

Community of Contrast Pt 1 -- The Strangeness of the Christian life

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[0 : 00] Canada's official name is not Canada. Didn't know if you knew that. You don't live in Canada. Our country's official name at its founding 155 years ago was the Dominion of Canada, with a national motto from sea to sea.

That language comes from Psalm 72, which is describing the reign of God's future king, the Messiah, the Christ. Verse 8 of Psalm 72 reads, His dominion shall be from sea to sea. The initial vision of the Dominion of Canada was that this land would be a fulfillment, a manifestation of that psalm. That this land would be Christ's country, the kingdom of heaven come to earth.

That Christ's dominion would be established here, from sea to sea. And I'll excuse you if you feel like that initial vision for this land has been lost.

In the last 50 years, the Christian faith has been jettisoned from the center of our culture, exiled to the margins of modern life in our country.

[1 : 19] First Peter is written to people grappling with a similar experience, of following Christ in a world that doesn't. Following Christ from the margins of their culture, treated as exiles, strangers, aliens in their hometowns, because of their allegiance to Christ.

First Peter is about how to follow Jesus when the world around you doesn't. How to exist on the margins because of your Christian faith.

We're going to be looking at this book through the lens of the St. John's vision statement. Now I know all of you have memorized the St. John's vision statement. That was a joke.

If you're new with us, none of us know what our vision statement is. That's why we're doing this series. But in case you need to hear it, it's going to go up on the screen and we're going to say it together, okay? St. John's is a community of contrast, all together, gripped by the gospel of grace, sharing Christ with our city.

Last week we started 1 Peter by contemplating what it means to be gripped by the gospel. And this week we're going to learn how to live as a community of contrast. In our text we're given three commands on how to follow Jesus in a world that doesn't.

[2 : 38] Three ways to be a community in Christ that contrasts the culture around us. And the first is in verse 13 if you open your Bible. Peter writes, Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being clear-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Set your hope fully on God's grace. Where do you place your hope? Where does our culture tell us to place our hope?

We're told to place our hope in ourselves and in our apparently progressing society. Success is within reach, we're told. Satisfaction in life is possible for everyone.

But it's up to us to forge our own path. To hope to discover both our true self and true happiness through personal ambition and wealth and pleasure and the freedom of self-discovery.

We are trained to be our own masters, to be our own lords, and that we control our own destiny. So hope in yourself. There's a survey published three weeks ago by the Canadian government and it found British Columbians are the least satisfied people in our country.

[4 : 03] And British Columbian women are less satisfied than British Columbian men. We are the unhappiest Canadians despite living in the self-proclaimed best place on earth.

See, the people around us are losing hope. That secular message that we can discover success and satisfaction through our own effort seems more often than not to be leading people off a cliff of

anger and anxiety rather than to a mountaintop of our aspirations.

Our world increasingly, it feels month by month, week by week, feels more and more hopeless. And as Christians, it's easy to feel hopeless too. We see our congregations aging and declining.

We see young people falling away or leaving. We see our faith labeled very effectively as unloving, outdated, irrational, and anti-everything.

It feels like a cultural tsunami of secularism has crashed over us and it threatens to drown us. We're like Jesus' disciples in the storm, so we cry out to God, wake up!

[5 : 17] Don't you care that we are about to perish? And in a space of instability, uncertainty, and fear, we need to hear these words.

Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Do not forget, in the middle of the storm, that we have a living hope.

And it's not ourselves. We put no confidence in the flesh, in ourselves. We're a community of contrast because Jesus is our living hope.

Our hope is him, and our hope is living because he is alive. And so we do not lose heart, though our world is wasting away, because in him, we are being renewed day by day.

As he rose from the dead, so shall we. The gates of hell will not prevail against his church, his people. We are gripped by him, and he will not let us go.

[6 : 31] So we set our eyes on the future, not the past, nor the present, to an event that has not happened yet, Christ's return. But for certain, it will happen because of what has happened in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago at a vacated tomb, and what is happening right now as the Holy Spirit is alive and at work in us.

Because he lives, we shall live. We will not drown in this secular tsunami. We're gripped by the gospel of grace. And our hopeless, helpless, depressed, dark, dying world can see our living hope. They should see in us a contrast to their darkness. Because we are a community that radiates the light of Christ as we place our hope fully in him.

We have hope, friends. You have hope. The world does not. They may think they do in their wealth, their ideologies, their political leaders, their aspirations and plans, but there is only one living hope that can never die, and that is Jesus Christ.

And setting your eyes on him, on the grace that will be revealed at his glorious coming, makes us together a community of contrast, a people who are full of hope amidst a hopeless world.

[7 : 59] Because our hope is not in ourselves. It's in him. That's the first way we're to be gripped by the gospel of God's grace. The second way to be a community of contrast is in verse 14.

And let's look there together. As obedient children, Peter writes, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Be a community of contrast by first setting your minds on Christ, our living hope, and now secondly, by being holy as Christ is holy. Verse 13 began, prepare your minds for action.

