

A Community Founded on the Love of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] So if you've got a Bible, open it up, if you've got the Bible app, flick it on, check out the verses in 12 to 16. The kind of basic heading is a community founded on the love of Jesus, a community founded on the love of Jesus.

So before summer, most of my conversations started with something around the words like, did you see Lupin? It's just the best Netflix show that has ever been made and it's, we've just had two seasons of it but I was brilliant, it was so good and I just wanted to kind of chat to people about it.

I wanted to connect with people, I wanted to share the loves that I have and I wanted them to respond. I wanted to connect in a world where it's been really hard to connect to of late because we're born to connect, aren't we?

We're born for relationships and these are the things we prize most often. So often we start by conversations, by sharing, have you seen that, have you listened to that? So we share stories, we share experiences just to kind of build connections with one another.

And I think that's why COVID and lockdown has been so hard because we really are missing out on the communal experiences.

[1 : 3 0] We really want to return to normal, we really want to close the gaps, we really want to remove the masks, we really want to just return to that place where we can enjoy connections, where we can enjoy family and friends without fear and without worry, where the distances between the different people are closed, where the gaps grow smaller.

And I think at the start of COVID, there was all this talk about closing the gap, coming back better. And as Christians, we would agree, we do want to come back better, we do want to live in a world where racism doesn't exist, where homophobia doesn't exist, where gender equality reigns and where people are free to flourish.

But as Christians and even as non-Christians, we know that there are deep struggles which exist within relationships.

Relationships are not the way we want them to be. They've got faults, they're not perfect, they've got struggles within them. And as Christians, we say that the cause of these struggles, the cause of the brokenness of these relationships, is because that our first relationship, our relationship with God is broken.

And because of that, that has an impact on all other relationships we enjoy, or maybe we endure. Yet, as Christians, we live with this hopeful outlook, don't we?

[3 : 0 8] As the God that we were disconnected from, that we turn from, wants to reconnect with us. He wants to restore the broken connection which exists between ourselves and our heavenly Father.

And which then exists between the relationships which are all around us. And so this little passage, this little calling of the twelve apostles or the twelve disciples, is all about establishing of a new community, a community which is centered on the love of Jesus, and is all about restoring the relationships which were broken between us and God and the relationships which were broken with one another.

And as we look at these little verses, we're going to look at it in three parts. We're going to see, first of all, the formation of a new community.

Then we're going to think through the idea of the transforming power within the new community, and then finally the direction of the new community.

So first of all, the forming of the new community. I'm not sure if you know this story, I'm sure you do. Willy Wonka, great story, great film.

[4 : 31] And the film, the Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, is all about basically a succession planning, isn't it? Who's going to take over the Chocolate Empire? And so Willy Wonka advises the Golden Ticket Competition to identify who will be his successor.

And it needs to be somebody who will embody the visions and values and carry the Willy Wonka name forward. And so various tests and challenges are set, and young Charlie proves himself to be the person who will best represent Willy Wonka in the coming years.

And so Charlie and his family move into the Chocolate Factory, and he begins his apprenticeship to Mr. Wonka. And what we have in verse 12 here is kind of like succession planning here.

We find Jesus on the mountainside, and he's in conversation or communion with God through prayer. And the detail that you'll notice maybe in verse 12 is this all night.

And it's not really used that much, this little all night. And so we know that the decision Jesus is about to make is monumental.

[5 : 54] It's a momentous decision that will be made because Jesus is praying to his heavenly Father all night. He's trying to figure out who will spread the message of Jesus once I'm gone.

Who will spread my message once I'm gone? You see, the pressure's been building on Jesus. We saw that in the previous verses. The religious authorities are wanting him dead, and so he prays to his Father.

He prays to God for guidance. As Jesus climbs the mountain here, he's doing something really interesting. He is deliberately drawing our attention to Moses and drawing our attention to Moses on Mount Sinai, which is found in Exodus 19.

