

Shine Through Graciousness
When Values Clash
June 12, 2016

PRELUDE – Trust in You

Worship Songs – Rejoice / It Is Well
Announcements – Video
Feature – Biscuits / Offering

Well, that sure does sound like good advice doesn't it? "Mind your own biscuits and life will be gravy."

And it would be except for the fact that, sometimes (and maybe a lot of times), the way you hoe *your* row and raise *your* babies affects the way I hoe and raise mine. Sometimes (and maybe a lot of times) when you smoke your smokes it makes me choke and that's no joke – at least, not to me.

I'm being a bit silly here but my point is a serious one. As wise as the admonition to "mind your own biscuits" or the less country-sounding version "live and let live" may seem ... truth is, it isn't always possible. Sometimes the way you choose to live affects the way I *have* to live. Sometimes the way you choose to live is offensive to me. Sometimes, as nice as we all want to be to one another; as much as we all want to "just get along," our values clash. And the tension caused by that clash is not easily dismissed, no matter how catchy the tune may be.

The question is: *what do we do about it?*

As you might have guessed, the answer has something to do with *graciousness* ... because ... as Shannon said we're

continuing in our series “Shine through Graciousness.” If you’ve been here or watched us online over the past several months you know that we are in a *series of series* designed to help us understand how those of us who are Christians – those of us who have come to understand that we are sinners in need of a savior and who believe that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead as that savior – we’re trying to understand how we can more effectively fulfill Jesus’ calling on our lives to be ...

... like light shining in the darkness of our world.

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

“When people look at you,” Jesus said to his followers, “they ought to be able to see a reflection of the God who loves this world so much that He became a man and tasted death in order to save it from the curse of sin.”

“When people look at you – and not just you as an individual but you all *collectively* gathered together in little communities with other believers (which we call ‘church’) – when people look at you, the light that comes from you ought to illuminate for them what is missing in this world because they see in you (and your church) how ‘up there’ is coming ‘down here’ – how the kingdom of Heaven is breaking in to this world. And your light ought to have the effect of leading people to want to know that God and to enter into

His Kingdom.”

The main reason we're emphasizing this right now – the reason we're doing this series of series – is that a lot of Christians are feeling threatened by all the changes in our culture. There's a values clash taking place right now between what most of us believe about how life is best lived (which we believe comes from what God has revealed to us through Jesus and in the Scriptures) and what our culture accepts and even promotes. And many Christians are looking at the upcoming Presidential Election in hopes that somehow, the outcome will put us on what they consider to be a better and more God-honoring course as a nation.

I've got news for you. *It ain't happening.* Of

the three major candidates for the office – and when I say three, I’m not talking about Bernie; I mean Gary Johnson who is the Libertarian candidate and will likely gain enough in polling to participate in the debates this fall – of the three major candidates, one is untrustworthy, one is a narcissist and one is a pothead. I’ll let you figure out which is which.

And I don’t say that to imply that you shouldn’t vote for any of them if you agree with their politics. If you’re a citizen of this country, feel free to exercise your right. But if you’re a Christian, I’m telling you that the light this world needs is not and will not be coming from D.C. If there is going to be any light at all, it’s going to come from you and me and little communities of faith like ours providing a

clear and compelling example of an alternative way of thinking and living. So, in this series of series we're looking at five characteristics of that way.

- We started out with *generosity* back in the beginning of May and spent three weeks looking at that.
- Then we moved to *graciousness* several weeks ago.
- And when we're finished with it, we'll be looking at God-centeredness, goodness and Gospel-drivenness.

I'm sure we could add to that list of characteristics but, as I thought about this, I felt like God was saying that these five are so unique and winsome that if we – NHCC – could get a grip on them, we would shine more brightly for Christ in this community.

The Cultural Challenge

So, that's a little bit of context as to where we are today and why. We're living in a time where our values constantly clash with the values of this culture and the question is ... what should we do about it?

Here's how one Christian woman decided to handle the values clash in her world.

Video Clip – Kim Davis Released (1.8 min)

B: Reporter – “Just a short while ago ...”

E: Reporter – “... they're not ready to back down just yet.”

I'm sure you noticed the accent of the reporter. RT News is actually Russian Television. Even on the other side of the

world people see what's happening here in terms of a clash of values.

Of course, the Kim Davis story is kind of old news at this point. What's more recent is this one ...

