

I See You
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Good morning church!

It is so good to be able to worship together - even if we are physically spaced apart.

My name is Rob Heagy and I serve on the Elder team here at Petra; in addition to that, my wife Tara and I serve together as the "interim" Regional Care Ministers for Region M. I would just like to welcome all of you, wherever you are this morning.

Well, as we probably all know, a few weeks ago was Memorial Day and in a few weeks from now July 4th will be here so right now we are sandwiched between the two holidays.

Major holidays are often a time when families and friends gather together for parties and picnics to enjoy some good old backyard barbeque.

Often on these holidays - like Memorial Day and the 4th of July - some towns hold parades and host various celebrations where the community would gather together.

When my daughters were younger, I remember taking them to the Veterans Memorial in Reamstown and gathering with people from the community. We used to go every year on Memorial Day and listen to several high school students read essays about what freedom means to them, then a local pastor would give a short message and often a member of the military would share too.

As far as July 4th, every year as a family we would head to the ECOB field to sit with hundreds and hundreds of people to watch the fireworks display.

Those times of being close to one another, gathered together during a holiday weekend, seem to be such a distant memory from what we have recently been going through. The Covid-19 pandemic has kept many of us from meeting together.

School buildings were closed for the year, some wedding celebrations were postponed, anniversary and birthday celebrations reduced to immediate family only and of course funeral services look much different during these times.

We have come into times when a simple greeting like a handshake or maybe a hug to say "hello" has almost become taboo.

Many of us have been, and continue to be, impacted financially also to the point where it could take many months or even years to recover. Seemingly everything looks much different now - even having to wear a mask while grocery shopping! There has been such a disruption in our daily lives - with rapid changes - that it has caused many of us to question what is going on?

But God. He has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever and He is still on his throne. Things may seem chaotic to us and life might not be going the way we thought it would be at this point in our lives - but God is still in control of it all! Amen!

Over the past few months, through all of this, one of the major things that I have been so thankful for is being a part of the Petra Church community.

The various ways the tech team has organized and pulled together our weekly services has been amazing! The way we were and are still able to meet for prayer times - even if it was remotely - has been such a blessing. The Easter virtual services were done so well. Pastor Brian Flewelling's daily study times through the Psalms encouraged many. The Regional Care support teams were trying to make a connection with the people in their regions. Many small groups continued to meet virtually. The Food Bank remained open. The Wake - for young adults - was striving to connect in some form. Student ministries are still working hard to reach the youth. The list goes on and on and on.

What I love about all of this, one of my favorite parts to this whole story is how you - my brothers and sisters in Christ - stepped up to help whenever and wherever you could help. It underlined and placed exclamation points behind the words: Love and Honor!!!

As I mentioned, Tara and I are the care ministers for our region, and during the "lockdown" we were sending emails, and making phone calls, along with some other people who stepped up to help us. We were calling to try and reach as many people as possible from Petra that live in our region. It was during this time that we heard both leaders and lay people asking, "How can I help?" It was a truly powerful reflection of Christ's love and speaks volumes about the culture of honor and the value that we place on honoring and loving one another here at Petra Church.

This morning I want to look at just a few of the many ways that we can continue to love and honor each other. Even as we seem to be on the backside of the curve and can now meet, I pray that we continue to help and serve one another. Which brings me to point number one...

1. We love and honor one another with our service. Matt 20: 25-28

Children - draw a picture showing a way that you can serve or help someone this week.

Adults - We're going to read Matt 20: 25-28 - it's a lesson that Jesus teaches about leading and serving in the kingdom, but before we do that, I'd like to try and set this up for you.

Jesus was just asked by the mother of James and John (who Jesus nicknamed "the sons of thunder") if Jesus would allow her sons to sit at his right and left hand - places of honor - in his kingdom.

As you can imagine this really irritated the other disciples when they heard this. I can almost hear them murmuring to each other: "The nerve of this woman asking Jesus for special treatment for her sons. What about us? Haven't we been walking with Jesus too?"

I can almost see Jesus and the disciples sitting around a campfire and, as guys usually do, I'm sure there was some good-hearted joking about this too. I can almost hear outspoken Peter saying, "Hey, Sons of Thunder, you two don't seem too thunderous now with your momma

taking care of you.” And then Jesus settles them down: “Okay, okay boys...that’s enough... lean in here and let me explain something to you about leading and serving in the kingdom.” Here is where we pick the story up...

