

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

And so we pray that our hearts would be humbled and be lives that reflect the grace that You would have us manifest in them. And we ask that the ministry and preaching of Your Word might be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. Please.

I was reminded again this week why I only post pictures of fish that I catch on Facebook, and pictures of my family are, you know, nice stuff.

When you post opinions in social media, inevitably you will get to hear the other sides of any

subject, and people can be a little venomous in the way that they respond to thoughts and the ways that they communicate. And so I got to experience that again. And there's a part of me that, you know, says, "Well, don't join the fray, you know. Don't speak. Don't say. Don't do." And I think that's part of what has happened in our society, to a degree, is that we have all allowed the loud, angry voices and the mean-spirited and the judgmental voices to silence those, and many of us from speaking. And that's very unfortunate. I think the death of Charlie Kirk, his assassination, was horrific. And I was very moved by his ministry and just very saddened by what had happened. And I wrote a little tribute about him and posted it on my blog and on my Facebook page. I don't know if you know I had a blog, RevCharlieHolt.com. It's an excellent blog.

I don't post very often on it, but every now and then I'll put something out there. And I got inspired.

I just think, you know, when I reflect on Charlie Kirk and what he did, I, of course, don't always, Ä¶ I don't know everything that Charlie Kirk said. How could I possibly say I agree with everything that he said? He was not a perfect person, but he was a really fascinating person. He was a good person. He was a great evangelist and prophet in a lot of ways for our time.

And one of the things about him is that he deeply cared about young people. And he went out to college campuses around the country, and he would put

out microphones and he would invite people that disagreed with him to come into a conversation and a dialogue about anything that they wanted to talk about. No controversial subject was off the table. You know, he would say, "Whatever you want to talk about," and they would talk about the political issues of the day. But one of his favorite things to discuss was his Christian faith, and he would winsomely listen to what a person's case was for why they disagreed with him, why they didn't believe what he believed, and then he would winsomely present counterpoints and logically discuss with them. Very fair in the way that he treated other people, which I think is just a great witness in and of itself. Whether you agreed with all of his ideas, the way that he encouraged debate and dialogue and discussion, and was evenhanded in listening to the other person's opinion, and in fact inviting it and wanting to help people to correct and to say what they believed was a real testimony and witness. And so I was really disheartened by what had happened this week. And so I said some things, and the negativity came out, along with a lot of positive things, too. But one of the things I think is timely, this gospel passage, about the ways in which we think about other people and the way that we talk about other people. You have Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners, is what it says, into his presence, and he is doing that because he wants to teach them and to lead them and to be their Messiah, their Savior.

And there are some Pharisees and scribes, and they are grumbling.

And this is what it says that they say. They say, "This man," talking about Jesus, "this man receives sinners and he even eats with them."

Now, let me make a few observations about that in an application to our time.

First of all, it's very typical of human beings, going back even to the time of Jesus, for us to create a label or a category like sinners, for example, and then put a bunch of people into that category and then write them off.

And we all do it, don't we?

We all have our derogatory slurs and negative labels that we can create a basket of whatever it is, Nazis, fascists, communists, socialists whatever, Democrats, Republicans, Florida State fans, I don't know, whatever it is.

But we take and we put the people into that bucket, and then we say, "They're this," and then we can cancel them out of our having to deal with them.

And that's what the Pharisees and the scribes had done with the tax collectors and the sinners, that Jesus was welcoming him into their presence.

Well, let's be honest about the group of people that Jesus was talking to. I mean, the tax collectors, these weren't just your typical IRS agents. I've talked to a few IRS agents who are kind of mean-spirited and use the power of the office to be grumpy and that sort of thing. I've also talked to some really nice ones that are very helpful.

But these were,Ä¶ tax collectors during that time were Jewish people who were working for the occupying tyrannical force of the Romans.

So in a sense, they were traitors to their own people. They had gone to work for the Romans to extort money out of their poor Jewish neighbors and family members.

How would you feel about tax collectors?

Bad people, negative views.

And that's the way people,Ä¶, people took people like that and they put them in the category of sinners, and that's where they could live.

Written off, "I don't want to talk to you. Don't want to deal with you.

You're a lost cause."

And Jesus was welcoming these people into his life. He was even having dinner with them, having lunch with them, talking with them, trying to reach them.

And the Pharisees and the scribes said they're sinners.

Here's another observation about all of that: the label "s sinners."

The only person that wasn't a sinner in those gatherings was Jesus, actually.

He's the one that we understand and believe to be without sin.

So calling somebody a sinner is saying something about yourself, i.e., well, I'm not one of them, thank God.

I'm righteous. I'm holy. I'm on the good team. I'm a good one.

And what the Scriptures teach, and we have some really wonderful passages about this, tough ones actually, the Old Testament passage where Jeremiah is just calling all of the world under judgment.

And then you get to the Psalm that says, "There is no one that is righteous, no, not one."

And then the Apostle Paul, who says, "Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners, of which I am the foremost."

Every single one of these passages is saying a unified thing: that every single person on this planet is in desperate need of salvation and grace given to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who gave His life as a ransom for all.

There isn't one of us who doesn't fit into the category of sinner.

No, not one. Paul would even pick up that Psalm in that particular passage and use it in his book of... to the Romans, where he would say, "Am I any different?"

Not at all.

For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Every single one of us is in desperate need of grace.

It's interesting, I do a lot of counseling for people who are planning their funerals or funerals for loved ones.

And people pick a lot of the same stuff at funerals. They pick the same hymns. There's a group of hymns that everybody tends to like. There's a group of readings that everybody tends to like.

But one of the hymns that is on the list is "Amazing Grace." And people...