Video Clip – Anti-Target Campaign (1.2 min)

B: Voice – “From sidewalk picketing to online petitions ...”

E: Voice – “... for greater privacy and security.”

<BEGIN SLIDE SET 2>

Now, I don't know what your opinion is on either of those issues – though I'm pretty sure that most of us feel strongly one way or the other. But my purpose in raising them isn't to analyze and evaluate. It's to illustrate the kinds of clashes that are

taking place more and more in our culture.

Of course, for a lot of us who are Christians, it's not just "out there" where we're seeing a values clash. For many of us, *the tension is present in our own homes* because we've got spouses, or kids, or siblings, or parents who are not followers of Jesus. Or the tension is at work or at school because we've got bosses or co-workers or teachers and classmates who are not believers. And, frankly, they really don't care what the Bible says about marriage or money or generosity or sexuality or personal responsibility or abortion or parenting or civility or honesty or church or God or <whatever>. It has no conscious effect on their values.

The greatest influence on their values is

not even their own thinking (although many will argue that it is). It's what they see and hear in our culture promoted through movies, music, TV, literature, the educational system, advertising, sports, etc. They (and we) are influenced 24/7 by a culture which is not only becoming more and more permissive but also *hostile to and disparaging of any ideology which questions that permissiveness ...* such as Christianity. About the only part of Christianity that is accepted and embraced by our culture is what Jesus says about not judging ... which is interpreted to mean "if you're a Christian, don't you dare assess and criticize my values or my lifestyle. Hoe your own row. Mind your own biscuits. Jesus said so."

Now, this is a huge challenge because,

while you can boycott Target if you think that's the right thing to do, you can't really boycott your own family ... nor should you. You can't boycott the place you work or the people you work with without losing your job. Somehow, as a Christian, you have to figure out how to walk hand-in-hand with people in spite of the fact that you don't see eye-to-eye with them.

And the key to doing that is *graciousness* ... which is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote this to a group of believers in the first century.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)

What an awesome word picture that is!
“Full of grace ... seasoned with salt.”

Salt, as you know, makes us thirsty. It increases our desire for water. Paul is saying “be gracious to people who don’t follow Jesus because if there is anything you can do that will make them desire to know God, that’s it.”

And that’s our goal, right? To be the light and, in this case, the salt that points people towards our Heavenly Father.

A Quick Review

Now, last week we spent a good deal of time defining what we mean by graciousness

and I won't go back through how we got to the definition that we're using. If you weren't here or watching online, I highly encourage you to check out the message in the media section of our app or on our website.

But graciousness, we said, is the unconditional predisposition to treat “them” better than they deserve (because that’s how God treats me).

I didn't deserve for God to send Jesus to be my savior but God did it anyway. I didn't deserve to be born in this time and place and live where I live and have the life I have. God allowed it anyway. God always treats me better than I deserve. He is *gracious* to me, so that's how I want to treat *them*.

By *them* I mean people I don't like and who don't like me as well as people I disagree with and who are disagreeable to me; people who challenge my beliefs and who are challenging to my beliefs; people with whom I do not see eye-to-eye.

Now, just to be clear, you *can* be gracious to people you *do* like and to people with whom you *do* agree. Graciousness treats *everyone* better than they deserve. The reason I decided to narrow the definition to "them" is because Jesus said that being gracious to people who we like and who agree with us is nothing special. Everyone does that.

If you really want to be different; if you really want to be unique; if you really want to turn some heads ...

Jesus said ...

“Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!”

Matthew 5:44 (NLT)

“Try loving the people who are not lovable. Try being kind to people who are rude and mean and treat you unjustly. Try asking God to pour out as much blessing on them as much He does you. *That* would be exceptional.”

That would have the effect of salt and light. That would be creating a desire in people to know God. That would illuminate for people what God is really like.

Ok, that’s what I mean by *them*.

By *predisposition* I mean that it's the intention of my heart to be gracious though sometimes I fail; that I have decided in advance that this is how I want to live though sometimes I don't. It means that I'm committed as God gives me strength to seeing them and treating them in the same gracious way that He has treated me.

By *unconditional* I mean that people don't need thank me, love me, make it up to me, or promise do the right thing by me in order for me to predispose myself in this direction.

Graciousness is the unconditional predisposition to treat "them" better than they deserve. And by *better than they deserve* I mean ... well, that's the point of this message, isn't it? How can those of us who

are Christians treat folks with whom we have a values clash better than they deserve?

