

Monday Story – Alatair, Trail Life and American Heritage girls, Upward Soccer

Financial Update – 95% - If you were ever wondering.

When I was a fresh college ministry staff member with the University of Illinois, we did a great job of welcoming new students. And one year, we welcomed a new guy named Dave Liming. Now Dave was smart – cuz, well, everyone at U of I is smart. Dave’s struggle was around social skills. A winning smile, but touseled hair, misfit clothes and, well, he was a Chemistry major. And you know what it is like to try to have a conversation with a chemistry major! It’s like 45 seconds and out. In fact, he was one of the freshman who we would sit down and say “we are going to play a game. I ask you a question, like “what is your hometown.” You answer it and then ask me a question. And it could be the same exact question and we will go back and forth.” So Dave kept coming. He was in a Bible Study. He came to every retreat. He grew in his faith... he learned to serve where he fit. And he grew in his social skills... By his Senior year, he was ready to lead his own Bible Study and that year, five little freshman engineering and chemistry majors followed him around like ducklings with their mama. God was discipling Dave. But he was discipling me too... Mark, don’t write people off just because you don’t think they fit. I have big plans for ordinary people that you have no idea!

Did you ever notice who Jesus gathered around himself? Teenagers. A woman possessed by seven demons. A hated, notorious tax collector. A guy who couldn’t walk, or was blind or had a withered hand. An insurrectionist Zealot. Fishermen. It was all real flesh and blood, but they were the leftovers, the impure, the people that would be left on the fringes. Jesus aimed for them.

This was contrary to the religious establishment. And contrary to the way things work normally in culture. You know, people in power want to surround themselves with ‘winners’! The high gpa kids, the national champion athletes, the curvewrecker intellects, the people who color inside the lines – the Kardashians! the bold and the beautiful.

And strangely to me, Jesus had harsh words for the religious establishment. The pharisees. The teachers of the law. And I am still trying to learn my lessons from Jesus...

Luke 11

³⁷ When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. ³⁸ But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

³⁹ Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees **clean the outside** of the cup and dish, **but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.** ⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

Why was Jesus so harsh with these guys? Pharisees and teachers of the law?

WHAT is a Pharisee?

- Often Christians think of Pharisee as a job. Like a pastor or teacher. But Pharisee is not a job, it is a sect, or a denomination. It is like saying “Presbyterian”. And then there were Saducees and Essenes – which would be like saying the “Episcopals” and the “Mennonites” The Pharisees were the biggest sect as well. It was the popular, populist movement. Not only that but it was a progressive movement. They cared a lot about personal morality, and about social morality, and about living according to the Torah – the law of Moses
- In general, you’d find the pharisees to be likeable people. They would be your favorite neighbors. They would mind their Ps and Qs, live an orderly life, invest in their kids, and be highly devoted to God. They were big into education – and especially memorizing the law of Moses. “Good, salt of the earth people!”
- They believed in the Messiah coming. They wanted him to come. They thought that he would never come as long as they were compromising. They had to follow the law BETTER in order to create the kind of culture that was ready for the messiah. So they paid careful attention to the 613 laws of Torah. Yep, I said 613.
- But if that was all, they would be fine. However, they made a cottage industry out of interpreting the law. So, if Sunday is the day of rest, what constitutes work? And they had it knocked out... number of steps in a day. How much weight you could carry, whether you could start a fire, what constitutes food preparation, how to determine your tithe... to them the details mattered – the magic was in the fine print.
- But the problem was... the fine print became the main thing.

Now I have a theory here. I think that Jesus didn’t wash his hands just to start the conversation. You see, a Pharisee saw the whole world as potentially unclean. The law said that a dead body was unclean. A person with leprosy was unclean. Pigs were unclean. A menstrual flow was unclean. And if you touch someone who is unclean, then you become unclean even if you didn’t touch the original unclean thing. And even if you touch someone who touched something and even they didn’t know they were unclean. Kinda like getting cooties in first grade. So you better wash your hands so that unclean does not go from the outside to the inside. Now, this handwashing before dinner wasn’t in the Law of Moses. It was a layer of rules on top of the 613 rules....

Now here is the crazy thing about Jesus. Normally, when a clean thing comes in contact with an unclean thing... the clean thing gets infected. Like when salt water is mixed with fresh water, it is all salt water. Or when a healthy body touches a leper, there is potential of contracting leprosy. But Jesus is the great exception. When Jesus touches the leper, the leper gets infected with healthy. When Jesus touches the blind man, sight is restored. When Jesus touches a sinner, they get forgiven. Jesus is infection working backward... or he is infecting people with goodness and health and wholeness! So maybe, just maybe he didn’t wash just to get the conversation rolling...

So Jesus tells the guy... It is not what is outside of you that makes you unclean. It is what is inside. In this case, he says “you are clean on the outside, but inside are full of greed and wickedness!” It matches his other teaching in the sermon on the mount and to other Pharisees. What goes into your stomach does not make you unclean. It is what comes out of you. Pay more attention to fixing your greed than washing your hands! Then he ups the ante!

