

Being a Multiethnic Church

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Gary. If you'd like to keep your Bibles open, that'd be great. If you've just joined us, we are in our annual vision series.

We've been dealing with big topics of things like racism, ethnocentricity, unity, diversity, what does it all look like in terms of working out in a local church. Our vision, hopefully you have heard it many times in the past, hear it again, is to treasure Jesus together that is make Jesus supreme together for God's glory and the joy of all people.

Now, I'm convinced that we pursue that vision as a church in a neighbourhood that we're in, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood, by building a multi-ethnic church of people whose hearts are transformed towards one another by Jesus Christ.

Now, in this series, I've been making the point really clear again and again and again. This is not about fixing the politics of our world. It's not about a political statements of where we sit with racism. This is a series that's about hearts. It's about your heart. It's about my heart. That's what it's about. And together, I want to talk about those transformed hearts coming together as a local church in relational generosity.

[1 : 29] That's fundamentally the transformation of God's grace to us is that his radical generosity to us makes us radically generous people, not just with finances, but relationally generous.

Being a multi-ethnic church is fundamentally about our relational commitment to each other and not, first and foremost, about structures and how we do things.

It's not first and foremost about language and structures and leadership. It's about relational commitment. And I want to pick that issue up today from Luke 17 and a few other verses.

So three points today. If you've got the St. Paul's app, it'd be great to open it up or just get a pen and pencil, you know, piece of paper, whatever. Three points. Being a multi-ethnic church requires us to be a community of forgiveness, a community of reconciliation, and a community of love.

That's the three points. And I want to focus on the first point the most. So when I get to the end of the first point, you go, my goodness, he just got through one. That will be the most point.

[2 : 40] Then I'm going to quickly move through the other two. Okay, a community, a forgiving community. First of all, we notice from Luke 17 that forgiveness is hard.

Every single one of us had people out there who owe us. People who, in our mind, owe us. Might not have never met them personally, but we think that they owe us because of how they've treated us, even if that treatment of us has not been a direct treatment of us.

We just assume that they've treated us badly. And we tend to hold it over them in some way, even if it's a secrecy of our own hearts. We might be more demanding of them if we know them personally, or we might just keep bottled it up inside and don't speak of it.

Generosity means that you release those things. We let it go. We forgive. Does that sound hard? Well, in Luke 17, it appears the disciples thought forgiveness was hard too.

When Jesus starts talking about forgiveness, the first response of the disciples is an emphatic, in the Greek language, increase our faith.

[3 : 57] Increase our faith. It's another way of saying, Jesus, how on earth is that even possible? How is it even possible for us to forgive like this?

Verse 4 is the enormity of the challenge that Jesus puts before the disciples. He says that if your brother sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times he comes to you repentant, you must forgive.

Now, the number 7 was symbolic for Jewish people. It's a number that means completeness, fullness, perfection, beyond which nothing more is possible.

What Jesus is saying here is worse than you think. Someone put it like this. If a person would wrong you as completely and as fully as any person could ever possibly wrong another human being, you must forgive them.

Just let that sit with you for a moment. That's his command on his disciples. Imagine the worst thing that anybody could possibly do to you, something so bad that nothing beyond it is even possible.

[5 : 24] Jesus says to his disciples, you must forgive them. That's why the disciples say, increase our faith. He's saying, that's impossible, Jesus.

That's impossible. It's an enormous challenge. But we cannot shrink back from it. There's a little phrase here that is easy to ignore.

And it's actually connected to what follows, not to what the two previous verses is. In verse 3, it's connected to what follows. We connected to normally what is previously, but actually connected to what follows.

Jesus starts this section with, watch yourself. Watch yourself. Then he talks about forgiveness. We are called to watch ourselves when others sin against us.

When someone wrongs us, we normally pay a great deal attention to them. Think about how much they have wronged us and how much they have hurt us.

[6 : 39] Jesus says you are to pay attention to yourself, your own heart. This is so crucial for us.

As a multi-ethnic church of diverse people, it is so easy to inadvertently say the wrong thing, to be culturally offensive and not even to be aware of it, to forget someone's name and for deep hurt to be settled in because of someone, I've used the wrong name.

