

A BETTER WAY: Week 2

Engaging a Culture of Individualism with Hospitality

Matthew 10:5-15, 40-42

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome
- b. Series setup - A Better Way
 - i. Last Week: Jesus' example of engaging culture
 1. He engaged people in distress with compassion.
 - ii. Today and Following: Jesus' instructions for engaging culture
- c. Cultural concerns today
 - i. Health - mental, emotional, physical, relational, spiritual - esp. teens
 - ii. National & Global concerns - economy, government, war, hunger
 - iii. Civility - attitude toward people with whom you disagree - home, school, work, neighborhood, church, news
 - iv. Macro Trends - information technology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, post-Christendom
 - v. Gender & Sexuality - personal identity, gender fluidity, trans athletes
 - vi. Race - tension, reconciliation, diversity
 - vii. Family - marriage, divorce, singleness
- d. A Culture of Individualism
 - i. "Individualistic cultures are those that stress the needs of the individual over the needs of the group as a whole. In this type of culture, people are seen as independent and autonomous. Social behavior tends to be dictated by the attitudes and preferences of individuals. Cultures in North America and Western Europe tend to be individualistic."
 - ii. "Collectivist - or communal - cultures emphasize the needs and goals of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of each individual. In such cultures, relationships with other members of the group and the interconnectedness between people play a central role in each person's identity."

2. Implications for how to engage a culture of individualism - 5 things.

- a. **Start with your inner circle (5-6).**

- i. Jesus told his disciples to go to the Jews first.
 - 1. Romans 1:16. Paul explained, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”
- ii. People from all of Israel were lost sheep. Holistic condition; not selective.
 - 1. Isaiah 53:6. The prophet said, “we all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way.”
- iii. Sometimes we selectively engage people further from us, overlooking those who are close by.
 - 1. Family. Friends. Neighbors.
 - 2. We might build relationships with others for any number of reasons. Sometimes we avoid hard conversations or messy relational work with those closest to us.
 - 3. Sometimes it’s hardest to love those closest to us.
 - a. Expectations are higher.
 - b. Vulnerability is greater.
 - c. Harder to be married than to date.
- iv. But Jesus told his disciples to start with the inner circle - the Jews who were lost and needed the compassion of Jesus. Don’t overlook them. I believe our engagement should start there too.

b. Embody the Kingdom of Heaven (7-8).

- i. The good news of the gospel is that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. That was Jesus’ message.
 - 1. It is a present reality, though not fully manifested. Already, not yet.
- ii. Accompanying the message are many acts of compassion that embody the goodness, kindness of God.
 - 1. Healing. Raising the dead. Driving out demons.
 - 2. The idea is that Jesus’ disciples had received compassion given to them freely, so they were to pay it forward in their acts of compassion.
 - 3. We saw last week how Jesus engaged people in distress with compassion.
- iii. What can we do today that embodies the Kingdom of Heaven?

1. Pete Scazzero talks about spouses loving one another like God with skin on. Consistently putting one another's needs first, being a safe refuge, an encourager.
2. Train your thinking toward compassion. Cultivate a heart of compassion for people.

c. Trust God to provide for you (9-10).

- i. The disciples were sent out as they were. No special plans or provisions were made to sustain them on their mission. No supplies were gathered. No extra money or clothing.
 1. Someone pointed out that the disciples would have had no appearance of doing anything but serving God and others. No big production. Just people living day-to-day.
- ii. Jesus' explanation was that workers are worthy of their food.
 1. It's the idea that when we work for an employer, the company provides what's needed to accomplish the task. It's part of resourcing the workforce.
 2. Jesus says so it is with God. He will provide what is needed for his workers to go out and share and embody the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.
 3. Over the years we'd encourage our kids that God is always with them.
- iii. How would God provide for the disciples? Through the welcoming hospitality of those ready to hear and receive him.

d. Find people who welcome you into their life & stick with them (11-13; 40-42).

- i. Jesus told his disciples to enter a town, find out who is worthy and stay there until they left. Interesting instruction, and I think this is the main idea of this section, so we'll camp here.
 1. How were they to find out who is worthy?
 2. What did it mean to be worthy?
- ii. Verse 12 says "greet a household when you enter it." The standard Jewish greeting was "peace be with you."
 1. Evidently a worthy household would be one that welcomed the disciples of Jesus, offering them hospitality and receptivity.