⁴² “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but **you neglect justice and the love of God**. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

⁴³ “Woe to you Pharisees, because **you love the most important seats** in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

Now I want you to imagine a guy who is going through his mint leaves 1...2...8...9 – 10. 1...2... get it? He is meticulous about the law, but there is a guy just around the corner who hasn't eaten in days. And a widow down the street who is being mistreated in the courts, but can't afford her own defense. Jesus is saying – dude, it is not the herbs. I mean, keep on tithing... but don't miss love and justice!

What was motivating these guys was titles and greetings. Nice to see you great one! Hello your honor! Please... sit next to me. They didn't love PEOPLE, they loved SEATS!

Did you know that this is why **AB Simpson** started the Christian and Missionary Alliance? Back in 1887, he had been promoted to a great gig. 10th presbyterian in New York City. It was large, wealthy and his preaching drew great crowds. Simpson spent his spare time on the docks with - get this – Irish and Italian immigrants. I know! Scandalous! And when the people he reached started showing up at church, the elders and donors complained. Threatened to leave. Simpson had a dilemma. Stop reaching immigrants or divide the church. He didn't want either, so he chose the third path. Walk away from his sweet building and six figure income. Start a church that welcomes everyone... the poor, the dirty, the uneducated – anybody created in God's image would be welcome.

So on a frozen night in what he called a 'cold and cheerless' dance hall, he started over. With seven people and a Bible, he flipped it open and it landed on Zechariah 4:2 – Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord God Almighty. In other words, you may be only seven, but when you welcome the refugees, the weirdos and the outcast.... When you put the power of Jesus behind them... you can become a might army of irregulars. It is the kind of Army Jesus produced and the kind of army Simpson championed and to be frank, the kind of army CCC can put together.

I have told you that I have a fear for CCC. It is the tenth presbyterian fear. It is the respectable religion fear. It is the pharisee fear. My fear is that we forget the least and the lost in pursuit of keeping the rules and the status quo.

Our danger is that we do things well, hire amazing staff, have a great building, and make our budget. I am not bragging here, I am warning. We must constantly be on the lookout for the least and the lost. We must never become hardened to the addict, the divorcee, the trans teen, the homeless, the felon, the abortionist. We have to care about the marginalized person, the refugee, the single mom.

Do you know that this is a generation in search of God? Sometimes they know it and they know they are on a detour. Sometimes... they are just looking for something... and don't know it is only God that will make them whole. This is a generation of anxiety, who does not know that Jesus is the prince of peace. This is a generation of depression who does not know that Jesus is Jesus is hope. This is a generation addicted to screens because it passes the time and numbs the pain. And they just don't know that Jesus is the healer. In Jesus' own words, they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. So be on the look out! Find them! Love them! Include them!

They are all around us. So let me make a challenge. How about inviting one person who would be totally unsuspecting. One person who hasn't been to church in years or would not imagine they are welcome at church. Invite them to Easter and then to your place for Easter brunch. Find someone who is down on their luck. Someone who has nowhere to go for Easter lunch. Someone who is homeless. Someone with sexual brokenness. A single mom. An atheist. You see, THAT is the way of Jesus... It is the way of life!

Then there is this one:⁴⁴ "Woe to you, because **you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.**"

Anybody remember the show "Yo, MTV raps battles"? They would drop an insult in rap about the other dude's height, weight, shoe style... or mother. And everyone would go OH!!! Well, that just happened right here.

What is that? Well remember I said "dead people make you unclean." So do graves. Just walking on them makes you unclean. But an unmarked grave is WORSE. Because it makes you unclean and you never even know it when you walk over. And Jesus says to these people obsessed with cleanliness – THAT'S YOU! You make people unclean without people knowing it. Oh, youch.

It is like Jesus saying "you are the virus on the computer from the Nigerian prince and when you open it, it destroys your laptop from the inside." You are not only not the solution to sin... you are the problem!

⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

⁴⁶ Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because **you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.**"

Jesus does not back off here! I am not trying to insult them and not you. You are just as bad! You have these layers on layers of stuff Mr. Teacher of the LAW. And it isn't freeing people – it is burdening them. A little background here. Some of you will remember the Leviticus series- the law was designed to help people get RIGHT with God. It was teaching on – hey, you are going to be ritually unclean from time to time... just living life you are going to have dead bodies and graves and pigs and menstruation around, so here is how to bathe or change or wait in order to come back to God. It was a formula for reconciliation. But these experts turned it into an UBER long list that becomes impossible to comply with. Jesus is saying – the code for God is not burdens, but freedom! I didn't come to make you conform, I came to take your burdens away so you can be free. You have it upside down.

And this is why he got so critical with these guys. Literally. God's law was designed to free and you are loading people down!

So, Christian friends... we can't expect Christian behavior out of people who don't yet believe in Christ. We can't load them down with burdens without the internal power to change. Because people are all around and they are watching and evaluation.