Moses, when he went up on the mountain, was given the promise by God that the Israelite nation would be his special people.

They would be his special people if they remained faithful to his covenant, if they remained faithful to God. But the history of the twelve tribes of Israel points to a failure in being faithful.

[7 : 14] They go their own own way and push God to the side so often. They fail to be faithful. The twelve tribes had become this proud and unloving race who obsessed about moral uprightness and created this incredibly ornate and onerous system of religion to try to cover up the brokenness which lay within their own hearts.

Yet those systems of religion just didn't work. The people remained far from God, and they remained increasingly and became increasingly distanced from one another.

However, good news is coming. When Jesus went to the mountainside, he brings a message, a new message of hope.

He brings a hope for all people. He says that reconciliation, that new community is about to be created, and this will involve a deep reconciliation between God and his people and also the people amongst one another.

This new Israel, these new twelve tribes, this new people of God will be formed by the love of God, and they would love God with all their hearts, soul and mind, and they would love their neighbors as themselves.

[8 : 42] And the amazing thing is that they are not expected to do it from within themselves. But Jesus, the one who creates, is also the one that will fuel this community's love, who will pour out his love into their hearts every day like overflow water that they can just take from.

And the wonderful thing for us is that we are that new people. We are the new people of God, those who are fueled by this love of Jesus, but we are also a people who need that constant reminding of who we are, and what it really means to be part of this new people of God.

It means for us that our hearts are being formed not by the influences and the influencers of society, but our hearts are being formed and shaped by the love of Jesus.

This takes us out of ourselves, this moves us from within ourselves out towards others, and we're going to see this path being followed by the apostles, by these disciples.

When they experience the love of Jesus, they move out, they move towards one another, and they move towards the other also. The barriers which had been created are going to be smashed by these apostles, by these disciples, as they bring this new message, this message of reconciliation from God and man, to men and women throughout the known world at the time.

[10 : 20] And at this moment, as we begin to reflect on all that's about to happen in this passage, it might be a good moment just to reflect and just to think about our own heart and how it's being shaped.

What's our greatest love in life? Is our greatest love in life God? Is our great desire to be formed by the love of God?

Or are we so busy numbing ourselves in the world of social media or in the world of pleasure that we don't really kind of think along those lines anymore, that we don't really begin to kind of think through what it means to be formed by the love of God?

Is your heart reaching out and moving towards others? Or is your heart about excluding and diminishing others? Does your heart long to build people up? Or does it delight in doing people down?

Does your heart delight in doing good to others? Or is your heart all about begrudging service? Does your heart joyfully worship God? Or is it kind of largely non-plussed about the whole worship thing?

[11 : 45] These are deep questions which we all need to answer and wrestle with. And the wonderful thing though is this, that it shouldn't lead us to despair, it should lead us back to God.

Because God is at work forming and molding our hearts into His glory. He is always doing that business, but we need to tap in and to tune in and to work alongside God so that our hearts can be formed just as the hearts of these twelve men were being formed and transformed and molded by God.

So we see first of all the forming of this new community, this radically different community, this new Israel. But then we see the transforming power within the new community.

I love this time of year because it's all about on Sky Sports, it's all about transfer deadline days, it's all about speculation and it's all about kind of, oh wonder who's going where.

And I would love to have heard Jeff Stelling try to describe Jesus' picture right here. He would have been beside himself with astonishment as these men are chosen by Jesus to take his message out into the known world.

[13 : 05] It was completely bizarre, it was completely wrong-headed on a human scale. It's like messy ripping up Barcelona contract and joining someone like Livingston, or it's much worse than that.

It's just ridiculous the kind of people Jesus chose for his work of spreading the gospel in a human terms. And so Jesus, what's he doing? He's coming down from the mountain and as he calls his growing crowd of disciples or followers to him, he declares that from their midst twelve will be chosen.

They will be given the status of apostle. And so twelve of the most unexpected people are given prominence and giving the designation an apostle.