It's so easy to hurt. It's so easy just to pack it all in the heart. And Jesus says, watch yourself. Watch yourself.

Why? I'll illustrate it, then I'll unpack it. The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was married to his wife Sonia for 48 years. On the eve of their wedding, he gave his 18-year-old fiancé his diaries to read. They included the details of his many sexual experiences, including with a servant who worked for him in that moment and who bore him a child.

[7 : 56] The child who his fiancé was not aware of was, in fact, Leo's child. When she was in her early 70s, she was writing, this is right at the end of her life, she was writing in her own journal very, very bitterly about what she had read over 50 years earlier.

One historian wrote this about that journal entry. For half a century, jealousy and unforgiveness blinded her and in the process destroyed all love for her husband and other people.

In other words, she reads of his sin and she's destroyed by it.

She's the one who's ruined. Hebrews 12, 15, See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Watch yourself. Because anger, when someone wrongs us, will always tell us it's not actually anger.

[9 : 20] Anger will tell you that I'm not angry, I am justified, I am truth, I am righteous. But if we keep a hold of that anger, it will defile us.

Now there are four words in the English language that all come from the same core root word. They are wrath, which means rage, anger, fury.

Reef, which means to twist together flowers, branches, vines. Writhe, is to be bent out of shape and contorted. And wraith, which is a ghost-like figure, image of someone just before or after their death.

They're all connected, the same root word. And when we stay angry with people and we hold a grudge, we stay resentful, we become distorted, twisted by anger.

They may well move on. We don't. We become a person who's afraid of trusting another human being.

[10 : 39] Can you see how that destroys relationships? We become joyless. We become suspicious of people. We demonize others.

We become a hard person. If someone wronged you, and if this is the case for you right now, put your heart on high alert. The wrong that's being done to you is probably the least of your problems. So, forgiveness is hard. So what does the practice of forgiveness look like?

There are at least three things that we must do if we're to avoid becoming twisted and destroyed by bitterness. The first thing is that we must refuse to caricature the other person, the person who's wronged us.

Jesus is making an important point here when he says, if your brother sins. He's talking about, in this moment, Christians wronging Christians.

[11 : 46] And he's reminding us that we all have a common family. When our temptation is to highlight the differences, don't forget to emphasize the unity in whose you are.

But in Mark 11, 25, Jesus says that we are to forgive anyone who wrongs us. Not just brothers, anyone.

And the principle is the same. We must stress that we have a common unity with whoever they are. We share a common humanity in the image of God.

Every human being is a complex person made in God's image with great dignity and worth. We also share a common sinfulness with all people.

It is impossible to stay angry with someone else unless you feel superior to them. Get that?

[12 : 50] Let me just let that sink into you a little bit more. It is impossible to stay angry with someone unless you feel superior to them. We must identify with the enemy.

We must bring ourselves down in humility and them up in image of God. the second thing we need to do is to inwardly surrender the right to repayment and to pay the debt ourselves.

The word for forgive that Jesus uses in this passage is a very specific word that means to release a person from a financial debt and it means to absorb the debt yourself.

How do we forgive? We can only forgive if we inwardly inwardly we forgo seeking repayment.

Normally if someone makes us happy we in turn seek to make them unhappy. If someone rejects us we in turn seek to reject them.

[14 : 09] If someone destroys our reputation we destroy their reputation. We might do it directly and tell them off and make them feel bad or we might do it behind their backs and gossip about them and ruin their reputation.

The less obvious way though is to inwardly nurture the hurt. Inwardly nurture it. We keep playing it over and over and over again in our minds so that we can stay angry with them.

And we take any little bit of feed that we can get to feed it into that anger so the anger just stays really healthy. Whichever way we do it we feel like we are getting repayment.

forgiveness but it is instead robbing our life of joy and peace and contentment.

We become harder and bitter and twisted and closed off from others. Forgiveness disciples were right here increase our faith.

[15 : 31] Forgiveness might hurt in the short term because we refuse to repay and instead absorb the debt but it leads to joy and peace and freedom for eternity.