I love that. Our faith is not just about acquiring and consuming and downloading information. We love the Lord with all of our mind first, so that now second, we may love the Lord with all of our strength.

Prepare your minds for action. Be holy in all you do. To be holy means to be set apart, to be different, to stick out. A community of contrast is a holy people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood.

[9 : 19] Peter defines holiness for us by looking at its opposite. In verse 14 he says, don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. Look at that verse closely.

The conduct of the world is not holy. The character of the world, verse 14 tells us, is like a person who is molded by their selfish passions and their own ignorance.

Such a good cultural commentary from a 2,000 year old document. Our world today is driven by selfish passions and ignorance.

And so are we in our default, sinless state. We're taught to do what we want. Get yourself ahead no matter the cost.

As long as it makes you happy in the moment, that's all that matters. Live for today. Live for yourself. Embrace your passions. Nothing and no one else matters as much as you do.

[10 : 18] We're groomed to be selfish. Pursue your passions and be ignorant of the consequences. Live for today and to hell with tomorrow.

That's the human default position. Then and now. But you, Christian, Peter declares, be different. Be holy.

Be who you were created to be. Made by God in the image of God. Reflecting God in how you live. Do not be conformed to the culture but be transformed by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who lives in you.

Be holy. Contrast the culture collectively as a community. Be selfless. Do not be controlled by your passions and do not be ignorant of the consequences of your actions.

Peter doesn't just tell us to try harder to be holy. He now gives us the motivation for our holiness and it's in verses 17 to 21.

[11 : 29] Let's look at them together. If you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways you inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

God is our righteous judge. He is holy holy holy and we are sinful sinful sinful all of us are.

And so if you have the audacity as a wretched sinner to call the holy righteous God your father remember where your status as his beloved child has come from.

Verse 18 declares that you were bought you were ransomed from your slavery to sin and being damned to death not with gold not with cash not with your righteous deeds or merit but verse 19 with the spilt blood of God's only son.

[13 : 02] That is what our salvation has cost him. Our motivation for holiness is not our own effort nor resolve it's the reality of Christ's sacrifice for us.

The fact that we can call God our father at the cost of his only begotten son. That is our motivation to be holy. Our inspiration to be a community of contrast is the unbelievable good news that Jesus has done for us the unimaginable.

He has left heaven become a man humbled himself completely and emptied himself fully to die the death you and I deserve. He's ransomed us saved us freed us adopted us by his own self-sacrificial death.

That is holiness. And so in view of God's mercy all of us are compelled in response to now present our bodies as a living sacrifice which is holy and acceptable to God.

Be holy because of what God has done for you to ransom you from sin and to win you the status of an adopted child of God.

[14 : 21] Be holy as he is holy. Be motivated in how you live by how he lived. Be a community of contrast. Be different. Set apart.

Be holy. We are not hopeless like the world around us. We are not lost in selfish passions and ignorance but we are found in Christ and so we resemble Christ in how we live.

To be a community of contrast we love the Lord with all our mind and all our strength. We follow Jesus in a world that doesn't by setting our hope fully on Christ firstly and secondly by being holy as he is holy.

The third final command is in verse 22. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.

Love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God.

[15 : 29] We follow Jesus in a world that doesn't by loving one another. A community of contrast gripped by the gospel of grace loves one another.

this is how we share Christ with our city. Loving one another is our greatest evangelistic opportunity for witness in our world today.

The real secret to fruitful and effective mission in the world is the quality of our Christian community. Tim Keller wrote that. our evangelistic success in a post-Christian world will only be as good as our love for one another.

In a post-Christian context such as ours we must be honest that people who don't know the Lord are almost exclusively not coming to a room like this one. To a service like this one.

There's a survey in Britain that recently found 70% of the United Kingdom 7 out of 10 expressed no intention of ever attending a church service.

[16:39] And this is a nation where 72% of the people claim to be Christians. Not great at math but that doesn't make sense. Imagine what those numbers would be if the survey was done here.

Non-Christians generally will not come to our Sunday services. At least not initially. So if our entire outreach strategy is to preach evangelistically on Sundays and that's it that's our entire strategy to reach our city then the vast majority of our neighbors will never hear the gospel.

There's a little book called Everyday Church that two pastors wrote and they say this A farmer cannot blame his crops if he fails to sow and reap.

Sunday services in church is the one place where evangelism cannot take place in our generation because the lost are not there.

They go on we can no longer think of church as a meeting on a Sunday. We must think of church as a community of people who share life ordinary everyday life and we cannot think of mission as an event that takes place in a religious building.

[17:57] Of course there will continue to be a role for special events but the bedrock of mission will be ordinary life. Mission must be done primarily in the context of everyday life.

They finish we need to wake up and realize we are in a missionary situation like Nepal. We need to operate as missionaries in a foreign land.

This mentality resembles how Christianity spread in the world that Peter was writing to. Michael Green comments in this book Evangelism in the Early Church that the most important way Christianity spread in the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection was through the extended household evangelism done informally by Christians.