Some people, "Oh, I just got to have Amazing Grace at my funeral," or, "I want Amazing Grace song. I definitely want that one."

And then other people will see Amazing Grace going, "Oh, not that one."

And it's interesting. I mean, some is just... It's overdone. We just always hear that when I want something different. Okay, that's fair enough. But some people, they say, "I don't like that line."

I know what line they're talking about. You know what line they're talking about? I don't want at my funeral the line about the wretch.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see."

I don't want that wretch language at my funeral. Thank you very much.

Part of what the Scriptures are saying is we all are wretched in and of ourselves.

We all need that Amazing Grace.

The person that wrote Amazing Grace, by the way, was a bit of a wretch. He was a captain of a slave ship. His name was John Newton.

And the Lord changed his heart, converted him to the faith, and called him actually to be a pastor and a hymn writer and all kinds of other things.

And like the Apostle Paul, took him from being a man of violence and a man who blasphemed and a man who treated people really poorly to being a person who understood his own need for salvation and his own need for grace and changed his life for the good.

Many people would have written John Newton off as a lost cause, but not the Lord.

And so when he writes Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

What a powerful words, huh?

Jesus, this is another interesting thing about our gospel: Jesus wasn't just concerned about the tax collector and the sinners that he was welcoming, but he actually didn't even see the Pharisees and the scribes as lost causes.

And so he tries to tell a story that would help them to look at those tax collectors and sinners from a different perspective, to change their perspective. And that's one of the masterful things that Jesus did as a communicator, is the use of story and parable to kind of flip the script and help you to see things from a different perspective. And so he tells this story of, you know, if you have a hundred sheep, you know, say you're a shepherd and you have a hundred sheep and you lose one of them, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine and go look for the lost sheep?

And if you found it, wouldn't you call your friends over and say, "Hey, remember that sheep that I lost?

I'm excited, I found it. Let's have a party."

Well, the same thing from God's perspective, when a sinner repents and gives their life to him, when a guy like John Newton comes to faith, there's much rejoicing in heaven

when people are converted to the truth and give their lives to the Lord.

If you had ten coins, you were a woman, you had ten coins, and you lost one, and then you found it, wouldn't you call your friends over and rejoice?

And what Jesus is saying is, we need to change the way that we look at the people of this world, because God doesn't desire that any be lost.

You know, I had maybe four or five of my Facebook friends block me and unfriend me this week.

I'm their lost cause.

They don't want to hear from me anymore. There's no point in interacting with me. I'm lost.

Okay.

But that's sad to me.

And I have some people that maybe I feel the same way. I'd like to block them and unfriend them, cancel them out of my life, never have to deal with them anymore.

I mean, that's a very human response to people that we disagree with or that we don't like.

It's actually one of, again, back to the witness of Charlie Kirk. He would put a microphone out and he'd say, "I don't want the people that believe the same things as me to come to the microphone, but I want the people that don't agree with me, that don't believe me to come to the microphone, because I want to hear what you think and what you have to say." And he would give them a platform and a microphone. It was funny, there's one video of a guy

coming with a bullhorn and he's speaking on a bullhorn, and Charlie's like, "I gave you a microphone.

Why are you using a bullhorn?" But he was giving people a platform to talk, to share their ideas, and to express. And I heard him say once, "Maybe I need to learn from what somebody else has to say." Now I want to tell you what I think.

Jesus ,À I'll give you three D's and I'll end with this ,À but Jesus wants us to change our perspective about people. And if you have people in your life that you think are lost because they did this or that, or they voted for this person, or they voted against this person, or they are associated with these people and therefore they're the unwashed, they're part of this category.

Jesus wants you to have a desire for them, to have a heart for them, to make them an object of your prayers and your heart's desire because God hasn't given up on them.

And He would reconcile them to Himself.

So number one is have a desire for the lost.

And to value the one, the one person ,À you know, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one. The woman looks for the one lost coin. And what the Lord is saying is that every single sheep has value to a shepherd. Every single coin is important to a woman who has ten coins. She doesn't want to just have nine coins. She wants to have ten coins because all the coins are of value.

How much more people?

Every single one of the people of this planet is loved by the Lord, and He desires that they would come into a personal relationship with Him.

There are no lost causes and canceled people when it comes to God's perspective on the people of this planet.

He wants all of them to repent and come into a reconciled relationship with Him. They're made in His image.

And so this is the perspective that the Lord is trying to get across. And yeah, some people are really hard to love, aren't they?

I know a lot of them that are. And yet, that's our call. And does it make a difference?

I love that little story of the boy that's on the beach and there's, you know, the thousand starfish that have washed up on the beach and he's out there picking them up and chunking them back out into the ocean. And this man comes up and he kind of cynically says, "It doesn't seem like you're making much of a difference, little man."

And little boy reaches down, grabs another one, throws it out in the ocean. He says, "Better made a difference for that one."

Every single one is important, even if you didn't win any of them to the Lord.

Winning one is worth it.

And lastly, to change our perspective about people so that we would delight in their return as the Lord delights in them.

I have seen people come back to the Lord at the very end of their life, where they have been just a pretty ornery person all the way through their life, kind of prickly, not very fun to be around, a little grumpy.

And then at the very end of their life, you see just an amazing conversion in their heart,

and you realize they weren't a lost cause to the Lord.

You know, the Lord delights in the thief on the cross that repents at the very last minute.

And so I want to end by just asking you, is there anyone in your life that you have put into the category of somebody I've written off, or they're lost? I won't, I'm done with them.

And you know, search yourself in this moment, because we have let our society go a little too far down that road.

And there's a need for all of us to repent, and repent, one, towards the Lord, first and foremost, of course.

But in repenting towards the Lord, we now have to repent towards one another, which is another part of that equation.

Amen.