

The Art of Inclusivity – Defining terms and people

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BIG IDEA – What is inclusivity, and why are we talking about it?

scripture focus - “One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.” **Luke 7:36-38 NLT**

Sin separates us, it divides us. Our own self-determined will and decisions have separated us from God and each other. At the root of all our human problems lies division, animosity, and hatred towards one another. **We must recognize our true enemy towards repairing that breach, that divide.** Only in God and only from God can we find reconciliation, unity, love, and peace. Outside of God, there are only lies from the devil and the selfishness of our own soul.

Humans have been and always will be God's highest form of creation because he breathed in us a soul. Do plants and animals have a soul? No. Are they a living thing? Yes. Do they have an intelligence and design? Yes. Do they communicate with each other? Yes.

We are collectively called the human race. [It has been cited](#) that the phrase itself is on a list “Racial Microaggressions,” believing that there are separate races and some hold power over others. Many of our secular universities choose to use “[microaffirmations](#)” instead, affirming that some races should forfeit their power for the sake of true equality.

What is inclusivity and why are we talking about it?

For God so loved the world – (kosmos: the world, universe; worldly affairs; the inhabitants of the world) **that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

Even in the midst of explosive cultural upheaval, filled with ubiquitous, found-everywhere words that fill our screens and airwaves, God sent THE Word (logos) to dwell among us (John 1:14). **This word, that preexisted time, came to be THE word that wins over all other words**, that determines what is real over all falsities.

Inclusivity is the art of including everyone.

There are two fundamental reasons we need to address this idea of inclusiveness:

1. To understand that as believers gather together, we are all one in Christ. All cultural, racial, societal, even physical features are seen as God given expressions of gifts and beauty, reflecting who He is and what heaven will eventually look like.
2. We also need to understand that our mission is not just be be disciples of Jesus but to also **make disciples of all nations** (éthnos (from ethō, "forming a custom, culture") – properly, people joined by practicing similar customs or common culture; nation(s), usually referring to unbelieving Gentiles (non-Jews)).

It is our mission to see our differences as a strength not a weakness. To see each other as family. And to see those who do not yet know and believe in Jesus as possible brothers and sisters, or future family members.

How are we supposed to do that?

We must quit seeing each other through religious eyes, which judge and categorize people as less than ourselves. We need to quit

seeing nonbelievers through cultural eyes, which prejudge their destination before we even know their story.

We need to see everyone as Jesus sees them – hopeful that they would turn their hearts towards him and not reject God’s love.

Here’s a true story about how Jesus sees people.

“One of the **Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him**, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When **a certain immoral woman** from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.” **Luke 7:36-38 NLT**

The sex worker and the holy

Oh boy! I just love these real-life examples of Jesus’ interactions with both the highest and lowest people on the social ladder at that time. I have so many questions as I read this story.

At first, there are no names mentioned, “one” of the Pharisees and a “certain” immoral woman from the city. Where exactly do Pharisee’s live? Since they are relatively separatists, my guess is that they lived uptown somewhere, away from the chaos of the town. And I imagine that **this Pharisee was surrounded by fellow religious leaders that made up his neighborhood. A place where privilege provided privacy. Simon’s community was safe, egos were fed and status was earned by clean, holy living. There were no sinners there, only saints.**

Where did the city-girl live? With her kind, her people. She lived and worked where the greatest concentration of traffic and opportunity would be. Where she could eek out a living, be herself, not be judged and have a certain kind of freedom of invisibility. Her neighborhood may have carried a label like Red-light-district, Bourbon Street or Crack Alley. **Her neighborhood was where people go to purposely get lost, or lose themselves in addictions, violence,**

and pleasures. A place where people were quite comfortable making transactions for a moment of position, pleasure, or pain - searching, aching for peace and anything to escape their mundane lives. **I doubt neither Simon nor the immoral woman spent much time in each other's neighborhood.**