It's informal organic everyday evangelism. That's how the gospel initially spread. a community of contrast sharing Christ with our cities through how we love each other and how we love God and how we love others.

When I was in our young adult ministry Ecclesia it was the love of that community that they had for one another that grounded and motivated us in our shared faith.

[19:19] And it fueled the evangelism that occurred there. I had two non-Christian friends in university who didn't know each other who both came to faith through the community of Ecclesia.

I think one of you has the same story in their own life. Both of them ended up marrying someone within that St. John's community and both are still walking with the Lord, raising a new generation to now further extend our community of contrast.

That was 15 years ago. My wife Melissa came to St. John's because she heard about the incredible community at Ecclesia. She didn't come from me, much to my chagrin.

She came for Ecclesia and instead she got me. But it was the community of contrast that was gripped by the gospel of grace. And people from the outside world who met people within that St. John's community and saw our earnest love for one another desperately wanted to be a part of it. So as the director of evangelism and outreach at St.

[20:26] John's, my entire evangelism strategy for our church is you. It's the same strategy that was the apostle Peter's nearly 2,000 years ago, writing to Christians throughout the Roman world.

Be a community of contrast, hope fully in Christ, be holy, and love one another earnestly. It was Paul's strategy as well. Calling Christians to shine as lights amidst a crooked generation.

And both of them learned it from Christ, who calls his followers to let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven. Jesus tells us the way the world will know that we are his followers is by how we love one another.

This is how we can be both a community of contrast and also share Christ with our city. by loving one another earnestly with a pure heart. So how are we doing in loving one another?

The last few years have been awful for most of us. Let's just be honest. So how are we supporting each other? How are we being a community of contrast in how we care for one another with the love of Christ?

[21:45] Christ? There are new faces in our midst, as well as others who are exploring the Christian faith. There are people here who are hurting and need to be loved by us with the love of Christ.

How are we doing in this ordinary, everyday, missional task of loving one another, of welcoming new people into our community and supporting them in their first few steps of faith?

See, what's needed is not another program, not another staff, but a mindset amongst all of us to worship God by loving one another earnestly. This is how we can be a community of contrast. This is how we share Christ with our city. And you can start right at coffee at the end of the service. Do you know what demographic in our community needs to be loved right now?

It's our young people. I've been reading two different books that are examining why young people are leaving the church.

[22 : 53] And both books identify certain traits or trends that seem most effective in developing resilient believers among our youngest members. And the two books have two different lists of what to do.

But both identify one common trait that's universal. resilient young Christians, young people who stay connected to Christ, feel connected to the older Christians in their church.

There are strong intergenerational bonds between young and old amongst the young people who've kept the faith in our post-Christian culture. So how are you doing in loving our young people?

Those among us who daily face unbelievable pressure from every direction to abandon their faith and capitulate to the culture. We have here an incredible cloud of witnesses.

An amazing communion of saints in this community of contrast. But I wish our young people knew you more. I wish they knew your stories.

[24 : 02] I wish they knew your struggles and how in Christ you persevered. What would it look like to love our young people? Well, let me give you a few examples.

Janelle is no longer here as our evening service coordinator for Sunday school. And that means no one is teaching our Sunday school. So our youth director, Will, who's running an entire Bible camp next week, came here tonight to run Sunday school because no one else volunteered to.

That's a really practical way to love young people. Our teenagers need more mature Bible study leaders to mentor them and teach them in the faith. There's only one person in the entire congregations of St. John's who volunteers to lead a university Bible study at Ecclesia.

Imagine the witness to the friends of our young people if they came to these ministries and found a building full of older people who know and love our young people and are joyfully serving them.

It would be unlike anything these young people had ever seen before. Love one another. That's how we are to be a community of contrast gripped by the gospel of grace, sharing Christ with our city.

[25 : 21] Love the Lord with all your heart by loving one another as Christ loves you. This love for one another is birthed and fueled, verse 23 tells us, through the living and abiding word of God, the gospel that was preached to you.

See, it's the word of God, the gospel, that births our love for one another. We must be a community that's forever centered on the word of God. It's the seed of faith that continues to grow in fruit as we abide in it.

We must never stop longing for the pure spiritual milk that nourishes our faith, which is the gospel that was preached to you. We don't relate to one another like the world relates.

Chapter 2, verse 1, tells us consciously to put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. If we have a problem with someone here, we go to them directly, humbly, gently, and we seek to love them and reconcile with them as Christ came to gently reconcile with us.

We don't ghost one another or cancel each other or gossip or grumble. We're different. We are a community of contrast and we contrast the culture.

[26 : 39] We seek to love in all we do, to serve each other as Christ serves us, to be holy and to be different from our divided world. So we're called to be a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel of God's grace, sharing Christ with our city.

And we do that first by setting our hope fully on Christ, second by being holy as he is holy, and lastly by loving one another earnestly. This is how we are to survive and thrive in following Jesus in a world that doesn't.

Amen.