

## **Engagement – living the Jesus Way**

### **Let's pray...**

If you've glanced at the bulletin or were with us last Sunday, you'll know that we are taking three Sundays to talk together about our **core values** as a church – the **deep commitments** that anchor and shape all we do – that anchor and shape **how** we seek to worship and follow Jesus.

And we need to talk about this.

Because, let's be honest, every church out there will say that they are seeking **to know, love and serve God** – or to **follow Jesus**. The question is **how**?

*How will we pursue and live this? What defines or guides this.*

At Lambrick, for many years now, we've distilled our core values, the deep commitments that guide us in this to three things –

### **Orthodoxy, Engagement & Formation.**

Last Sunday, we explored the first of these – our commitment to pursue the Beautiful Orthodoxy of Jesus.

And today we need to talk about **Engagement** – on the heels of last Sunday's theme.

Because the Christian life, life in Christ, life in the Spirit, is not just about a **commitment to Truth** – this this is vitally important.

But it is also about **a commitment to a Way** – a way of living in the world – and specifically, a commitment to live **the Way of Jesus**.

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Now, here and there, I read or hear someone refer to Christians as **people of the Book**. But in the early church, before the disciples of Jesus were called "Christians", they were known not as people of the Book, but people of "**the Way**".

**6 times** in the book of Acts we find the Christians – the disciples of Jesus – referred to as **the Way** or the people of **the Way**.

[Acts 9:2 and 22:4; 19:9 & 23; Acts 24:14 & 22.]

Let me read one reference as an example.

This title shows up for the first time in **Acts 9:2** where a Pharisee named Saul (later to convert and become the Apostle Paul) is "*breathing out murderous threats against Jesus' disciples.*"

**"He went to** *the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to **the Way**, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."*

This title affirms the reality that following Jesus means more than just embracing a certain set of beliefs or truths, but that following Jesus lead to a particular **way** of living – **an ethic** – shaped by **the ethics/the ways** of Jesus...

Which is not surprising since the Greek and Hebrew words we translate as "Way" refer not simply to a path, but to **an ethic**. To a way of living. And specifically – **to live the Way of Jesus**.

To put it simply: **following Jesus means learning to live the Jesus' Way**.

As opposed to the Way of the Romans, or the Way of the culture, of the Way of the Pharisees, or even the Way our own hearts.

**To be a Christian is to learn and live the Way of Jesus.**

So ***what is the Way of Jesus?***

Well to help us get at this, I want to invite us to actually consider the **Pharisees** (this influential Jewish group in Jesus' day) and particularly to consider the difference between ***the ethic of the Pharisees*** and ***the ethic of Jesus*** – as we see played out in the gospels.

And I apologize to anyone who is totally a newbie to the Bible and the story of Jesus – cause you won't have much basis for considering this question. But hopefully as we talk you will grasp the essential difference between these two very different ways of approaching and participating in the world.

But for those of us who are familiar with the gospel accounts, ***what would you say is the essential difference between the ethic of the Pharisees and the ethic of Jesus?***

--- invite actual real time answers ---

I suspect what comes to mind for many of us is that the Pharisees were focused on **externals** whereas Jesus had an ethic of the **heart**. I know that's what often comes to mind for me.

The Pharisees were concerned with how long your prayers were and how well phrased they were. Whereas Jesus was and is concerned with whether or not your heart beats for God and others – no matter what your prayers sound like – to you, to Him or to anyone.

Throughout the gospels, we are confronted constantly by this dramatic difference of concern between the Pharisees and Jesus.

**Mark 7** is a classic example. It's where we find the Pharisees complaining about how Jesus' disciples didn't perform the ceremonial washings.

We're told **(v.3)**

*(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)*

**So the Pharisees** and teachers of the law **asked Jesus**, "Why don't your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

And if you know the story, in response, Jesus really lit into them for putting all the emphasis on meaning externals – as though what's on your hands is more important than what's in your heart – guiding your life!

In the end, Jesus boils it all down to this – **we read.**

*Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them... For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."* (v.14-16, 21-23)

Clearly this is a major difference between Jesus and the Pharisees.

They were consumed with externals, whereas Jesus was and is captivated by the reality of our hearts and how they shape and guide us.

But a number of years ago, Mark Buchanan, a wise pastor and writer (whom I've referenced before), pointed me toward something deeper. **A deeper divide.** A deeper distinction between the way/ethic of Jesus and the way/ethic of the Pharisees – one that's instructive for us as **we** seek to learn and live the Way of Jesus in the world today.

