

Formation – into the life of Jesus

Over the last two Sundays, we have explored the *what* and *why* of 2 of our core values as a church – **Orthodoxy** and **Engagement**.

We've explored how in *Jesus we see and learn the beauty of Orthodoxy*, and how in *Jesus we see and learn the way of redemptive Engagement...*

And this morning we want to explore our third and final core value – a deep commitment that stands alongside and both undergirds and also flows out of the other two in an essential way.

We call this core value: **Formation**.

It's our call and commitment to seek and pay attention to God's work in us – in our hearts and lives.

Almost every time the elders and I have met this past year, we've started by reading and praying in the light of the apostle Paul's instruction to the elders in Ephesus – as recorded in **Acts 20:28**.

Paul says, "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*"

There's a lot there worth pondering, but I'm always struck with the implication of his opening words – "*keep watch over yourselves...*"

The implication being – **our** lives matter to God.

What's going on **in us** – in our hearts, in our lives – matters to God.

Our call as elders isn't just to attend to God's work and the need for God's work in the lives of others and the church as a whole. But to attend to God's work and voice in our own lives...

To the places where **we** need God's work, God's forgiveness, God's rebuke and renewing grace... To pay attention to where God is speaking to us, calling us, even confronting us – in grace.

In truth, our capacity to recognize this in others and in the church as a whole flows out of our commitment and capacity to attend to this in our own lives... Our ministry to others requires this...

But even apart from that, **we simply need this.**

Because the call of **Jesus is always personal.**

And by that I don't mean private, but personal.

Jesus is not like a boss who only cares about our productivity and output.

No, Jesus cares about it all – every fiber of our being, every ache in our bones and our heart; every struggle in our relationships and our sexuality; every fear, every hope, every thought and how they shape us... **All that we are...**

And because of this, the gospel – Jesus – always gets personal.

And thank God He does.

Seeking to reach into every nook and cranny in me and in you
and bring God's renewing grace, redeeming grace, transforming grace.

And we know this. We know this in our guts.

We know that following Jesus isn't just a matter of knowing the right things, and doing the right things, but that it's ultimately about an encounter – an ongoing encounter – with a God who is setting all things right – and who, in grace, seeks to **set all things right *in us***... in the deep parts of our hearts and soul... the parts that shape and inform all the rest.

And I say we know this because of how we all respond when we hear a story of another fallen Christian leader – a pastor or ministry leader who's ministry and influence has come crashing down due to an illicit sexual relationship or a misuse of power or funds or influence...

Something inside of us reacts strongly.

Not just because another person has come crashing down, but because we know that this is the furthest thing from what Jesus is like and what Jesus does... that Jesus had no part in this...

And so there is this compounded ache because we know it should have been so different... just the opposite in fact.

It's a sobering example, but it gets to the heart – that ***Jesus gets to the heart.***

That Jesus isn't just interested in reshuffling the furniture on the deck of our lives, but is passionately committed and seeking to get down deep and renew us from within.

It's impossible to read the gospels and not see and hear this beating in the heart of Jesus – guiding all that He says and does... And Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers get this and explore it constantly.

And because of this, because this is so core to Jesus and the gospel, we, as a church, are convinced this needs to be core for us, something we care deeply about and don't ignore – what God is doing and wants to do in us...

This matters to the gospel.

Orthodoxy matters because Jesus **is** the Truth.

Engagement matters because this is the Way of Jesus – the Way that He invites us to live...

And **Formation** matters because Jesus **is** the Life – and so the gospel draws us into His life... ***This is what Jesus is after.***

We hear it right from the get-go from Jesus.

Matthew 4:19, Jesus calls, saying, "***Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.***"

This is our core calling as Christians – to follow Jesus, to be His disciples. *Everything else flows out of this...*

"Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

Which could sound like mostly a matter of what we do or **will** do, but as we attend to Jesus in the gospels, we discover that this is ultimately about becoming new people. Women and men who, as we follow Jesus, are becoming *new people – alive with and in the life of Jesus... being transformed into His likeness...*

Women and men who, as we follow Jesus, are increasingly, though incrementally, **marked by His character** – His compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...

