

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday February 6, 2022. "The Genius of The Incarnation. The POWER of God with us"

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 now in 2022, a brand new year, and we're excited about where God is leading us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. You can check that out through our social media sites. We're so encouraged by 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 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 Sunday.

Okay...we finally finished the "Reset" series and began a new one we call; "*The Genius of...*" series. But even before I begin to explain our understanding of what this series will be about, I want you to begin thinking about what the word genius means to you.

So, what does genius mean to you?

What expectations, understanding, and more would you place on the idea of genius?

Let's talk about how we framed what genius means for us first. The actual root words for genius mean "*above our talents, abilities, or inborn nature*". So, there is this foundational understanding that genius implies more than what we do naturally or instinctually. We are framing this conversation around genius on this definition. **Genius- to apply a counter intuitive creative solution to a situation or currently held school of thought ... and it works..** So, yes there is a beyond our own natural abilities understanding of what genius is. But we believe that even more than that, there is this push against commonly held beliefs and practices, that takes us to a new level of living. Which also means that if something is genius it will create some tension, resistance, a push back because it does challenge long held common beliefs and practices. This is why Jesus faced so much opposition and eventually lost his life. Because long held beliefs and practices often protect those in power, and we are threatening the very foundational elements that keep powerful people...in power.

Each one of these genius understandings will cover a truth in scripture that challenged the belief and faith system of the day. Today it's the genius of the incarnation. The revolutionary truth that God was not only close to us, near us, but actually one of and with us.

There were two scriptures used. Read the proclamation of the incarnation, and then the actual practice of incarnation. **Luke 4:16-21** is the proclamation. And **Luke 19:1-10** is the practice of incarnation. Read them both and then we'll have several questions.

**What jumped out to you from either passage that helped point to the idea of incarnation?
What do you believe incarnation looked like and felt like for those people in the stories?
Was there anything new about incarnation that you noticed?**

The primary component to make any relationship work is trust. There has to be this unwavering, unflinching, commitment to another to make a relationship real and meaningful. And this applies to our relationships with each other, and especially in our relationship with God. And the most powerful way to grow and nurture trust is proximity AND solidarity. It's one thing to be physically close to another person. To live next door, work in an office nearby, sit a couple of rows apart in church. We can be in the proximity with another person but that doesn't say anything about the closeness or meaningfulness of the relationships.

It's when we stand in another person's shoes, experience life as they do, stand in solidarity over the same issues or beliefs, when real relationships form. This is the heart and practice of incarnation. And what makes incarnation genius. Knowing things about someone can help you learn information. But only incarnation, being one with them, grows the kind of relationship where trust is strong.

So, think about one or two relationships you had or still have, in which you feel this kind of incarnational closeness. Name one or two things that you have done that makes that relationship so special.

The final point is; incarnation is hard...really hard. Because we can do this in the lives of people in our inner circle, Jesus said that this really isn't special because non-believers have relationships like this with the people they are close to in life. Actually embracing the truth of THE incarnation, God becoming one of us, to live among us, and living incarnationally in the other relationships in our lives, requires us to step outside our safe little self-constructed bubbles. Christianity unfortunately has devolved more into defining and maintaining some religious form of purity than it is to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. And living incarnationally, fully embracing this genius idea of standing in solidarity with others who are outside our normal circle, requires us to give up on this unfortunate obsession with purity, giving up any claims to rights or privileges, and to join with the life of another. This is not how religion often operates. The genius of the demands of incarnation is that those who are on the receiving end, and truly get it, will give you the trust that real relationships will flourish.

Where has someone else stepped outside of their world or comfort zone for you, and you grew in your trust and closeness because you realized the sacrifice they had made?

III Challenge.

Of all the 'genius' ideas we'll hit in this series, they all start with this idea of incarnation. To know that God loves each of us so deeply should naturally grow us to love others in the same way. This type of caring for others will just ripple out from us.

The challenge: who is one person you are close enough in proximity that you could step out and be incarnational in their life? What one first step could you take to know them better?