

The Cruciform Life: The Gift of Self Forgetfulness

Oct. 8, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Lectio Divina

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Read Romans 12:3-8 using the prayer practice of Lectio Divina. Read the passage aloud 3 times. After each reading, spend a few minutes reflecting. After the first reading, open yourself to the presence of God. On the second reading, listen for a certain word or phrase that stands out to you. On the third reading, listen to what God's invitation might be for you.

Icebreaker

Tell a story of a time you felt judged. What did it take for you to recover from the experience? On a scale of 1-10, how judgmental are you of yourself? Of others?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 3:21-4:7

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

"God is far more interested in the people we are becoming than in what we do or accomplish." What then is keeping us from becoming the people we want to become? We say we follow Jesus, but our values and concerns don't look all that different from anyone else in LA. We take pride in our achievements, abilities and possessions, allowing them to define us.

In Biblical times, the fault was thought to be pride. Today, we often look in the opposite direction, saying it's a lack of self-esteem. Regardless, the natural condition of the human ego is to be fragile, overly-sensitive, and hungry. Fragile in that it can be just as easily inflated as deflated, or even popped. Which of course makes it sensitive and easily wounded: the slightest touch can irritate, bother, or provoke us. And our egos are hungry – starving, insatiable – always trying to be filled because they're empty inside. Our egos feel diminished and envious by the success of others or prideful when we "get ahead".

Something is wrong with our sense of self. We must let go of the lie that contentment can be found by some addition or change to our circumstances. The truth is that whether things improve or deteriorate, we adapt and adjust our expectations. Which means that no matter what happens, we will continue to run toward things that will never fill or satisfy our egos. We will never find rest because we are captive to a vision of human flourishing that is futile.

Christianity offers a life where our sense of self is no longer tied to the evaluations or judgments of others. It also frees us from ourselves and the (often all too high) standards and expectations we place on our own shoulders. The truth is that we don't actually see ourselves all that accurately. As a servant of Christ, Paul can willingly see himself as weak and foolish, yet find incredible confidence. His actions and his identity are no longer connected. His memory of past sins doesn't plunge him into shame, nor do his accomplishments puff him up. Gospel humility isn't thinking less or more about ourselves; it's thinking about ourselves less. If we're self-forgetful, we're no longer undone by criticism... but neither do we dismiss it. Instead, we see it as an opportunity to change.

How can we get to a place of Christian self-understanding? The Bible reminds us that "It is the Lord who judges" us (1 Cor 4:4). Why is this Good News, and why is it liberating? God – the only judge that matters – took human form and judged Himself as our substitute. God placed himself on trial, so that we no longer needed to be. On the cross, Jesus absorbed the consequences of all our sin. Yes, it is the Lord who judges us, but the ultimate verdict has already been rendered! By faith we are torn out of the imprisonment of our ego, pride, sin and accomplishments. We are liberated by Christ who has declared we are forgiven and free. Christianity is therefore no longer about trying to be better people; it's a whole new way of seeing ourselves in Christ. For the Lord has said to those who have faith in Him, "You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What is keeping you from the person you want to become?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening questions...

- Take turns reading through the entire passage – I Cor 3:21-4:7.
- Read 3:21 again. What do you think it means when Paul says “for all things are yours”?
- What is the difference between judgment and judgmentalism?
- What is the relationship between judgmentalism and boasting?

Digging Deeper...

- How do you feel/respond when you are being criticized?
 - How do you feel when you are praised for something?
- Look at I Cor 4:4. How do you respond to Paul’s assertion that the Lord is the one who judges us?
- What spiritual habits can replace the practices of “comparing and competing” in our lives?
- What are some spiritual practices that can help us see ourselves as God sees us?

Application Questions...

- How can we help each other to not care about what others think of us? And to not care about what we think of us?
- What is one thing we can do between now and our next meeting to act on the reality of what we explored today?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Thank God that He has liberated us from our own ego and having to rely on the opinions of others.
- Pray that we would see the world through God’s eyes instead of our own.
- Pray for our world and all of the people who are suffering from natural disasters and human tragedies.

Experiment of the Week

Write a prayer a day that takes your...

Fear
Anxiety
Accomplishments

...to the Lord. You could do one per day 2X for a 6-day week. Find a Psalm that express your feelings, and use it as a model. Bring one of your prayers to the group to share next week.