

TREASURING JESUS TOGETHER

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 December 2014

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] This core value that we're closing off with today is about our life together. It's about relationships. It's about our togetherness, if you like.

And like all of our core values, this core value is highly practical. All values are highly practical. That is, what we value deep down in our hearts drives our behaviours, our attitudes, our motivations and our actions.

And this core value is no different. If we say that Jesus is our supreme treasure and that we value ensuring that Jesus, obedience to Jesus and loving him is the centre of our life together, then it results in certain actions, behaviours, attitudes.

For instance, treasuring Jesus together says that as a church we are committed to making corporate worship, what we're doing right here now, a weekly priority. We're committed to meeting together in small groups, more intimate opportunities for nurture and service.

Small groups being the main network for discipleship and pastoral care and relationships.

Treasuring Jesus together by engaging to watch over one another in brotherly love.

[1 : 09] By remembering one another in prayer. Aiding one another in sickness and distress. Cultivating Christian sympathy and joy. Being courteous in speech. Being slow to take offence but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the command of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We're committed to welcoming people from every background. We're committed to openness towards new people and the avoidance of clickiness. You know what I mean.

We're committed to pursuing increasingly visible and authentic and practical ways of loving each other.

And we're committed to being personally involved in one ongoing ministry towards building up the St. Paul's family according to each other's gifts. So this value not only says that we value being together, but it talks about how we are together.

It says that the way we relate to each other is supremely important. In fact, more important than anything. We are a multi-congregational, culturally diverse, complex church.

[2 : 20] And our vision is to see more and more different people come and treasure the Lord Jesus with us. The diversity that exists in this church will always threaten to drive us apart.

Always. Every day. It will threaten to drive us apart. What is greater than our diversity, however, is the Lord Jesus and our unity in him.

He's the one who unites us. He is our glue. Jesus must be the main thing for us. His standards for our relationships must inevitably be our standards.

And so I've been wrestling this week as I've been out there on the Bobcat to try and work out what do I say to encourage a biblical kind of life together at St. Paul's.

Because apart from the cultural and generational diversity, there's also individual personality preferences or relational preferences and differences personality-wise.

[3 : 25] And my best guess is that there is at least four different kinds of people in this room who need at least four different kinds of messages to do with this.

On one extreme are those people who say, I don't feel any need for personal relationships and I don't care if I actually have any relationships. At the other extreme are people who say, I actually need personal relationships and you owe me personal relationships.

And if I don't have any personal relationships, it's your problem. Now, both of these extremes inevitably are deficient in love and they're tarnished with pride. But the form of their loveless pride is different.

The one expresses loveless pride by rejecting the need to give love or to receive love. And this is the pride that that's the sort of pride that looks from a heart that is, if you like, strong and self-sufficient.

The other extreme of loveless pride by, it expresses its loveless pride by feeling that people owe them love and then blame others for not giving them love.

[4 : 30] And that's the way pride looks like in the heart of the person who is weak and self-pitying. Granted, those are two extremes on this spectrum. Ultimately, both extremes need to discover what real love is, why God designed us to give it and to receive it from him and from each other.

Now, the other two kinds of people are probably those who are moving from those two extremes towards each other on the spectrum because they've recognised their deficiencies.

They recognise Jesus' personal sacrifice in coming across the universe to meet them, in coming to us in particularly in love and forgiveness and want to change by his enabling grace.

And so the first of the second pair of people is moving from self-sufficiency and says, I don't naturally look for close relationships where I can be loved and actually love others, but I want to grow in this area with you.

Will you help me in that? The other person in this pair is moving from self-preoccupation and self-pity and says, I know that others need true friends just like I do.

[5 : 41] And I would like to try to be one to someone else without thinking about myself and my needs first. And so in wrestling with all this complexity, I decided that the best thing I could do for us this morning is just give you a whack of the New Testament.

And what it says about our life together. I think this is the best thing I can do. So let's start with Jesus and his relationships before we get to the church that he founded.

And I think this is essential because I think it's easy for us to project our relational expectations on a church relationships, as I mentioned just a moment ago, and expectations which are neither biblical nor practical.

For instance, there's unwritten core value that we must know everyone in the church for it to be a genuine church. And another unwritten core value is that we all must have a personal relationship with the pastor or with the leadership of the church.

That's another unwritten core value, which is both unbiblical and unreasonable in its expectation. Jesus modeled something for us in terms of relationships.

[6 : 58] From all the hundreds of followers, he chose 72 for a special ministry in Luke chapter 10. And the reality is, you can't know 70 people particularly closely.

And so he also chose 12, out of those 72, for a closer partnership in life and ministry. Mark chapter 3, verse 14, he says, But even 12 sometimes is too many to hang around with.

Especially if your lounge room is not big enough. And so Jesus had a closer bond with three, Peter, James and John. And on a number of occasions, it was just those three that were with Jesus.

Often are the most significant times of his life. And even three sometimes is kind of too much to handle. And Jesus seemed to have a unique bond with just one, John.

Five times in his gospel, John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. And so Jesus had his great crowds. He had his 72, he had his 12, he had his three, and he had his one.