2. In those houses, Jesus said to let their peace be on it - enjoy the warmth of their welcome, bless one another - and to stay until they left for another town.
- iii. Such hospitality was a big deal, and Jesus explains why in vv. 40-42.
1. Read **Matthew 10:40-42**.
 - a. To welcome a disciple was to welcome Jesus. To welcome Jesus was to welcome God the Father.
 - b. A prophet was one who proclaimed God's word
 - c. A righteous person obeyed God's word.
 - d. A little one was an ordinary follower, perhaps a less spiritually mature part of the crowd of Jesus' followers. Maybe a new follower.
 - e. Every act of hospitality - even the smallest, giving a cup of cold water - was worthy of reward.
 - f. The disciples of Jesus were the embodiment of the Kingdom. To receive these people was to receive Jesus and perhaps even to become a child of God (John 1).
 2. This welcome appears to be the response of a worthy host.
- iv. Dina and I were welcomed by our neighbors back in 2001. We moved into a new house and spent lots of time with them. Eventually they received Jesus and began to follow him.
1. We weren't trying to apply Matthew 10, but we were disciples of Jesus living among neighbors in a community and we stumbled upon a worthy household.
 2. They welcomed us into their life, and we stuck with them.
 3. They're willing hospitality toward us was a precursor to receiving and following Jesus. It was as natural as you could imagine. Almost as if God designed it to be that way.
 4. Maybe you have a story like that. I wish we had more of them.
- v. I wonder if one reason we don't experience more stories like that is because our majority culture in North America is so deeply individualistic.
1. We're known more for parking in garages and disappearing into our homes than spending frequent quality time with our neighbors.
 2. We're known more for empty water-cooler chatter about weather and sports than showing real interest in someone's personal story.

3. We're increasingly threatened by diverging worldviews and suspicious of the motives of others. So most of us stick to ourselves and try to make sure we're okay.
 - a. Political differences fuel individualism.
 - b. Racial tensions fuel individualism.
 - c. Non-traditional gender identities fuel individualism.
 - d. Stories of violence fuel individualism.
 - e. I think the great migration is fueling individualism.

- vi. But we should recognize that not everyone in our culture thinks like an individualist. And Jesus wasn't speaking to an individualistic culture. He was speaking to a much more communal culture in Israel.
 1. The expectation was that they would extend hospitality to travelers. Jesus took a cultural practice and employed it for his mission. He understood the culture and engaged it with the good news of his Kingdom.
 2. As we think through this text, I think that's one of the takeaways.
 3. The largest minority cultures in North America - Black, Hispanic, and Asian - tend to think of themselves as a group, not a collection of individuals.
 - a. I heard a black pastor I respect talk about the different responses when something happens to a member of a group. Individualist = facts. Collectivist = feelings.

- vii. Maybe one of the most counter-cultural things we can do is try to take Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Matthew 10 and apply them to us. Find a worthy person by greeting them with peace.
 1. We Christians might lament that the world doesn't want to hear the good news about Jesus, but maybe one reason is because we lack the embodiment of the message that Jesus talks about in these verses.

- viii. Interestingly, what we've been talking about is Christians being willing to RECEIVE hospitality. The disciples were in the vulnerable position of depending on the reception of others for food and shelter, and that's exactly how God designed it. It's also what Jesus modeled.
 1. Remember Zacchaeus.
 2. Back in June we talked about Jesus honoring a woman of Samaria by asking for her help.

- ix. To be sure, giving hospitality is also good, but there seems to be something to this idea of Christ-followers putting ourselves in a position of dependence and vulnerability, allowing others the opportunity to gain the reward of welcoming us.
 - 1. That goes against pride, independence, self-reliance.
 - 2. We have to trust God and allow him to meet our needs through others. Perhaps strangers. Perhaps people who think and act in ways that make us uncomfortable.

e. **When people reject you, keep your peace (14-15).**

- i. Verse 13 says “let your peace return to you.” Don’t be distraught when people don’t let you into their life.
 - 1. If I’m reading this text correctly, a person’s hospitality or lack thereof is a reflection of THEIR worthiness, and that is a matter between them and God.
- ii. Verse 14 says “shake the dust off your feet.” When Israelites would return from traveling abroad, they would shake the Gentile dust off their garments as a symbol of removing the contaminated soil of the world.
 - 1. Sometimes a physical gesture reinforces an inward posture.
- iii. Finally, this section closes with a startling reference. Refusing these disciples of Jesus brought more judgment than Sodom & Gomorrah. Two Old Testament towns that symbolized debauchery and sinfulness.
 - 1. Shows the importance of Jesus!
 - 2. Welcome him into your life. Today, if you’ve not done so.