Ah, but **Jesus felt at home in both neighborhoods.** He probably hated the stench of one and grieved the sight of the other, but his love compelled him to look beyond the facades of stereotypes and labels to **find his mark, his mission - the human heart.**

The city-girl, out of some bold desperation could not wait for Jesus to come back through her part of town, **that day she decided to make her move towards life itself.** She must have heard; she must have seen the kinds of things this rabbi had done. She must have felt that she could risk everything to not just get out of the hood, but out of a lifestyle that was killing her - eating away and stealing every small morsel of moral fiber she had left. **This desire drove her to go uptown, to walk the cold quiet streets of glaring eyes and the invisible cloud of judgment and shame to get to the rabbi-Jesus.** And with her she clutched her most prized and protected possession. **She brought with her escape plan, her nest egg, her only lifeline to a possible retirement from the hellhole from which she was either born into or chose to make a living.** Bringing her alabaster jar appears to be her statement saying, **"I'm never going back."** Maybe she didn't know what she would do with her expensive retirement plan when she, if she, actually met Jesus. Maybe she was planning to pay her way into his group. **Maybe she was going to give it to Jesus thus paying for her sin and hopefully the transaction would free her from a life of pain or guilt.** But when she arrived at Simon's complex and saw Jesus reclining, relaxed, possibly smiling, literally being the LIFE of the party, something overwhelmed her.

She looked at Jesus dirty feet and **knew what she had to do.** **She decided she would go all in and use her life savings to clean the master's feet.** She didn't care who saw her. She didn't care what anyone in the room thought. She served the rabbi with the only things she owned, her tears, her hair as a towel and her ointment as

a way to seal and heal Jesus, now clean but rough feet. **And Jesus let her do it! There must have been so much tension in that room.** It must have vacated the air; time must have slowed to a crawl and everyone one else's brain went into shock. **I'm positive that eyes were wide, dilated and mouths were gaping open.** No one could move. No words could come out of their mouths because their vocal cords were also frozen.

But **Simon's and the others thoughts were written all over their faces.** It was the only thought their tiny, tightly wound, religious minds could think - **IF JESUS ONLY KNEW...** Bah ha ha. **If Jesus knew?** Are you kidding me? IF Jesus knew? **EVERYONE knew who this woman was.** **Her clothing, her mannerisms, her gender - oh my goodness. If Jesus knew! That is hilarious.**

Then Jesus speaks. What is he going to say? Jesus had 100% attention in the room. EVERYONE was absolutely captivated by this dramatic, cliff-hanging curiosity of what would happen next. It wasn't WWJD, what would Jesus do it was WWJS, what would Jesus say?

Jesus tells Simon he has something to say. Remember Luke tells us that Jesus answered Simon's thoughts, but Simon did not know he'd been read like a cartoon strip! I always wondered, **was this Jesus' human, gifted ability to read the room or was this a supernatural move of the Holy Spirit giving Jesus the unspoken thoughts of humans?** I like to think maybe it was both! Either way, it's important to remember Jesus did not do anything that he didn't fully expect his followers to do as well. **We can't keep using the, "yeah, but he's God" excuse to dodge both the gift and the responsibility of all those who believe and follow Jesus.**

Then Jesus tells a story that lowers Simon's pride and elevates God's grace. The two men in debt. One owed a year and half of his wages, the other a month and half of wages. Both debts were cancelled.

Which one should be more appreciative, or as Jesus said, “who has greater love?” The one with the greater debt! **Powerful**. Especially because Simon and all the other religious leaders in the room had a wrong perspective in their heads. **They believed they had zero debt to God, they were perfect because they kept most of the law. I’m fact, they believed that God owed them! Do I believe I owe no debt to God?** What about the woman? I love the fact that Jesus never winked at, minimized, or excused the woman’s own sin. That would have been dishonest and insulting to her.

