

A community built on the love of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Thanks, Neil. We're going to focus on our passage this morning is from Luke 6, 12 to 16.

So Luke 6, 12 to 16 is going to be the passage where we're going to land at this morning. There we read, One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he also designated apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter, his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon, who was called the Zealot, Judas, son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

This is God's word. Most of my conversations with others involve the phrase, did you see Lupin? It is just the best Netflix show on at the minute, but sadly, we've only had one season so far.

As humans, we love to find connecting points. We love a shared experience. We love to connect. And in a world where we are often limited to just shading our screen, one of the few ways to connect is to talk about TV shows.

[1 : 26] We were born to connect, and relationships are the things which we often prize and value the most. For many of us, the real value of relationships and of communities have only begun to be acknowledged whilst we've been kept apart from one another.

There is so much longing for communal experiences to return, to feel those connections again. But as we wait, we imagine how we can come back to a better world, where we enjoy closer connections within our neighbourhoods and within our families, where the distances between people groups are closed.

And as Christians, we absolutely commend these desires for increased connection between different peoples. We do want the world to come back better.

It is clear that there are things that just need to change. We need to tackle racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty gaps, and the multiple other areas where disconnections exist and where restoration needs to occur.

All of us can acknowledge that our relationships aren't what they ought to be, and we struggle from time to time with them. As Christians, we view the struggles which exist between us as a consequence of a broken relationship with God first of all.

[2 : 53] And all other human struggles are a consequence of this one broken relationship. Yeah, we live with a hopeful outlook as the God that we are disconnected from, that we turn from, wants to reconnect and wants to restore this broken connection first with himself.

And then from there, all our other relationships can enjoy a process of restoration. This little passage that we've read is all about the establishing of a new community, which is centred on the love of Jesus.

And it will be through this new community that the restoring love of Jesus will be shared and embraced in some of the most spectacular of ways.

And so this morning, as we look together at this passage, we're going to notice how the community is formed. We're going to see the foundation of the community.

And we're going to see a little of how the followers of the community live out their life with this new foundation. First of all, forming the new community.

[4 : 09] Willy Wonka needs to find a successor. He needs to find someone who will take over his chocolate empire. So he dreams up the golden ticket competition to identify his next successor.

Someone who will embody the vision and values and carry the Willy Wonka chocolate factory forward into the future. And so through various tests and challenges, young Charlie finds himself

the successor to this vast chocolate empire.

Charlie proves himself that he embodies the values of Willy Wonka. Charlie and his family then move into the chocolate factory and Charlie starts his apprenticeship with Mr. Wonka.

Charlie and his family then move into the future. Succession planning is kind of what we are talking about in verses 12 to 16. We find Jesus on the mountainside and he is in a conversation or communion with God through prayer.

The detail all night is rarely used by the writers of Jesus. And so we know that the decision and the conversation that is being had between God and Jesus is of great importance.

[5 : 32] Something truly momentous is about to happen. A decision is about to be made which will enable the message of Jesus to continue after Jesus departs from this world entering into heaven.

The pressure has been building on Jesus. The religious authorities are wanting him dead. And so he goes to pray. He prays to God for guidance.

Now, as Jesus climbs the mountain, and this is why we read Exodus 19. He is very deliberately drawing our attention to Moses and the 12 tribes of Israel and the promise by God that they would be his special people if they remained faithful to God.

But the history of the 12 tribes points to a failure to be faithful. They go their own way and push God to the sidelines and fail to be faithful.

The 12 tribes became proud and unloving. They became a race who obsessed over looking right, over ensuring that they looked as if they were good enough.

[6 : 55] So they created increasingly ornate and onerous systems of religion to try to cover up the brokenness that lay inside their hearts.

Yet, these systems of religion didn't work. The people remained far from God and increasingly far from one another.

It's into this seemingly hopeless narrative that Jesus goes to the mountainside and brings a message of hope for all people.

The hope of a new community and of reconciliation. He is going to be greater than Moses. He is going to take his people into the promised land, just like Moses of old led the 12 tribes of Israel into their promised land.

But his new people aren't simply from one nation. They are from all the nations. This new people of God will be defined by the love of God.

[7 : 56] And they would love God with all their heart, soul and mind. And they would love their neighbour as themselves. So what is this new community founded on?

The foundations of the new community. I would have loved to have heard how Jeff Stelling and the Sky Sports team would have reacted to Jesus' picks as the foundation for this new community.

I'm sure Jeff would have been beside himself with astonishment. These are surprising and incredible choices. This is messy choosing to join Libby when his contract is up.

On human terms, Jesus' picks are just quite simply bizarre. As he comes down from the mountain and as he calls his growing crowd of disciples or followers to him, he declares that from their midst, 12 will be chosen.

And they will be given the status of apostles. And so, 12 of the most unexpected people are given prominence and given the designation apostle.

[9 : 09] Within the group, you have a group of pretty ordinary men. We have brothers who owned a fishing business, Simon and Andrew. Another set of brothers, James and John, who are probably from a fairly wealthy background.

