

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "Loving Other One Anothers"

Text: "1 Peter 2; Ephesians 2

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- Here is a little different Sunday
- I grew up listening to teachers and preachers giving lessons and sermons based on what they felt the Bible to be saying. Very often, it was obvious they had used the texts they picked as nothing but springboards to lend a sense of validity and authority to their own words in the minds and the hearts of the listeners who would not bother to validate the interpretations from Scripture.
- I chose as a young man, and eventually explicitly, with God's help, never knowingly to present the Word of God this way.
- For this reason, in the American church culture, I was unlikely and I remain unlikely, ever to be a leader for anything approaching the definition of a successful mega-church.
- This is not because I have given up or I am a lazy leader or even an unskilled leader. It is because I believe God has commissioned me to do otherwise.
- This means, from the perspective of a listener to my sermons, you might notice how few of my applications at the end of a sermon are prescriptive, how-to applications. Almost without exception, my applications are intended to leave you hanging. They are meant to toss you into the deep end of the water of the text and to tell you, *"Start swimming! You know how to swim. I'm not pulling you out to make it easy for you!"*
- If one wants to pastor a successful mega-church in our culture, every time one opens their mouth they had better present "how-to" and present their prescription with absolute certainty baptized by the Scripture they picked or by a claim that God told them so.
- People want answers to life. *I certainly do!* In all honesty, people usually want easy, formulaic answers to life that do not involve personal sacrifice. People desire answers from experts that come

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with guaranteed success by an authority and stamped with divine approval, baptized in biblical words. Most of us like to hear "Thus saith the LORD!" even if it is, in reality, only, "Thus saith the preacher or the CEO of the mission or the scholar!" who is pretending to be the LORD! There is a payoff in both directions for this transaction.

- Sometimes I walk close to the line because I can be loud, bombastic and imposing in presenting my ideas. I tended to walk the line more often in elders meetings. I have the full expectation that if someone is an "elder," by definition, they should be able to get past my human forcefulness, evaluate what I am speaking loudly or shouting and validate whether or not it aligns with Scriptural truth. This can validate it either as deceptive human, claptrap noise or wisdom informed by the Word of God.
- Sometimes we can't tell if our own hearts are deceived by what we feel so strongly and are bursting to say aloud. This is why we need one another and need one another to be marinated in Scriptural truth. It is why we are told by James to be "slow to speak" and that "not many of us should be teachers." We will be held responsible for pushing the claptrap to get out way or make ourselves significant.
- This long preamble on the biblical theology of homiletics or preaching is because I am going to tread close to the line today. As closely as I have ever knowingly publicly tread while part of FBC.
- BY Tuesday night of last week, my heart was brimming with another sermon on the "temple of living stones" God is building as Jesus' church and the "holy priesthood" that ministers in conjunction with that different kind of temple—a *living* temple. All this is, of course, found in **1 Peter chapter 2** where we have been studying on Sunday mornings. Let me read verse 4-8 to you again. **READ 1 Peter 2:4-8**

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- The sermon that was bubbling on Tuesday came out in 15 pages. A normal set of sermon notes for me would be about 8 pages. My longer sermons that make you want to sneak a check of your watch or phone are about 12 pages. With 15 pages, some of you would be dying of thirst or starving to death before I finished.
- What to do? I preached the sermon to Mary—without notes. Then I preached it to the elders Wednesday evening while they were standing and I was sitting on the concrete porch of a funeral home.
- I preached it again to some other men. They mostly agreed, 15 pages would be a little too much and I would do better just to make the point that was *bubbling* and not fear applying it specifically.
- I'll make that one point. My aversion to using tricky rhetoric in sermons did not keep me from using a rhetorical device last Sunday. You might remember me admitting that, like Agur the son of Jakeh, a writer of biblical proverbs, there are at least four things in my life that mystify me.
- One of those four was the mystery of how *the church of Jesus, in our current culture, might somehow be able to show "we are Jesus' disciples by how we love one another"* as Jesus said it could.
- The rhetorical trick was this. Supported by what the Bible says, I have no doubt, *how* the church is to do this. My doubt comes in the matter of will we do it? So far, we have not very often done it.
- The rhetorical trick was to leave at least a few of you thinking, "*As a church we know how to love one another and I think we often have done a darn good job at it Raleigh, what are you suggesting?"*
- Let me pull back the rhetorical curtain. I do indeed think you guys know how to love each other. I do indeed think that we are supposed to love one another well and truly in many ways as a church.