Better Than Expected

Actually, a more accurate way to phrase that question is probably “how do we treat them better than they *expect*” because, in reality, what *they think* is that *we think* they deserve to be condemned and made to feel like reprobates. People who are not Christians *expect* that those of us who are Christians are going to “should” all over them. “You should do this. You should not do that.”

- They expect Christians to be bigoted, close-minded and judgmental.
- They expect that Christians will think

they are right about everything they believe while everyone else is wrong.

- They expect for Christians to try and force everyone else to conform to their miserable unhappy standards – standards which they themselves can't keep ... which is why ...
- They also expect Christians to be hypocrites!

So what does it look like to treat *them* better than they expect? What does it look like for a Christian to treat a non-Christian who rejects Christian values in a way that would be surprisingly “full of grace and seasoned with salt?”

I want to share with you four specific actions that I think go a long way towards communicating graciousness. But before

we talk about those we need to make sure we have a proper perspective on the situation. And this is important because without a right perspective, the actions won't make sense.

What is that perspective? Let me give you three statements that I think describe it. (There are probably more that could be added but I think these are the most important).

A Proper Perspective

1. We cannot expect non-Christians to act like Christians.

Fascinating passage ...

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral

people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister ...

*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?
1 Corinthians 5:9-12 (NIV)*

Earlier I said that the three presidential candidates are of dubious moral character. But that should not be surprising at all. None of them claims to have a personal relationship with Jesus. None of them is actively seeking to know Him better and follow in his way more closely.

2. We should not be surprised to be called a “hater.”

It's painful to hear that and sometimes offensive. It's also a dodge. But it shouldn't be a surprise.

“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.” Luke 12:51-52 (NIV)

It's human nature that when we are deeply invested in and identified with our sin, any opposition to or lack of affirmation of that sin from others feels hurtful – like a personal attack. So we should not be surprised when we are called “haters” when we are not.

3. We are not called to win *arguments*

for God. We are called to win *people to God.*

Last week, I read a review of a book written about the recently deceased Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens, as you may know, was one of the well-known and outspoken atheists of our time.

Now, the review of the book about Hitchens was written by a guy who is one of the most well-known and outspoken defenders of the Christian faith of our time.

This is what he said about the guy who wrote the book who is also a Christian.

“[From the book] it is clear that [he] cared deeply for Hitchens’ soul and its salvation, and therefore was a real friend to Hitchens. By contrast I took my task to be the

drubbing of atheists, rather than reaching out in Christian love as [he] did.

“A painful insight into my own failings, and one that makes me rather humbled, to say the least. What atheist might I have won over had I not played the belligerent bulldog?”

<http://tothesource.org/reviews/the-faith-of-christopher-hitchens>

When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of

Christ. 1 Corinthians
9:20-22 (NLT)

The biggest issue in a person's life isn't that they are abusive. It isn't that they are irresponsible or have anger issues or they are sexually immoral or that they lie and steal. It's not that they don't agree with the Bible or with God's standards. It's that they are dead in sin and need to be raised to new life by turning to Jesus as their savior.

That's why our goal isn't to fix or change people. That's actually impossible. Our goal is to influence and the way we do that is by graciousness. As Paul wrote, "it's the kindness of God that leads to repentance." It's God's undeserved favor that leads people to change their minds about Him.

Ok, I think getting those three ideas solid in our minds will help us as we try to actually do the things that communicate grace to those with whom we clash over values.

- Don't expect non-Christians to act like Christians.
- Don't be surprised to experience some verbal abuse.
- Remember the goal isn't to win arguments. It's to win people.

Now, as I give you these four actions, I need to remind you of something I said last week. I said that graciousness is “fuzzy.” It requires constant wisdom and discernment. It's not always going to look the same in every situation and with every person.

Gracious Action

1. Go the “extra mile” if possible.

In the days of Roman occupation, soldiers could demand of any person that they carry their gear for up to one mile without compensation. Of course, the Jewish people hated this because it reminded them that they were subservient to the Roman Emperor who demanded that all of his subjects declare “Caesar is Lord.”

But they had to do it or suffer the consequences. So they did but not without dropping the gear as fast as they could and maybe they even mumbling a few choice words as they departed. But Jesus told his followers “if that happens to you ...”

“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.”
Matthew 5:41 (NIV)

“Treat that soldier better than he expects you to treat him.”

