

“Jesus Shaped Life - The Relationships of Jesus”

Scripture: John 15:12-15; Matthew 22:34-40, 18:15-20, 19:14;

Graphics: cross, boxes, relationships

Big Truth: Followers of Jesus at the Panama UMC are called to take on a Jesus-Shaped life. During Lent, we spend time understanding what that means. A Jesus-shaped life is a holy life. A Jesus-shaped life is an obedient life. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of healthy relationships. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of courage. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of justice. A Jesus-shaped life is a life of mission. Many things shape our lives, but the life of Jesus must be the primary life shaper.

Focus Phrase: A Jesus-shaped life is marked by healthy relationships that are based in God’s love, multi-generational, and reconciled.

1. Introduction

- A. The Wall Street Journal published an article in 2004 entitled *Pursuing Happiness*. The article caught my attention as I was preparing for today’s message because of one the conclusion of the article, based on a study in 2003 study done by psychiatrist Dr. Gordon Parker. One of his conclusions was that long term happiness isn’t a result of money or possessions. Long term happiness is found in relationships.
- B. The article said this, “Happier people, he says, tend to have a few key traits in common: they believe in causes larger than themselves; they are more optimistic; they don’t look to material wealth for fulfillment; and they have many meaningful relationships. ‘They tend to be more resilient ... more flexible and more focused on the present and the future, not the past,’ says Dr. Parker.” (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB109959484402665000>)
- C. That sounds a lot like - at least some of - the characteristics of a Jesus-Shaped life. Now, we all know that the reason we’re here this morning is not to be happier, although I will say that being together as sisters and brothers in Christ is cause for joy...which is deeper than happiness. Our purpose this morning is to worship, together, the God who created all things and is worthy of our worship. But we’re also growing and building relationships.
- D. Through our worship, we desire to be more like Jesus...to be holy (cross) and obedient to God. The next aspect of the life of Jesus that we strive to take on as we journey through Lent is Jesus’ understanding of relationships. Who did he hang out with? How did he show love and forgiveness and friendship? And what are we to do as followers of Jesus? How do we take on a Jesus-Shaped Life in our relationships.
- E. See, because, unless you’re a hermit living in the desert, your life is made up of multiple, long-term and short-term relationships. Some are very close and powerful. Some are no greater than the conversations we have in the grocery checkout line. And YET, they’re all relationships...and they can ALL be meaningful for Jesus.

- F. Take a quick inventory of your relationships. What you'll quickly find is that some are great...amazing friends and family, spouse, children, parents, siblings. Yet, some of those same relationships may be strained or complicated at times in life. Some are even broken and painful to even think about.
- G. Every single one of them requires work and prayer and humility to maintain in healthy ways.
- H. And yet, without all those meaningful relationships - relationships we were created by God to have by HIS design - (without them - even the challenging ones) life would be very lonely and very self-centered.
- I. That's not God's best plan for our lives. We were created to be in relationship with God and with others...and even with ourselves.
- J. This morning, we'll look to Jesus to show us what HIS relationships with the Father and others and himself looked like.
- K. We're taking on a Jesus-Shaped Life...
- L. Let's pray and then we can dive into the relationships of Jesus in the gospels...
- M. PRAY!**
- N. If you're taking notes, write this down: A Jesus-shaped life is marked by healthy relationships based in God's love, are multi-generational, and reconciled.
- O. Let's start in John's gospel this morning...chapter 15, verse 12...

2. Scripture

A. READ John 15:12-17

- i. Two things make me smile when it comes to certain relationships. First, it's funny how many times I see dog owners that look like their dogs. I always smile when I see that...it's a real thing, right?
- ii. Second - and this one's closer to my heart - I love that the longer a couple is married, the more and more they look, dress, talk, and act like each other. Or how children talk like their parents and take on the characteristics of their family members. There's a family resemblance.
- iii. What Jesus was telling the disciples in John 15 was that they were to love others **in the same way** that he loved them...they were to take on the characteristics of God...since the reason Jesus loved them in the ways that he did were because he got the command to love from the Father, who loved Jesus in the same way.
- iv. And you may have the characteristics of your family or spouse or dog, but you're also a member of the family of God, followers of Jesus together. And when each of us takes on the characteristics of Jesus together, then we