Philip, who is a sceptic. A number who we know next to nothing about. A traitor to the Jewish people and Matthew. Simon the Zealot, who was a fiery religious follower, who desired the overthrow of the powerful Roman rule.

And who probably had at one point in his life wanted someone like Matthew to be dead. And then we have Judas Iscariot, who would eventually turn over Jesus to the authorities to have him killed. Now, as we look at that list, we're amazed at the diversity within that group. But what is an apostle? What were these men about to do? Well, an apostle is a messenger. These men were going to perform an ambassadorial role for Jesus.

[10 : 13] These 12 men would be Jesus' closest companions as he taught the truth that he was the promised king of God.

He would come to restore the relationship between God and man. Not only would they hear his teaching, but they would eventually witness his crucifixion and more wonderfully witness his resurrection, which declared to them, to his followers and to us today, that God had fixed the broken relationship between himself and humanity.

And through Jesus, it was now possible to be members of God's new community. And with that, we could restore the brokenness of relationships which exist between one another.

So transformed were these 12 men that they were moved to go beyond their borders. And they took with them the hopeful message of Jesus, the message that any could come into this new community through the loving work of Jesus throughout the then known world.

Later on in the Bible, we read the words of the apostle Paul, who would write in his letter to the church in Ephesus, that the church would be built on the teaching of the apostles, the prophets, with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

[12:02] How do we understand that today? Well, it means that the teaching of the Bible declares to us today that if we restore a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, all other relationships can go through a restorative process.

And this is the hope that we present this morning, that the brokenness can be healed, that the gap can be closed, and that you and I can enjoy true and lasting unity with God.

And when that unity is enjoyed, we can take steps to overcome the brokenness which is around us. This is possible because we know the Bible is more than just a storybook, but that it is a living book which guides and forms the people of God.

And with the help of God's Spirit, it becomes an active force in our everyday life. Walking through the gospel of Luke, time and again, we have Jesus moving deliberately towards the outsider, towards those who had been rejected by the religious leaders and who had been declared unfit to be part of God's kingdom.

Jesus, however, continually moves forward towards in sacrificial love to bring the outsider in and as he does this, he declares that no longer will politics, race, gender, wealth, or any other barriers prevent anyone from entering into God's kingdom.

[13:50] Just as Jesus' new community was inaugurated through this unique call of Jesus to these 12 men in verse 13 and to the outsiders in the world.

When we heard the voice of Jesus. So through God's Spirit, we too are called by Jesus as we read the pages of the Bible. It's acting.

We are called, we're actively called to go on his mission to declare to all people that God is for them. Now that's not easy.

We humbly admit that Christ's calling on our lives feels too hard at times because we just want to live for ourselves.

So often we just want to focus on self and make our lives increasingly comfortable. We so easily buy into the overarching cultural narrative that we are to live our best life now.

[14:52] And to do that, it's focus on us and us alone. And from there, we can then make ourselves ready to be good people to those around us.

And as we do that, as we live for ourselves, we allow ourselves to become comfortably numb to the brokenness which surrounds us. As Christians, it's hard because we have so many different voices coming at us.

Big tech has turned us into products where they will sell our data, but they will invest billions into ensuring that our lives are formed by what is presented in front of us.

And as Christians, we need to make ourselves. And as Christians, we need to fight against the formation of our character according to the needs of big tech. We need to ensure that our lives are being formed by God's word and by that alone.

And thankfully, through God's word, we are shaped and guided by God himself. As God's people, we keep coming back to the Bible, allowing ourselves to be formed by its truth.

[16:11] We come and make ourselves aware that our identity is fixed in Jesus and that we are the new members of God's community.

We are freed from the pursuit of self and we are able to move towards others in love. And as we do this, God gives us the gifts that we need to love others and to love all.

As we read the Bible, we find the incredible picture of the impact of the love of Jesus' movement towards others.

In the new Jerusalem, we have in Revelation, this scene of worship, where people from every nation, every tribe and every language worship God together.

What we see in heaven is that God has designed us to be different. And our differences won't be stamped out in heaven, but that in our diversity, we declare that we are united.

[17 : 27] We celebrate diversity. We give thanks to God that we are not the same, but that together God weaves us together into his one family.

And so with God's help, we move towards others in love. We deliberately create spaces and opportunities to enjoy and celebrate the diversity of people that make up Cornerstone.

And so we must move towards increasing and ever deepening unity amongst our church family.

The barriers that may stop us from doing that whole heartedly can be overcome with God's help.

And so we pray and we move towards others in love. And as we do that, we create and enjoy an increasingly diverse group of people united and joyfully displaying the message that God loves all.

And that God unites us all together. Every member of the church family is called to build our lives on the love of Jesus.

[18 : 46] To love our enemies, to go the extra mile for another, to consider the needs of others before our own needs. When we live this out, when we live out these truths in love, we present our communities with a hope that restoration is possible.

That the divisions in society can be overcome through the transforming love of Jesus. When we identify with Jesus and his people, we can put to the side our desires to better ourselves, to put ourselves and to promote ourselves.

We can move towards others and promote the good of others and the good of all. As a church, let us be a display of the great uniting love of Jesus.

Let us love one another and let us love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.