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- However, I don't think this deep love for each other, as we are constituted today, is what Jesus was thinking of when he talked of a love that would be so obviously different to a watching world that they would have to attribute it to being the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings.
- In another spot in John's Gospel, that spot in John 17 that is closely followed by the betrayal of Jesus and his crucifixion, in that spot in the narrative, John tells us Jesus prayed for his present disciples and his disciples to come. That's us!
- He prayed, John 17:20-23 ²⁰ ***"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***
- In his last hours, Jesus prayed that his church would be united in love as one just like the Father, Son and Spirit, although different, are united in one as God. He prayed that this would be so, so that the "world might believe" that Jesus was indeed the One sent from God.
- Loving one another is a good thing that honors God, but loving one another that ends up, by default, mostly focused on people who are pretty much like me, is not the display of love that will show the world something supernatural.
- In slightly different terms, but still making the point I am trying to present to you, Jesus taught in Luke 6:27-36 ²⁷ ***"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If***

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someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

- ***³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***
- Loving people who are more like us and for whom we have a more natural affinity is a good thing but it is not the unified oneness of the church in love that will show the world something supernatural—that will display Jesus Christ.
- Even the world is used to people loving one another when they are alike but it is not natural in the world to love one another when the one-anothers are different.
- I have much that is biblical to say here but I must limit my words.
- Let me simply point you to a study of what God did as the first church in Jerusalem was growing and growing. Likely, with some few exceptions, like the Grecian widows issue, people could get along because they had much in common. Most in common was their Jewishness.

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- They had come to Christ as Jews and their way of being the church was comfortable to one another because it was very Jewish. Nobody suggested they start serving pig at the potlucks.
- Oh, but wait, along comes super-Jewish-club member Saul who is now Paul and it sounds as if maybe he will bring a Gentile pulled pork recipe to the next church dinner in Jerusalem.
- There was quite some division and havoc over potentially changing the membership rules for the Jewish, church club. The Christians in the 1st Church of Jerusalem found it pretty easy and mostly normal, even for the world to love people much like them. After a time, God sort of blew up that club.
- If you search the epistles, especially Pauls' letters, you'll find very often he is dealing with what we call the Jew/Gentile controversy. WE often don't put the great amount of emphasis on that matter that Paul did because we don't face a very big Jew/Gentile controversy in the church that keeps us divided and keeps us from loving one another.
- I must point you to ***Ephesians 2:11-17***. In the section of the letter to the church in Ephesus that reaches some of the most beautiful and lofty heights of theology about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ—in the midst of all we love about our new identity we read these words focused on a controversial division in the church that we just don't have to even think much about today...

Ephesians 2:11–18 ¹¹ *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—* ¹² *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. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

- So, now, love of Jews for Gentiles and of Gentiles for Jews would be a "loving one another" that would even catch the world's attention as something miraculous. "How is this possible" they would ask? "We have One same Father and Lord, they would respond! Huh? Explain that please! OK we will tell you all about it.
- It's a shame in our day we don't have cultural divisions like this Jew Gentile division of Paul's day that we might break down the walls that define them and show some miraculous love for those unlike rather than like us.
- OK, that was a rhetorical device and I promised to be as un-rhetorical as possible this morning. You know very well that we have divisions just like that Jew Gentile division in our own culture. You know that these same divisions are nearly just as visible in the church—in our church—in FBC. There are racial divisions, socio-economic divisions, educational divisions, status divisions, language divisions, worship style divisions, etc. etc. etc.