Jesus said, **her sins “and they are many...” have been forgiven.** Done. Complete. In the past. Why? Because she cried? Because she served? Because she spent her future to care for Jesus calloused feet? **No, because in her act of service she gave Jesus everything! Her repentance was in her tears, her love was in her hair, now becoming a dirty towel, and her salve/lotion gift of generosity was proof of her changed heart. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.**

If anyone wants to see how God looks at our human sin coming to him in brokenness, this is the picture. If anyone wants to see what makes God sick to his stomach just look at the human pride assuming that God won’t come near to those who are broken. The paradox of **Simon’s sin to look down on another compared to this woman’s salvation to look up to God in repentance is stunningly clear!**

There is no better story to describe the word and idea of Inclusivity!

There were cultural and class differences, race and gender differences, religious and non-religious differences. Jesus knew who she was and what she had done yet let her touch him, let her pour out her retirement savings. She didn’t confess, she didn’t even say a word, but the Word made flesh, God himself forgave her and set her free.

If this woman lived in your neighborhood, how would you see her? If this woman made her way to Candlewood and wanted to join our gathering or Hot Meals or our Christmas Festival, what would we see?

Who would we see? I want to see people like Jesus sees them. Everyone has a story. Everyone has a past. Some are harder or worse than others. Yet Jesus sees me, he sees you.

I did not come from a religious background, nor much of a church background in my childhood. My mom struggled to see herself as a regular part of a church. She preferred to quietly attend a church when I was in Junior High and High School. She eventually quit going to church all together. When Robin and I were on staff here, back in the day, my mom would come and watch our kids perform in our plays and for some special recognitions over the years. I asked her why she didn't come more regularly. She said she didn't have the proper clothes to wear, she only had work clothes and casual wear. I told her that was silly. She was trying to tell me she just didn't fit in or feel comfortable her at our church. I'm not blaming us for her feelings. I am however reminding myself that this can be very common for people to feel like they don't fit, or they are not really comfortable because of all kinds of things going on in their own life. This Jesus story challenges me to be more like him and our gatherings to feel more welcoming, accepting for people to come and feel welcomed.

NOTES

Scriptures

"One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them." **Luke 7:36-38 NLT**

"When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to

one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?" And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."” **Luke 7:39-50 NLT**

“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. **From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth.** He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.” **Acts 17:24-27 NLT**

“**From one man he made all the nations**, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.” **Acts 17:26-27 NIV**

“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So **God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**” **Genesis 1:26-27 NIV**

“Therefore, remember that **formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision”** (which is done in the body by human hands)— **remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has**

destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself **one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.**"
Ephesians 2:11-16 NIV

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." **Galatians 3:26-29 NIV**

Questions

- Q: What do you think about when you hear the word, inclusive or inclusivity?
- Q: Do you believe that culture or race should be separated? How so?
- Q: Do you believe that some cultures or races have power over others?
- Q: Do you believe God intended some races to have authority over others?
- Q: What do you think about Simon's opinion of the sex worker?
- Q: Do you think the woman was brave coming up the hill to the upper-class area?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Internet Links

Inclusivity - <https://diversity.social/inclusivity/>

Inclusivity means making sure everyone feels welcome, valued, and respected, no matter who they are or where they come from. Imagine your school or a party where everyone is invited and treated fairly, regardless of their background, race, gender, or beliefs. Inclusivity is about creating an environment where everyone can be themselves and contribute their unique perspectives and talents.

[Phrase "Only One Race" Considered to be a Microaggression](#) – Ken Ham

[Race \(human categorization\)](#) – Wikipedia

Race is a categorization of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into groups generally viewed as distinct within a given society. The term came into common usage during the 16th century, when it was used to refer to groups of various kinds, including those characterized by close kinship relations. By the 17th century, the term began to refer to physical (phenotypical) traits, and then later to national affiliations. Modern science regards race as a social construct, an identity which is assigned based on rules made by society. While partly based on physical similarities within groups, race does not have an inherent physical or biological meaning. The concept of race is foundational to racism, the belief that humans can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another.

“Modern scholarship views racial categories as socially constructed, that is, race is not intrinsic to human beings but rather an identity created, often by socially dominant groups, to establish meaning in a social context.”