But, wait a minute, Jesus, that’s helping him to do something evil. He represents a godless culture!

“I know. But if you’re forced to go one mile, offer to go a second.”

Now, as to how this plays out in your life and mine with the people whose values clash with ours ... that’s fuzzy. You have ask God to give you wisdom and discernment.

- If gay marriage really bothers you and you’re a baker or a photographer

maybe that means you bake two cakes ... without charge.

- If your son or daughter moves in with a girlfriend or boyfriend without getting married and that bothers you as a Christian (and it should), maybe you offer to pay for them to go see a counselor to at least ensure they have a chance at success.

“But isn’t that saying that I agree with what they’re doing?”

Maybe. But it also treats them better than they deserve; better than they expect. And frankly, there’s no reason as you go the second mile that you can’t also make it clear that you don’t condone anything but you do value them as people and you don’t

hate them ... which leads to the second gracious action.

2. What you can't condone, don't condemn.

This is what Jesus meant when he said “do not judge.”

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye?”

“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” *Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)*

What Jesus is talking about is actually *helping* someone, not beating them down. For example, he says, if you have something in your eye, in order to get it out, you often need the help of someone else to see it and remove it. When they do that for you, they’re serving you, not condemning you.

So when you see something that’s dangerous or destructive in someone else’s life you don’t need to condone that. But you also don’t need to condemn it. Those are not the only two choices. There’s a third option. And that’s to help by speaking truth

in love; setting boundaries when necessary; taking action when necessary.

The Bible says that “Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness” so because I love you I cannot rejoice in behavior I think will be destructive to you.

But wait a minute, Rick. Didn't you just say we can't expect “them” to act like Christians? Why would they want to listen to “our truth?”

3. Emphasize wisdom over commandments.

Again, you can't expect people who are not Christians to think like Christians. They are not going to care what the Bible says. But God's ways are wise. Surely we as Christians can explain why it's wise to live the way we

do, can't we?

- Why does marriage make sense even though some marriages fail?
- Why is it wise to be generous with money instead of living on the financial crazy cycle?
- How does it benefit us to stop one day a week and renew our soul in worship of God?
- Why is it a good idea to have a moral compass outside of ourselves and what our culture is telling us today (which will change tomorrow)?

Surely we have answers to these questions. I mean, I get it why a Christian would say “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” But don't we believe that our God is telling us to do things that are smart and beneficial?

So ...

- Go the “extra mile” if possible.
- What you can’t condone, don’t condemn.
- Emphasize wisdom over commandments

4. Tell the truth on yourself.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

And Paul in his letters described his sinfulness. In Romans 7 he talked wanted to do one thing – the right thing - and then did another. Elsewhere we read that he was

the guy holding the coats while Pharisees murdered one of the first Christian leaders.

He told the truth on himself and so should we as Christians.

Why? Because I don't want *you thinking* that *I think* I am better than you because I am a Christian!

Telling the Truth

For example ... last week between the first and second services, I failed spectacularly at being gracious. And I need to confess this to you because the last thing I ever want anyone to think is that I have somehow “arrived” and that I have this (or any other aspect of the Christian life) nailed down. Unfortunately, *passion* about a subject can

come sometimes come across that way.

What I mean is that I am very passionate about this particular characteristic of graciousness and I can speak about it with a lot of knowledge and enthusiasm because *I get it*. I've experienced it personally. And I believe it could be such a game-changer in how Christians are perceived in this culture. But that's not the same thing as maturity in this area.

And, again, last week I realized that I have such a long way to go.

A couple years ago, I spent a whole lot of time trying to help someone deal with a huge problem in their life – a problem that was literally destroying their marriage and family. But the person I was trying to help

turned on me and it got really ugly. The abuse that had been poured onto their spouse was poured onto me to the point where I had to get a security system for my home. And then, to my shock, the abused spouse turned on me as well.

And it was painful and made me mad but, I really do want to be a gracious person because that's how God treats me. So, when the couple re-united around their contempt for me, I thought "if me being their whipping boy is what it takes for them to get their act together to save their marriage and family, OK. So be it. I'm not going to talk bad about them. I'm going to pray that God will bless them and their family as much as he has blessed me and mine and move on."

And up until last Sunday, that's what I did ... until someone came up to me between services and said "Guess what? I just ran into so-and-so at the store this morning. I was a little surprised because they said all kinds of bad things about you" and then went on to tell me what those bad things were – including that I had kicked them out of the church!