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matt 20: 25-28

Take a look at verse 25 where Jesus first explains how the world works when he says:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”

Think about the words of Jesus for a moment and what he is saying to his disciples: “Look guys, the world strives to become the boss, the leader, the chief. The world strives for these positions of power so they can control and manipulate people to serve their own needs and whims.”

Then Jesus continues when he says to them:

“Not so with you.”

He is saying to his disciples: listen up... the Kingdom of God is so very different from the world’s system of governing. You see, in God’s kingdom, to be a leader you must learn how to serve one another.

When he says, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,” he is telling them, “Follow my example!”

Romans 12:10 says **“Honor one another above yourselves”** which is so countercultural to our modern American way of living and thinking - where we often are only looking out for ourselves - and if you don’t think it’s true just walk down the toilet paper aisle sometime.

Jesus says in John 13:34-35....

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this *everyone* will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35 (Italics added)

Nothing will speak more to the world (that is the everyone) around us of the value that we place on each other's lives than when we are intentional about loving and serving one another.

When we see our brothers and sisters’ needs, a neighbor’s needs, a friend’s needs and even a stranger's needs as being just as important - or even more important than our own needs - it should spur us on to serve them. What does this look like in practical ways?

Well, one story that I heard involved a group of co-workers - from right here at Petra - who were working at different locations and they were on a video conference. One of the people on the call happened to mention that she really missed her office chair because it was so much

more comfortable than the chair she was using at home. Wouldn't you know it... someone on that call - one of our pastors - heard the need and responded by taking the office chair to her home!

Such a simple act of serving, but it shows the level of respect and honor that we need to place on each other - Honor one another above yourselves.

And that is just one story. Honestly, serving one another will look different for the many needs around us - for whatever the context is wherever you are.

It could be as easy as calling the "at-risk" neighbor before you're going to the grocery store to ask if there is anything you can pick up for them. Maybe it will be a little more involved, like pulling weeds for them. The simple act of just reaching out and asking "What can I do for you today?" or "Is there anything that you need?" - even if they tell you they're fine - the simple act of reaching out can be enough to encourage your neighbor or your friend.

That leads us to point number 2...

2. We love and honor one another with our encouragement. Matt 3:16-17

Children - draw a picture showing a way that you can encourage someone this week.

Adults - If there is one lesson that I've learned through the past few months it is this: the need for human interaction and encouragement is so important. While we were and are apart from each other, the simple act of receiving a text, a phone call, an email or connecting through video chats can brighten someone's day and encourage them.

Isn't it important to know that someone cares and is thinking about you?

This is one area that so many of you do so well - it is your gift, your love language - and that is words of affirmation and encouragement. Positive words that you speak or that are spoken over you - or to you - can have a profound positive and lasting impact.

And as Christians, our words to each other can carry more weight as we can bless others in Jesus' name! To be able to speak words of life to other people or to read scripture or text scripture to them or speak a biblical truth to another person is not something that should be taken lightly!

Proverbs 18:21 says it this way:

**The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
Proverbs 18:21**

A few years ago, Pastor Lester wrote a booklet entitled "Encouragement from God's Word." He wrote it during a time of a health crisis in his life. In the booklet he writes, "When I received a diagnosis of cancer in my body it drove me into the scriptures in a new way. It was during this time of testing that I put this booklet of scriptures together, and it strengthened my faith walk when I was weak. During that time, when life felt out of control, these scriptures helped me maintain a healthy perspective as I waited and prayed. It kept hope alive in me."

It is a powerful example of how the Word of God can be used to build us up, encourage us, bless us - it can keep hope alive in us - and not only us, but the people around us that we are coming into contact with as we bless them with encouragement from God's Word!

These encouragements and blessings that we speak to each other are so important too; the Bible has many examples of blessings. Here are just a few...

- Parents blessing their children (Jacob blessing his twelve sons: Genesis 49)
- Relatives blessing relatives (Elizabeth and Mary: Luke 1: 39-56)
- A king blessing the people (Solomon blessed the whole assembly of Israel: 1 Kings 8)
- Priestly blessing (found in Numbers 6:22-27)
- God the Father blessing Jesus at the beginning of his ministry!

“After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.’” Matthew 3:16-17 (NLT)

Powerful, powerful words spoken from the Father to his Son.

To be able to tell someone who they are in God's sight - how God sees them - can help someone root their value and worth in the truth!