Now what does an apostle mean? An apostle is a messenger. They are performing an ambassadorial role here for Jesus. They had the authority to speak and to act on behalf of Jesus.

And so as you begin to look at the list of men, you're, well, it's remarkable how ordinary, first of all, these men are. So we've got Simon and Andrew, brothers who owned a fishing business.

[14 : 22] We've got another set of brothers, James and John, who are probably fairly wealthy. You've got Philip, fairly skeptical. A number who we know nothing or next nothing about.

A traitor to the Jewish people in Matthew. Simon the zealot was a fiery religious follower who desired the overthrow of the Roman Empire, Roman rule in Israel. Jesus, a scariat who would one day turn Jesus over to his the authorities.

These twelve men would be Jesus's closest companions as he taught the truth that he was the promised King who had come to restore the broken relationship, who had come to inaugurate the new Israel.

Their teaching, the teaching of the apostles would also form the bedrock of the church alongside the teaching of the prophets and of Jesus himself.

These men were truly transformed. These men, when they were chosen to become apostles, were transformed by God. And the way they were transformed was this.

[15 : 27] They were fueled by grace and because they were fueled by grace, they were pushed beyond the border. And when they went beyond the border, they took this hopeful message of Jesus to the world that any could come into this new community, into this new Israel through the loving work of Jesus.

And I love the stories of the disciples that we read further on in, say, for example, the Book of Acts. In the Book of Acts, in chapter four, verse 13, we've got this astonishing scene in the Sanhedrin.

We've got these two guys, Peter and John, who are just normal, everyday kind of chaps and they're speaking to the religious authorities. And this is what is said of them in Acts 4.13, now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

I love this because it shows us and it reminds us that God is in the business of using the ordinary and everyday in powerful and transformative ways.

The apostles aren't great men. They aren't men of splendor and they're not spectacular. But they're being used by God because they have this beautiful heart posture of humility.

[16 : 55] They humbly offer up their lives to God in His service. And just as Jesus was at work through these apostles, so He is also at work through us too.

You see, when Jesus called us, He also commissioned us to be in a way ambassadors, not like the apostles, but we are also called to serve God, aren't we?

We've all been given gifts and abilities and skills and interests which are all kind of unique and different. And that's what's the wonderful thing about the church. When we look at Peter and John, clearly their gifts were speaking in public. They could speak for Jesus.

And they use that gift to great effect. We too have all been given these wonderful gifts and we're encouraged and God is inviting us to use them in His service.

But we know that's not always easy, is it? At times we can be a little bit reticent. We can be a bit backwards and coming forwards, can't we?

[18 : 11] And you know, if we're a bit Scottish or if we're a bit West Coastie, we kind of excuse ourselves from service because we think we're not good enough.

We say, I'm not good enough, you know, she'll look over there, she'd be much better at doing this than I would ever be. And so there's this kind of sometimes struggle within us that we're just not good enough. We're not that great.

And so let's give over this task to somebody else. You see, that's so against what Jesus calls us to do because it's not really about our giftedness.

It's about our service, isn't it? And often I think those of us who love to hang back and to expect someone else to do it, I think at the root of that is an issue with pride, if I'm being honest.

I say that because I feel that deeply myself sometimes too. Because we begin to think too much of ourselves and too little of God. We become consumed about thinking of ourselves.

[19 : 14] We just wouldn't want to be humiliated or embarrassed or to walk away as if we'd done a bad job. And so it's really when we kind of adopt that kind of reticence or that kind of backwardness, I think it's a deep heart issue that we need to really wrestle with and struggle with and take to God in prayer.

Because it's often a real failure to trust God, isn't it? And his ability to work through us. But we're really thankful to God that he's gentle.

Because remember Peter, who spoke so boldly, he messed up. He was invited to speak for Jesus in front of a little girl and he denied.

He denied knowing anything about Jesus three times. But you know what? God graciously restored him.