- ALL, as a church, are taking on the characteristics of Jesus together. Who knows, maybe we'll start looking like each other!
- v. Jesus' model of the characteristics of relationships was based on, according to his words in John 15, **one thing: LOVE**.
 - a. God loved the world (John 3:16) to such a degree that He sent Jesus to be the one who saves us from our sin.
 - b. Jesus loved the Father and was obedient to his plan of salvation.
 - c. Jesus loved his disciples and those around him while he was on earth.
 - d. Jesus loved them all the way to the cross and into the tomb. HINT: he didn't stay there!
 - e. But this love wasn't the sort of romantic mushy thing we think of at Valentine's Day. Love, in the bible, is almost always expressed in ACTIONS. Love does something...it sacrifices, forgives, it cares for, it teaches, it says no, when needed, it invites and welcomes, and humbles.
 - f. 1 Corinthians 13 - that famous wedding verse - lists out things that love IS and ISN'T. It is not loud or proud or rude...it does not keep track of wrongs. It IS patient and kind. The reason we often read that at a wedding is because marriage is one of the most important and sacred relationships God created between a man and a woman. Based on love and what love DOES as a verb.
 - g. Jesus commanded his disciples - and us - to love others in relationship. And, that love is what He received from the Father...and what he shared with them. And then, Jesus gave them the ultimate example of that - by telling them that the world WILL know love. The world will know love when someone lays down their life for their friends - their relations. And, then, HE DID IT! He laid down HIS life for them and for you.
 - h. That's how we know Jesus is in relationship with US and loves US!
 - vi. In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus gave the religious leaders the Greatest Commandment, which is based on...LOVE. When ask about the most important thing, Jesus told us to love God fully...and love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and prophets hang on those two commands, which means that everything God ever taught pivots and hinges on loving God and loving others. This is ALL about relationships. And even though it's not as tangible for us, we have a sense that loving God is about worship, prayer, obedience to His commands, being generous in giving and sharing, and being open to the Holy Spirit's leading.
 - vii. It's loving others that sometimes is more difficult...in all those relationships I talked about earlier - those closest and those more fleeting ones.

viii. We've heard lots of sermons about loving others, but let me highlight two ways that Jesus calls us to love others as we take on a Jesus-Shaped life in our relationships.

a. First, Jesus calls disciples to reconcile every relationship.

- i) Matthew 18:15-20 gives us this command: "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."
- ii) The whole point about this is **reconciliation**. Reconciliation is a restoring of what once was or a coming together for peace. We KNOW that we won't always agree. We know that we won't always think alike. Yet, we ALWAYS have the opportunity to reconcile if there's ever been something said or done that harms someone else.
- iii) Reconciliation is a powerful pathway to grow into a Jesus-shaped life. Let me give you an example. I was at a meeting with a colleague and things got a little tense over some disagreement about a theological difference we have. We were both emotionally charged, maybe doing some grieving, maybe some anger mixed in there. At the end of the meeting, we just kind of walked away in some anger and sadness. She and I had the opportunity to reconcile the next time we saw each other. It started with, "I'm sorry for the way I acted at our last meeting." The reply was, "I'm sorry for my words, as well." That's reconciliation. It's not that easy many times. And it doesn't always end in a repaired relationships either. Yet, we can attempt to reconcile and seek and give forgiveness especially when LOVE is at the center of each person and the relationship.
- iv) Taking on a Jesus-Shaped Life must include forgiveness and reconciliation because those two things are what keep the relationship from breaking. It's like grease that keep the bearing in the wheel from over heating and shattering. Again, it's based on love and grace and desiring the best for the other person.