You want to know something encouraging? That survey we did two weeks ago helped us understand we have people all over **the map spiritually**. Check this out. 80% of CCC people said they are settled or committed in their faith. And that's great. But 20% are curious, exploring, skeptical, unsure... and this is great too! Because we want to be the kind of place that you can safely explore faith in Jesus. Now, full

disclosure... it is our MISSION to make followers of Jesus, so we hope you get to settled or committed. But in the mean time, please be skeptical, ask questions, try this on for size. You are welcome here!

There is a paradigm I want to share with you. It is not unique to me, and it's been around a while. But I think it helps in talking about ministry philosophy. It is the three Bs. Some churches put them in this order: **Behave, Believe, Belong**. It was the tenth presbyterian mindset. If the dock workers clean up, learn English, smell good, get a respectable job and act nice in church, we will tell them about Jesus. Then, once they are baptized, they can come.

The Jesus paradigm is the opposite – **Belong, Believe, Behave**. Jesus started his ministry with “Follow Me” and “Come and See.” His invitation was to relationship, to proximity, to hang time. And he had messy people join with him. Then they discovered he was the messiah, then he gave them the Holy Spirit and then he expected them to act their spiritual maturity.

If Jesus was talking today, he would say...

Come to me!

- *Come with your bedhead. Come with your skinhead.*
- *Come in your pullover. Come with your hangover.*
- *Come with your heavy heart.*
- *Come in your neediness. Come in your nerdiness!*
- *Come out of your world of illusion. Come to me with your gender confusion.*
- *Come with your saggy but crack jeans or your stretchy revealing tops.*
- *Come with your Fentanyl addiction. Come with your iphone addiction. Come with your porn addiction. Come with your food addiction. Come with your nicotine addiction.*
- *Come with your guilt about what you did in that war. Come knowing that for you grace is in store.*
- *Come with your morning breath. Come while you're grieving death.*
- *Come with your anxiety riddled to do lists. Come with your COVID trauma and your family shifts.*
- *Jesus doesn't need you to brush your teeth, unsag your pants, fix your addiction or comb your hair to come to him. He simply tells you to come...*

Jesus welcomes us just the way you are. But he loves you so much, he won't let you stay there. You need to know that he has this beautiful destination of righteousness and peace and hope... but he wants you to commit... so he can take you there.

As a side note... Did you know that this is one big reason the church is full of hypocrites? Because we are all in process. I mean, imagine the perfect church where nobody is sinning – in order to be perfect, they would have to welcome sinners. And, well, that would mess it all up. And the more welcoming they became, the more messy it would be. And the more beautiful it would be. And the more transformational it would be. And the more hypocritical it would be. Because it is full of people who are partially in process. And some are just starting. Jesus is reworking all of the people around you and trust me, nobody has arrived. Oh, they look dressed up on Sunday, but they are just a work in process. That includes me, the staff, the elders. Some of us are further in our process, but trust me, we are all still in process.

So... Christ followers... Here is the key: We need to love people where they are and help them take their best next step toward Jesus. The felons, and the druggies, and the misfits. It may be a big step like trusting in Jesus. It might be a small step, like helping our friend Dave Liming with his social skills.

Dave Liming... did what I never would have predicted. After he graduated, he became a missionary! He used his S.T.E.M. strengths to become a missionary teacher in Asia. His freshmen year, he might have been voted 'least likely to become a missionary.' But today, he is 30 years on the field. And now doing computer wizardry to make Bible translating faster and better. Married. Two beautiful daughters. Because Jesus was going after him when others did not have confidence in him.

Music Starts

Some of you may be saying. "But wait! I am not sure I like the messy people plan... and even as you say it, you are going "Maybe I AM a pharisee..." As we think about the Pharisees, I want you to think about another story that Jesus told. It is a familiar one from LUKE again – Luke 15 this time. It is the parable of the lost son. You may remember. The younger of two sons asks Dad for his inheritance early – breaking his Dad's heart because he just valued him for his money AND because he was skipping town. After a famine, he came home and the Dad welcomed him back with a big party and a ring and new robe! The older son meanwhile was outside the party pouting. He was jealous. He was the rule keeper. And his whole life he never had a party... he just kept the rules. And his Dad came out to him too. And said "come on in son, join the party. Everything I have is yours – you can have a party all you want, but please – today, your brother has come home. Won't you join the festivities?"

Have you ever wondered who that story was told FOR? It tells us in Luke 15:1-2 - **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** Jesus told this story for the exact same people he was dogging in chapter 11. It wasn't FOR the sinners and outcasts (although they could benefit from it!) It was FOR the pharisees.

Jesus wants them to join the party. He wants them to know that the Father is after the rebel AND he is after the rule keeper. Why did Jesus speak so harshly to the rulekeepers? Because he needed to shock them out of their comfortable rut and help them see God's grace is SO much bigger! He wants YOU to know that he loves you! If you are a pharisee, he wants you at the eternity party. And, if you are close to him, his riches are available to you every.... Single..... day!

Friends, Jesus door is open – every day to pharisees and heretic. To the religious and the atheist. To the rulekeeper and the rebel

Invitation?