Mark stated it this way. He said...

"The deeper difference between Jesus' ethic and that of the Pharisees was this: **The Pharisees had an ethic of avoidance, and Jesus had an ethic of involvement.**" (Or engagement)

*"The Pharisee's guiding question, core question was not, 'How can I make others clean?' but 'How can I keep myself from getting dirty?'*

Those are two profoundly different questions and ways to live.

Let me read that again. And as I do, I want to just invite us to listen for which question reveals the primary concern of our hearts as we live in these days...

*"The Pharisee's question was not, 'How can I make others clean?' but 'How can I keep myself from getting dirty?'"*

I've been reading a book recently on life in the post-Christian West and what it means for Christians.

The author, a very brilliant and whole-hearted Christian, is exploring the ways in which life in the West has changed so dramatically, so fundamentally, from previous eras in Western history – in how we understand and think about life, about the good life, about fundamental freedoms, about character, about virtue, about what matters most in life and what to value above all.

And he's asking questions that need to be asked. Naming realities that need to be considered. Exploring implications. Proposing ways forward – in regard to politics, family and community life, education and vocation, church and worship.

And at points, I'm very much with him – gripped by the reality of a world that often feels very **untethered**, very **unhinged**.

Disconnected, and happily so, from God – the Source of all Life – and the beauty and goodness that flows from God.

As I read this book, I am gripped by the desperate need for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done – *on earth as it is in heaven* – in our day and age...

So, here and there, I've really been tracking with this author...

But then I flip a page and find myself confronted more with the ethic of the Pharisees than the ethic of Jesus – with an ethic of **avoidance** ("*How can I keep myself from getting dirty?*") more than an ethic of **involvement** or **redemptive engagement** ("*How can I make others clean?..*").

And I can't shake **the call and example - the Way of Jesus** – the way that Jesus in the face of the mess in front of him – be it the mess of a broken or sinful person, or the mess of a broken relationship, a broken family or a community – *instead of avoiding the mess for the sake of staying clean* – Jesus always and in all ways **ran toward** the mess and the messy, **came near** to the broken, **reached out to touch** the unclean, **seeking** to bring the light of the kingdom **into** the darkness of a fallen and broken world.

We could turn almost anywhere in the gospels and we'd see this, but the **Incarnation** itself is the ultimate affirmation of this – that this

is **fundamentally Jesus' Way** – that this is *fundamentally God's*

*Way* in the world and with the world – for the world...

Mark Buchanan's description of the ethic of the Pharisees rings in my mind: "*The Pharisee's question was not, 'How can I make others clean?' but 'How can I keep myself from getting dirty?'*"

We see this time and again in the gospels – in the Pharisees – avoiding the marketplace and sinners for fear of being defiled, closing their doors to the unclean, and only approaching the sinful for the purpose of enacting punishment – doing all they can to keep a distance from the sinful and unclean so as to not allow **themselves** to be defiled and unable to participate in their "holy work" away from the mess.

But in Jesus we see the utter opposite.

In Jesus we see the ethic of involvement – **the Way of engagement** – coming near to the unholy, the broken, the unclean, the sinful... Almost every page in the gospel tells this story...

If you have a bible, I want to invite you to turn with me to that story we read earlier. And just before it actually – to **Mark 6:53f.** It's the end of one scene and the beginning of the next (the one we touched on before).

**Mark 6:53-7:4** – and as I read, I want us to pay attention to the word **marketplace**. It shows up twice. And particularly to notice

how differently Jesus and the Pharisees relate to the *marketplace*.

(And again, I'm drawing on the insights of Mark Buchanan – who's helped me a lot in this).

### **Mark 6:53-7:4**

*When they had crossed over [the lake, that is], they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the **marketplaces**. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.*

*[ch.7] The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the **marketplace** they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)*

Now clearly, this is a secondary matter in the story, but noticing the Pharisees relationship to the marketplace in comparison to that of Jesus is not secondary to the gospel.

Whereas **Jesus had a reputation** for being found in the marketplace. He seemed to **order His life** around being in the marketplace – the place where the broken, the hurting and the unholy would be found – **for the sake of** the broken, the hurting and the unholy...

The Pharisees were **utterly consumed** with **avoiding** the marketplace – avoiding the unholy, the messy, the broken...

And, if they did have to traverse it, they made sure to religiously wash it all off – to wash away even the residue of the marketplace – the residue of the messy, the unholy, the unclean.

It's hard to find two attitudes and actions more diametrically opposed...