While the world is busy tearing each other down, let us be known as people who are passionate about honoring and building each other up with blessings and with encouragement from God's word.

Point #3

3. We love and honor one another with the love and compassion of Jesus. Luke 7: 36-50

I'm going to read through some verses - I'm sure you'll get the common theme rather quickly.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. John 15:12-13

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10

Do everything in love. 1 Corinthians 16:14

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 1 John 3:11

And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 4:21

And there are many, many more verses like these. But church - if we're honest, this can be so hard to do sometimes.

"God, do you know about this person's lifestyle...?" "Yes, I do. Love them."

"Okay God, but do you know about their addictions, their anger...?" "Yes, love them."

"Sure God, but what about their sin patterns...?" "I know all of it... love them."

We all come from different places in life, different stories, different backgrounds, different experiences which makes each one of us unique. You and I may not know what someone else has gone through in their life or what they might be going through right now that is causing them to behave or react a certain way.

We run into people all the time who have been hurt and sometimes may even seem unlovable to us.

The pain that people experience can be from health issues or the hurt and grief felt from the untimely death of a loved one or past hurts from abuse or addictions or sins...the list is too long to go through.

There is a very good chance that every single person that hears this message - including the man preaching it - has been hurt along the way by someone, or maybe you are hurting now.

The truth is that all people, not just the hurting, need to experience the love and compassion of Jesus.

Think about the different people in the bible that Jesus showed compassion to...people with Leprosy, a paralyzed man, a blind man, adulterers, prostitutes, the social outcasts, the demon possessed, a Roman centurion, widows, children, hungry crowds and even the chief tax collector along with many, many more.

If you have your bible, please turn with me to Luke 7:36-50 and look at an account of another person whom Jesus showed compassion to... a sinful woman.

Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

I have listened to sermons about this story, as I'm sure many of you have ... sermons about how important this encounter was between this woman and Jesus. And the symbolism of her tears, wiping Jesus' feet with her hair and pouring the perfume on his feet.

I've heard sermons about the lack of hospitality shown by the Pharisee while this woman - lavishes hospitality on Jesus - and all of these have good truths that we can learn from; but I want to look at a small phrase that I believe often gets overlooked in this story... “Do you see this woman?”

Keep in mind that Simon was just thinking in his mind - in a rather condescending way - “if Jesus knew who was touching him and what kind of woman she is.” Almost saying “Ugh, I would never let her touch me” and accusing her of being a sinner.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, and of course Jesus knew exactly who this woman was; he knew her backstory, her history, all that she had done and all that she had been through in her life that brought her to this very moment in time at Jesus' feet in humility! - and he had compassion.

Take a look at what Jesus does in verse 44...

“Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman?’”

Keep in mind that Jesus is a guest in Simon’s house, and he turns his back to Simon to face the woman... the woman that Simon accused of being a sinner and Jesus asks him... “Do you see this woman?”

I can only imagine the love and compassion that was in Jesus’ voice as he said those words “Do you see this woman?”

Jesus saw the woman. When Jesus looked at her he saw her brokenness, her pain, maybe her addictions, her habits, hurts, and hang-ups...he knew her sins; but, he didn’t call her out on those areas and issues in her life... instead He had compassion on her. He saw her full worth and He forgave her.

I can only imagine how His words spoken over her lifted her up and encouraged her as he said: “Your sins are forgiven! Your faith has saved you! Go in Peace!”

The truth is: When you and I humble ourselves before Jesus... when we are in front of him with all of our struggles, our addictions, our brokenness, our habits, our hurts, and our hang-ups - when our sins are laid bare before him - Jesus turns his back to our accuser, and he looks at you and he looks at me and with that same love and compassion in his voice he says, “I see you.”

Not only does Jesus see you, but He took it a step further as He carried your sins and my sins to the cross and He died for you and He died for me!

The bible says: **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8**

Notice what it says: While we were still sinners! It doesn’t say after we are all polished and cleaned up; it is not after we get ourselves straightened out only then God can love us. NO! It says while we were still sinners - Christ died for us.

Then when we humbly come to Jesus, he says to each one of us: “Son/daughter, I see you. Your sins are forgiven! Your faith has saved you! Go in Peace!”

My prayer for us is that Jesus’ example of love and compassion be our guide as we serve one another and as we encourage one another. May we see - not just physically see - but really see the people around us with the eyes of Jesus so that we can love one another with compassion...the same way that Jesus loves us.