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- It is still pretty easy to love one, when we are much like one another, that is until we begin to talk about these divisions that make us unlike.
- I must clarify one more thing then get very close to the line I don't like to get close to and be more prescriptive in my application.
- That one more things is this. The loving unity of the church that Paul envisioned—that Jesus taught would be visible to the world—was not a programmatic unity. What I mean is this. It was not about a program where the Jewish Christians visited a Gentile church on a special "Love a Gentile Sunday" each year on a special day.
- It wasn't about the rich, influential people in a Roman church collecting money and making a very generous offering so that the poor Christians living a floor below in Rome could continue to meet in a poor, slave church.
- Nah! Read Romans 16 where Paul purposely lists Jews and Greeks or Gentiles, rich people with high born names of rich homeowners and slaves with names like Tertius or "Third"—names of men and women all together in one wonderful unified jumble of a church.
- That was when Rome began to ask, "Who are these guys? Who do they follow? What power *in the world* makes people like that who are so different love one another as they do? It is not a power *IN* the world!
- Here comes that line...
- I believe deeply and with a bubbling heart—God has not spoken to me personally—there is no Scripture verse that confirms my belief specifically—there is only whatever insight I possess from trying to hold Scriptural values and from 50 years of *doing* church all around the world—I believe that our Lord Jesus has equipped us and called us these days to be a church who loves people unlike one another.

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- I am not talking about loving those who are different—those where there have been walls and ugly divides that the world can see are in the church as well—I am not talking about loving the different than us with a nice program or some financial help or pulpit swaps. I am talking about loving one another as part of one, same, visible miraculous body.
- Impossible? Maybe. Certainly impossible for us to force this on anyone different than us. Impossible with God? Not at all! In fact read the book of Revelation and see the make up of the choirs—every tribe, every nation, every kindred, every tongue. This is where God's redemptive plan is aimed.
- Finally, please let me get even closer to the line. I have believed—with no prophetic vision—no audible word from the Lord or miraculous handwriting on the wall—I have believed, and Mary along with me as well as a few others who would say it out loud, that God sold our building at 5590 N. Nevada because he had trained us and equipped us to love one another in this bigger way.
- I have believed that, as a church on God's mission he wanted us to move out further and more intimately into a world that was different than what we were used to and comfortable with as a church. I believed we were finally ready for that crossing over the rubble of the walls of partition that Jesus Christ destroyed so the whole world could see something miraculous and know it was God.
- I have believed, and believe even more strongly than ever today, that God miraculously directed us and connected us with this school Coperni 3. Coperni 3 was not a last resort of a place to land the rocket ship of the mission or plant the clubhouse temporarily. God helped us to have the patience not to go through with finalizing

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other options because he had this place—more correctly these people waiting for us to come.

- I believe that Coperni 3 is our God-given gift of a kind of practical laboratory for now, not necessarily forever, for us to reach out to those who are different than us and when they are brothers and sisters in Christ to be one with them in Jesus' church together.
- Is that scary? Sure it could be. Maybe you just didn't expect that we were thinking that when we sold and said let's move south.
- The part that scares me is waiting on God to provide the entre into peoples' lives, as I have believed he would.
- It has been slow and there are still no certainties. However, there are slight indications that it is beginning to happen.
- The story is long and each detail not very exciting, but God has used problems to put us in touch with people who have connected us with other people.
- He has opened the doors for us to serve the diverse Coperni 3 family 1/3 black, 1/3 brown and 1/3 lilly white like most of us in very simple ways.
- I believe miraculously God has opened the door to allow us into their clubhouse little by little to tell people about Jesus so that they believe and to find the other believers who are unlike us so that we can be one that the world sees as a God sort of thing.
- There is no promise that what I believe is right and no promise that this will work. It will require us being living sacrifices and not all of us will do that.
- Still listen to what God has been up to recently in just a small opening of the door. You missiologists will appreciate what is happening.
- **TESTIMONIES**