And I was mad. Mad that they weren't appreciative. Mad that they hadn't done the right thing by me after all I had suffered for them. So I said, "I'm not going to tell you all the details of what kind of a jerk that guy was but I *am* going to tell you that after six months of being personally harassed and threatened by him, I finally told him to get his butt out of the church."

Of course, *that* statement had *the same effect* as making him look like a jerk. But he deserved it.

By the way, in the interest of full-disclosure, I didn't say "butt." I said the other word. As I said, I was angry!

In fact, I was so angry that I didn't even tell the truth about what really happened. Specifically, *I personally* never told the guy or his wife to leave. Our Advisory Council – the seven members of this church to whom I am accountable and who can fire me if necessary – *they* told him to not come on the property anymore and to stop emailing me. And they told me to stop responding to his emails.

But I was so mad last week that *I wanted to*

be the one who told him! Even if I wasn't.

Now, do you remember that part in the story of Jesus where Peter denies that he knows Jesus and then the rooster crows and Peter has this moment of great shame because Jesus had predicted that would happen?

That's kind of what I felt like last Sunday when I heard the band start up with the prelude. "Oh. My. Gosh. How in the world am I going to go in there and talk about ... being gracious? I am not treating *them* (that guy and his wife) better than they deserve. I am trying to ruin their reputation in the eyes of this person who is telling me this. Ugghh!"

Fortunately, the way we did our service last

week included a vivid reminder that God's grace to us covers even the sin of ungraciousness (I'm talking about communion) and that helped a little bit.

But I've got to tell you: when I stood up to speak, I felt like the last person who should be saying anything to anyone about graciousness. That incident reminded me of the truth about me - that I'm no better than anyone else. I am still a sinner in need of a savior. I still have such a long, long way to go.

And that's a good thing to be reminded of because Christianity isn't about how good I am but about how good Jesus is.

Conclusion

So, here's a question or two for you to ponder as we draw this to a close.

As you think about the people in your life who are not Christians and whose values clash with yours, what would happen if you

...

- Stopped expecting them to walk and talk like Christians?
- Weren't surprised and offended when they called you a hater?
- Focused not on trying to win arguments but on trying to win them to Jesus?

What would happen? I think they would be surprised at that change in your attitude but, beyond that, I think you would feel a lot less pressure in your life. I think you

would be a lot more relaxed in your relationship with them.

And what if you ...

- Tried to go the “extra mile” and submitted to them whenever possible.
- What if, when you got to an issue where you couldn’t condone their ideas or behavior you just said that without condemning?
- What if you emphasized the wisdom of God instead of commandments of God?
- What if you were open and honest about your own failures to live up to your faith?

There’s no guarantee that anyone of your “thems” would turn to Christ in faith and begin to follow him. But I do think it’s safe

to say that, at the very least, there would be an element of surprise that, for some reason, you are not acting like Christians are “supposed” to act. You’re treating them better than they expected.

And by doing that, you would be acting as spiritual salt and spiritual light ... creating a hunger and thirst for God and showing forth who He really is.

And that, friend, is the goal.

Let’s pray together.

<PRAYER>

Feature Song – Salt & Light

Closing Comments – Rick

Before we leave, I want to take a couple of minutes to update you on our *Shine Generosity Project*,

Remember generosity is more than random acts of giving here and there whenever we get inspired or feel guilty and we happen to have enough money left over to give.

Instead, generosity is the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of personal financial assets.

And if you're new with us and you're wondering why we've defined generosity in that way, you can check out the messages from that series on our app and website.

Now, the purpose of the project was to provide a very simple and practical way to

put this definition practice so we set a goal for 30 individuals or families who are currently not giving or are giving randomly to NHCC to sign up for recurring regular donations through our app or website.

As of a week ago, we had 6 signups which was great for the first week of the project.

As of yesterday, we were at 17 signups which is over halfway to the goal.

I think that is excellent progress. And a big thank you to everyone who has taken this step.

If you've been thinking about doing that, you still have time. And ... if you would like some help in signing up you can stop by the Shine Generosity Project table on the way out. By the way, you can also make the

commitment to give regularly without doing it electronically. You can still write checks or put cash in the offering.

Ok, that's all for today. Let's go be salt and light in our world!

Endnotes