestyles that you struggle to know how to relate to?

And this is not a gotcha question.

What undergirds, supports, explains to you why that group or lifestyle is difficult for you? (i.e. scripture, your upbringing, your values and beliefs, etc.)

There were two primary scriptures used Sunday morning and it's important to hit both of them. The first is a rather lengthy but powerful story of Peter, having to deal with a scripturally supported, but misused understanding, of how we are to relate to people differently than us. So read the account in **Acts 10:9-33**.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

How did Peter's beliefs affect his understanding and relationship with people who were different than him?

What was he told about how he understood and practiced these beliefs?

And...how is that like us?

A little history. Peter was living fully into how his beliefs and his religious community understood how they were supposed to live into this calling from God. The only problem is even though there was scriptural support for the beliefs and practices of his faith, Peter, like his Jewish ancestors, didn't have the humility or self-awareness to examine if they were actually living like they were called to live. In Exodus, God told the newly forming nation of Israel they were to be a priestly nation to live this separated called out life to show others how great God is. However, the people narrowed the focus to only living a holy set apart life, not to reach others, not to be this priestly nation, but to separate themselves from people not like them. Their beliefs were supported by scripture, but did not align with the heart and work of God. A powerful lesson and full of questions we must ask ourselves how we treat the 'other'.

Do we use our beliefs and faith to separate ourselves from people not like us, build walls, or do we use our life, our beliefs, our faith, our understanding of the nature of God to be a priestly person to reach others not like us.

The second passage was **Ephesians 2:14-16**, and is simply an obvious understanding that we build walls and barriers in how we practice our faith and religion, and Jesus came to tear those walls down. Read the passage and we'll talk.

Again what jumped out to you about this passage?

What walls have you put in place that cause you to treat those not like you as the 'other'?

There were three truths pulled from this passage.

1. Walls are inherently hostile. 2. Walls are often built on a system of commandments and regulations. 3. Jesus knocked walls down...period.

In your practice of your faith, how you live out your beliefs, are they a bridge towards others encouraging and inviting them to follow Jesus with you, or do they create walls?

To live this **"Most Excellent Way"**, we HAVE to live our faith to reach others for Jesus...have to!!