- b. The other profound aspect of Jesus' relationships was that they were multi-generational.
 - i) Matthew 19:13-15 tells us this, "Then little children were being brought to [Jesus] in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' And he laid his hands on them and went on his way."
 - ii) In the gospels, Jesus engaged with people that were older than he was. He taught and healed people that were around his age of 30. But Jesus also took time to bless and love children and young people.
 - iii) Now, I don't want us to think it was so simple. Children were not respected members of society. In that culture, children were property. For Jesus, a teacher and rabbi, to spend time with and VALUE children, was perplexing and somewhat offensive to the adults. How much did Jesus care about that? Not at all. In fact, Jesus said, unless to humble yourself and become like one of these children, then you're going to have a hard time being a child of God.
 - iv) The Jesus-Shaped life of the church is one that is in relationships to ALL of those who are here. One reason we are so passionate about our Safe Sanctuaries ministry is because we love our kids and youth. And, if you look around, you'll see that there are LOTS here to love and teach and mentor and guide and, yes, sometimes gently correct. It's a total blessing to have these littlest disciples among us. They can teach us SO much about relationships and love and grace and patience.
- ix. A Jesus-shaped life is marked by healthy relationships that are based in God's love, are reconciled, and are multi-generational.

3. Application

- A. It doesn't take us long while reading the gospels to get a pretty good idea of the people Jesus hung around with while He was on earth. He was accused all the time of being at the table with sinners and tax collectors and women of ill-repute, and this kind of person and that type of person.
- B. If Jesus were alive today he'd for sure hang out with gang members, prostitutes, people who were greedy, people who were sexually conflicted, people who sinned this morning and those who will sin after lunch. He'd even hang out with us who sin during worship!
- C. Why? **Because relationships are the pathway to growing into having a Jesus-Shaped life.** We can TRY to do that on our own without anyone else, but

how do you grow in forgiveness if you never practice forgiving or being forgiven?

- D. How do you grow in obedience when you never see it modeled in community?
- E. How do you get better at knowing what Jesus said and does if you don't hear it taught or see it lived out?
- F. If you make mistakes in a vacuum, you may not ever know it. If you learn through trials in community...you'll know it and be able to grow through it. And the key difference between the community out there and the one in HERE, is that we operate from love and grace and not shame and condemnation.
- G. Because we all know that it's only by God's grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit that we aren't condemned already in our sin.
- H. So here what I want us to practice:
 - i. First, **cultivate relationships based on God's love.**
 - a. Take seriously the command to love God and love others. The key to that is true humility when you interact with someone else.
 - b. Show respect in ALL circumstances. Even when you feel wronged, pray for the other and work to love.
- I. Second, **be a person who reconciles.**
 - i. Anger and bitterness are powerful emotions in our lives. And many times those emotions come to us like a freight train after we've been seriously hurt by someone else.
 - ii. Yet, God is a God of reconciliation, not anger and hatred. God is love, it says in 1 John.
 - iii. Reconciliation is born out of forgiveness and leads to peace. And if there's one thing we need more of in our lives right now it's peace.
 - iv. Forgive the one who hurt you through the power of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Then, as much as it's possible from your end, reconcile by telling the person you forgive them and are at peace. The relationships may or may not be restored to what it was, but you may find the peace of Christ that passes understanding.
- J. Finally, **be multi-generational in your relationships.**
 - i. If you're a older adult, find a younger person and have a conversation about them and what they are doing. Ask probing questions about their faith and any struggles they're having. Don't tell them what to do, but model for them what you've learned. Be a mentor, if you aren't one.
 - ii. Younger people, seek out a relationship with at least one older person who is not your family member. Have dinner together. Have coffee together. Ask

them how they navigated life's challenges and trials. Ask them about their faith and how they've kept that for so many years. Get a mentor, if you don't have one.

K. A Jesus-shaped life is marked by healthy relationships that are based in God's love, are reconciled, and are multi-generational.

4. Conclusion

- A. (CROSS) So far, we've built a Jesus-Shaped Life that is Holy, Obedient, and has loving relationships.
- B. Next week, we'll turn our attention to the COURAGE of Jesus, which is not about bravado, but about humility.
- C. As you go from here today, think about your relationships, pray about your relationships, and the out love in action IN your relationships.
- D. Let's pray...