For Jesus, the marketplace was not a place to be avoided for the sake of holiness. Rather it was where He did **His holy work** – His holy work of **making the unholy holy**... making the unclean clean... restoring the broken... forgiving the sinner...

Not by standing at a distance and announcing judgment, but **by coming near** in redemptive, restorative action...

In a way, this comparison is a glimpse of two very different definitions of holiness itself.

To the Pharisee, holiness is something to be guarded. Something that requires distance from all that is unholy...

But for Jesus (who in the gospel is referred to at one point as the "Holy One of God"), holiness is something to be imparted. To Jesus, holiness means coming close to the unholy for the unholy. Being the friend of tax collectors and sinners. Sharing His table and friendship and life with the broken and troubled for the sake of the broken and troubled. Taking on flesh and making His dwelling among us... Laying down His life for us...

From start to finish, Jesus' Way in the world is **the Way of engagement.**

Drawing near.

Getting His hands dirty with the mess of our lives.

Involving Himself with us in costly ways, rather than withdrawing from us for His own sake...

**In truth, this is the gospel, isn't it?**

This is what God in Christ has done for us – for all of humanity – and what He calls us to now be about as His followers.

We hear it early on in the gospels in **Matthew 5:13**, where Jesus says to his disciples – "*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...*"

Salt and Light. Two everyday, ordinary agents – that exist to preserve what would otherwise decay and to bring light where the darkness is overtaking...

Salt and Light. Two everyday, ordinary agents – that need **to get up close to do their work**—into the darkness, into the mess, into the decaying and the broken places **with Jesus...**

***With Jesus.***

**That others may live...**

**That's the goal, right?**

A few years ago, I was watching a show with my son that we love – **American Ninja Warrior**. It's an epic obstacle course competition that you need to pretty-much be a ninja to complete.

Anyways, one of the competitors that season was a member of the **US Air Force ParaRescue troop** and so in telling his story – as a first responder who is trained and committed to dive quickly into dangerous water, to enter boldly into the danger zone – he shared their motto – what drives them in all they do...

***"That others may live."***

The moment I heard it, I couldn't forget it...

**Cause this is Jesus' motto**, right? This is Jesus' passion, Jesus' prayer... This is **why** Jesus lives **the ethic of engagement** – why Jesus comes near to the unholy and the broken... And why He invites us to the same – with Him... in everyday, ordinary, yet costly ways... bringing the light of the kingdom into the darkness of the world...

***"That others may live."***

This is why one of our core values is **Engagement** – because ***this is the Way of Jesus.***

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So, instead of just circling around this for another 10 minutes, let's close by taking a moment to bow to Jesus and invite Him to open our eyes to the dark places around us where He want to bring His light

**with us...** or the decaying places around us where He wants to bring His preserving and life-sustaining salt **with us...**

*Is there someone in your life that you've been avoiding that Jesus is inviting you to draw near to **with Him**?*

*Is there a situation that you've been avoiding that Jesus is inviting you to lean into and seek His kingdom and will **with Him**?*

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And I need to acknowledge, that for some of us today our hearts response is to acknowledge that the dark place is in us... the distorted and decaying place is in us...

And our greatest fear in this place is that God has given up on us – has walked away, washed his hands of us.

But know this today – God is not a Pharisee. In Jesus we see and know that God's Way is to come near to the unholy for the sake of making us holy...

And the One who comes near invites us near today... invite you near today...

----- pause and give people space to pray -----

Lastly, I want to invite us to pray for one another in this, and to ask for prayer if we need it.

Maybe the call of Jesus feels too much for you. Maybe the darkness feels too much to you.

Or maybe you are so used to **avoiding** the darkness that engagement feels incredibly overwhelming to you.

I want to invite you, as we sing, to simply turn to the person beside you or come forward to one of us, and ask for prayer. Who knows, maybe we'll ask you to pray for us as well.

Let's pray...

**benediction** -----

I met with one of our University students this week who spent the summer serving with an organization that walks with teenage girls in the wake of being involved in some way in the sex trafficking...

Not your average summer internship.

And I asked her – how did you end up there?

And her answer startled me.

She told me how she'd learned about this organization through a school project and it terrified her. And she knew God had not called her to live in fear – **so she applied for an internship.**

- **That others may live!**

She ran toward the mess – with Jesus...

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In the end, the call isn't to an ethic.

The call is simply to follow Jesus into the lives of others, into the broken places, into the dark places – with hope and faith that Jesus can restore and overcome the darkness...