[8 : 16] And as he put his mission and his church in motion, he not only modeled these levels of relationship, he sent his ambassadors out in teams as well. Life and ministry with Jesus was life and ministry together.

It was no individual operating. And the Apostle Paul followed the same pattern. Christian ministry, it appears, is ministry together. I don't think it's an accident that at every church that Paul planted, he appointed not one elder pastor, but more than one.

And when Paul and Barnabas had a bit of a blue about John Mark, because he abandoned them on the first mission, these two giants of the faith didn't head off in isolation by themselves and do their own thing.

They formed new teams and got the blessing of the church with those new teams. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and departed himself on a new missionary journey.

And when he met Timothy in Acts chapter 16, he asked him to travel with him as a ministry co-worker. And over the next years, six of the 13 letters that Paul wrote, he addressed to the churches as coming from both him and Timothy.

[9 : 36] Even though Paul himself was the one who penned the letters, he wanted to send it from the team. Now, of course, the pattern of life together is not just a matter of ministry strategy and partnership.

You notice in the New Testament, there is a predominance of togetherness language. Listen to how many writers describe what life together as Christians should actually look like.

This is the sort of church life that we ought to fight hard to shape here at St. Paul's. John 13, Jesus started with these words, a new commandment I give you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Now, of course, the Apostle Paul picks up this theme and states the commandment to love each other in dozens of ways. Quite literally, Romans 12, verse 5, In Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

[10 : 49] Romans 12, verse 10, Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Romans 12, verse 10 again, Honour one another above yourselves. Romans 14, verse 19, Make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 15, verse 14, Instruct one another. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 25, There should be no division in the body, but that its part should have equal concern for each other.

Galatians 5, verse 13, Serve one another in love. Galatians 6, 2, Carry each other's burdens.

Ephesians 4, 2, Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4, 32, Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.

Ephesians 5, 21, Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 2, 3, In humility, consider others better than yourselves. Colossians 3, 9, Do not lie to each other.

1 Thessalonians 4, 18, Encourage one another. 1 Thessalonians 5, 15, Always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. And then the book of Hebrews joins in the chorus.

[11 : 54] Let us consider how we may spur each other on towards love and good deeds. In chapter 10, verse 24. Then James pipes in, in chapter 4, verse 11, Do not slander one another.

And then in chapter 5, verse 9, Don't grumble against each other. And then in chapter 5, verse 16, Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. Then Peter joins in.

1 Peter 4, verse 9, Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Chapter 5, verse 5, Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. And I have to cut the rest out.

The predominance of other person-centered togetherness language is the church. What is obvious in all this is the predominance of loving, Christ-exalting personal relationships.

There is no such thing as isolated, individualistic, meet-my-needs consumer Christianity in the Bible. No such thing. You cannot fulfill the command to love and serve and give by yourself.

[13 : 08] Normal, essential Christianity is loving, Christ-exalting personal relationships. But notice, as we turn to 1 John, how profoundly God-centered those loving, Christ-exalting personal relationships are.

John explains on numerous occasions what our horizontal relationships of love have to do with God. He says this in 1 John 3, verse 10, This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother. In other words, loving each other is the living evidence that we are born of God.

That we are the church. That we are his children. That we share in his nature. 1 John 4, verses 7 and 8.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

[14 : 20] Love is the living confirmation that we are being born of God and that we know God. That's the rule.

That's the test. 1 John 4, verse 12. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Loving each other is the outworking of God's love within us. It's the work of his saving presence, which is made visible in us.

1 John 4, 16. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. Loving each other is the fruit of living in God and God living in us.

In other words, our life together in relationships of love in this church is massively important because it has totally to do with God.

[15 : 20] It is totally to do with God. He is the source of it, the definition of it, and the goal of it. And let it not be said, because I don't think John left it unsaid, this love is the love of the cross.

It's the love God showed in Christ Jesus when he died for our sins and the love that we have can only have because of what he's done for us.

1 John 3, verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

There's the definition of love. And so this core value of treasuring Jesus together, living in unity with one another, accepting and loving each other, is valuable finally and ultimately because it makes God look great.

It displays to this loveless world the greatness and the glory and the value of Jesus Christ and his love towards us.

[16 : 28] Jesus Christ came across the universe to meet our needs.

And if we cannot cross the floor to meet the needs of someone else, the problem is we don't know this Jesus well enough. In the final instance, our relationship with each other matters because the glory of God matters supremely.

Our aim in every relationship is ultimately to awaken the strength, to awaken and to strengthen and to deepen a joyful, fruitful passion for God through Jesus Christ.

Isn't it just like God that he would design the church so that we get the joy of loving and being loved and he gets the glory as the goal of it all?

What a design. And so I want to encourage you for your own soul and for his glory that this core value calls us to move from the extremes of self-sufficiency and self-sufficiency and, sorry, self-pity and to see Christ-exalting joy of treasuring Jesus together as a church.

[17 : 46] We need each other and our world needs us to need each other. Under God, may this value of treasuring Jesus together be written on our hearts in such a way that we pursue it with all of our actions and all of our behaviours and all of our attitudes together.

May St. Paul's be known for the quality of its Christ-exalting relationships, even more than its buildings, as our core values increasingly become our heart.

Amen.