God saw his failure and God didn't throw him on the dust heap. He worked with Peter. He used Peter. He worked his love and he continued to form his Peter's heart into something which was becoming more beautiful and becoming more like God and more like Christ.

[20 : 30] So when we fail, when we just struggle to serve God, let's remember Peter and let's remember our Heavenly Father, who doesn't just dump us and leave us and go on to the next person, but he graciously restores us.

He loves us. He looks after us. He puts us back on the horse and he invites us to continue to walk with him. And he will use us and through us, he will do his work.

So finally, and briefly, we're going to see the direction of the new community. Now this gospel of Luke is an incredible gospel because when you go through the gospel, you're going to see time and again 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 by the religious authorities.

Jesus, however, continually moves towards the outsider. He moves towards them in sacrificial love so that the outsiders can come into his new kingdom.

And as he does this, he declares that no longer will politics, race, gender, wealth be a barrier to God's kingdom.

[21 : 56] Everyone is welcome. Just as Jesus's new community was inaugurated through this unique call of Jesus to these 12 apostles in verse 13.

So through God's spirit, we too are called by Jesus as we read the pages of the Bible. We are called to go on his mission to declare to all people that God is for them, that God wants to be in relationship with them, that God wants to reconnect with them, to reconcile the two enemies together again.

But this isn't easy. We humbly admit that Christ's calling on our lives is hard and it's tough and it's costly. But thankfully, God doesn't leave us to do this on our own, does He?

He gives us his spirit. He shapes and he guides us as we read his word. As we read the Bible, as we read about God's people and about how he works within them, it is an incredible book which helps us to clarify and to see how God is at work in the lives of ordinary people.

It clarifies how God is at work in our life, how God loves us and how he cares for us and how he's for our kids. And as we read the Bible, we find incredible pictures of the impact of the love of Jesus moving towards the outsider.

[23 : 32] Now, the best picture, I think, of this is found in Revelation 21. It's a scene of heaven and it's a scene of worship in heaven.

And it's a scene where people from every nation, every tribe and every language worshipping God together. What we see in heaven is this.

God has designed us to be different. And our differences won't be stamped out in heaven. But in our diversity, we declare that unity and diversity is possible.

We celebrate diversity. We give thanks to God that we are different, that we are not the same, but that he has woven us into this new community, this new Israel.

With God's help, we move towards others. We deliberately create spaces and opportunities to enjoy and celebrate the diversity of people that make up our church family.

[24 : 39] And so we move towards ever deepening and ever increasing unity amongst our church family. The barriers that may set us back, the barriers which we find a bit more tricky to overcome personally, can be overcome because the love of Jesus moves us towards others, not simply to the outsiders, but to others within our own community.

As a church, we must work really hard and intentionally to foster greater unity amongst ourselves. And so we commit to creating a culture of celebration, which embraces and celebrates an increasing levels of unity amongst an increasingly diverse number of people, the glorious good news of Jesus.

As a church, we joyfully and courageously display the message of unity through the love of God to our church family and to our surrounding communities.

That's the amazing thing about this new community that Jesus formed on the mountain here. It was a community which included the outsider.

It's a community which included everyone and anyone because it was based on the love of God, that self-giving love of God, that love of God which propelled God towards us and propels us towards others.

[26 : 17] Tonight, we are in an incredible community, one that has been formed by God himself. And it's a community which we enjoy being part of.

And it's a community which is being transformed by God through his power to go beyond ourselves. And it's a community which loves others and which wants reconciliation between the different groups of people within our city, within our nation, within our world.

Let's give thanks to God. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you are a God who comes to us, who moves towards us. Lord, may we be a people who are fuelled by your grace to move towards others in love, offering them the hope of new relationship, of a new love, of restoration through Jesus.

We pray that you would continue to bless us as a church, continue to give great vision and great impetus to the church family here. May they continue to grow and to flourish here and in further afield.

We ask all this in Christ's name. Amen.