Who's hearts beat in sync with His heart... Who's thoughts and desires flow from His thoughts and desires... Who's lives are lived deeply **in Him...**

On earth as it is in heaven.

*In us – **in you** – **in me** – as it is in heaven.*

This is what Jesus is after, and what the gospel is about.

And it's important for us to grasp this and come back to it often.

Cause it's too easy to misconstrue the **goal** of the Christian life as getting to heaven, or getting out of hell, or getting our lives sorted out, or having all the right answers, or whatever else we can come up with.

But again and again, throughout Scripture, we are pointed toward a greater goal – something our hearts all ache for: **for us to become alive with and in Jesus... And He in us...**

For us to be alive in and with the life of Jesus...

Listen with me to the call and hope of the gospel... The call and hope of discipleship...

Matthew 4:19 – *"Follow me," Jesus says, "and I will make you fishers of men."*

Luke 6:40 – *"A disciple is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."*

Galatians 4:19 – *"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."*

Colossians 1:28 – *"We proclaim him [that is, Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."*

Romans 8:29 – *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."*

Ephesians 4:11f – *"So Christ himself gave us the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we **all** reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

2 Cor 3:18 – *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the lord, who is the Spirit."*

1 John 3:2 – *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has yet to be made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*

This is the goal of discipleship – the goal of the gospel – the passion and aim of Jesus for every one of us – that we would be come to **live our lives in Him** – to be transformed into His image – to be alive with and in the life of Jesus...

Having the mind of Jesus.

Led by the heart of Jesus.

Living in the character of Jesus.

Passionately seeking the will of Jesus.

In all things... from the heart...

It's amazing to consider.

Sounds a bit over the top. A bit unrealistic.

And it is – for us. Of course.

But not for Jesus – the One in whom and through whom and for whom all things were made.

And He is the One that calls us.

History is full of stories of fallen Christian leaders, yes.

But it is also full of stories – ***this church*** is full of stories – of ordinary women and men encountering Jesus and finding their lives, over time, drawn into His life on earth today...

Incomplete, yes. But in Christ, yes.

This is what the gospel does. This is what Jesus does – by the Spirit...

... **By the Spirit.**

I emphasize this because our response to hearing this hope of the gospel, is to ask **how?** *Right?*

How do we do this?

And the answer is – **we don't.**

This is what Jesus does in us – by the Spirit.

None of us are able to transform our own hearts. I'm sure many of us have tried and failed.

But it's not our calling anyways – our call is to follow Jesus, and His work is to change and transform us...

Listen again to Jesus' call and promise in **Matt 4:19** – "***Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.***"

I will make you...

Listen again to Paul's words in **2 Cor 3:18**

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the lord, who is the Spirit."

We... are being transformed...

Not "are transforming ourselves", but "are being transformed" **by the Spirit** as we look to Christ.

Which means then that the way we live out this **core value**, this deep commitment to Christian Spiritual Formation is bound up in learning together ***to simply attend to and follow Jesus...*** learning

together ***to be attentive and responsive to the Spirit's work in us...*** learning together ***to trust in, depend upon and cooperate with the Spirit's transforming, renewing, slow but very real, work in us...***

And as I look around this room, I know this is already happening and has been for years in many...

And I'd like to draw on one of these stories... And specifically, my wife, **Janet Anderson**. Over the years, as we've walked together, I have watched Janet pursue Christ and grow in Christ and want her to come and share some of what this journey has looked like for her.

- Tell us where it started?
- So what did you do?
- How did this impact you?

About a month ago, **Carlie Kilduff**, shares one of her recent poems with me, wondering if God may be inviting her to share it with us as a church. I was gripped by the raw honesty of it and asked if I could hold onto it and wait to see where it may fit into our September study. I've asked her to share it with us today as I think it expresses well the prayer that arises from this morning's focus...

- **"Jesus Deeply"**

Invitation to the Lord's Table