The third thing we must do is in verse 3 if your brother or sister sins against you rebuke them. That is what it's saying here is it's not loving to let someone go on doing anything that they want but be really careful with this verse.

really careful. The purpose of the rebuke here is not to put the other person down. The purpose of the rebuke is in fact to lift them up.

It's not to win an argument it is to win them over in relationship. The goal of the rebuke here is restored relationship not a further breaking of the relationship.

the truth must be spoken in love for the other person. We need to inwardly forgive then rebuke in order to reconcile. In other words we must seek the good and we must will the good of the person we perceive to have wronged us and I emphasize the word perceived to have wronged us.

[16 : 57] we need to will the good of the other and if you're a Christian if you are not spending extensive time praying about the individual and their goodwill before you seek to rebuke them don't assume even for a moment that you're doing it with good intentions.

what that ultimately means is we chuck out the old statement I forgive them but I just don't want to see them or having to do with them.

That statement is not biblical in any way. To say that means that you might not in fact be seeking vengeance on them but you are not seeking their good either.

So watch yourself. So lastly on this point unlocking forgiveness. So by now you might be echoing in the bottom of your heart increase my faith.

I hope you are. It's a core element of our community here. Fortunately Jesus has given us a good answer to what follows in verse five.

[18 : 25] In these verses we have a parable and a metaphor. The parable starts at verse seven.

Suppose you were the Lord, the master, the owner of a property and you had some people plowing

the paddocks and looking after your livestock for you.

At the end of the day would you say it's time to finish up, come on in for dinner. would you say thank you so much for the way that you've taken care of my sheep today and my goats and my chickens. Now to the apostles hearing this from Jesus in the first century the apostles answer to that would be no no no you wouldn't say that at all to your servants that's ridiculous us modern people hear it very differently we would say of course we want to do that we love to be affirmed we need to be affirmed in fact if no one affirms me I'm not going to turn up to work tomorrow we know it's part of running business well we need to affirm people and love them and care for them and we need to say well done well done well done we need to understand this parable in the first century these servants are not slaves traded in the marketplace who have no rights on the other hand they're not employees of your business these were people who fell into debt because of bankruptcy and instead of being put into prison to rot they are working for the person who they owe the money to in order to work off the debt and that in first century

Judaism meant for up to seven years you could hold these people for seven years and so the servant in this scenario is never off duty until that debt is paid the master of the house wouldn't thank you for helping so much you're doing your job you're doing your duty you're paying off a debt and so Jesus got the apostles here to imagine themselves as the masters and helped them to see that it would be inappropriate for a servant to demand thanks from the master and especially a master who is so gracious enough to not in fact throw you into prison in the first place but to allow you the opportunity to work off your debt that is this master is already a gracious master and a good master you're doing your duty you've got a debt and you're paying your debt and then in verse 10 Jesus flips the metaphor so you also when you have done everything you were told to do should say we are unworthy servants we have only done our duty when you have done everything you are told to do including forgiveness you should simply say I am just doing my duty Jesus is saying here when you refuse to forgive you're forgetting who you are you are forgetting that you owe God everything he sustains us every minute of the day and if you're a Christian you're also forgetting that this is a God who has redeemed you when we say

[22 : 22] I'm not going to forgive that person we are in fact in that moment putting ourselves in the judge's seat we are playing God Jesus also uses a metaphor to help us to see how we can live the forgiving life verse 6 if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say that this mulberry tree be uprooted and planted in the sea and it will obey you in other words what Jesus is saying if you got the smallest faith in Jesus Christ the smallest understanding of who he is even the slightest understanding that you're a sinner saved by grace if we understand the good news of the gospel at all you have everything you need to forgive the only way of getting out of the behavior and the attitude of being a servant acting like a king over other servants is to marvel at the king who became a servant we will never be long suffering and forgiving until we marvel at his suffering on the cross for our forgiveness we will we will never be able to forgive other people's tiny debts against us until we marvel at

Jesus dying on the cross to pay our incalculable debt Jesus is the judge of the universe who left the judge's seat and got judged for our sin to understand the Christian gospel at all the good news at all even a tiny bit is enough to bring transformation in your life even a mustard seed portion of the gospel of grace can turn us into a person who forgives radically and lives generously across all lines of division in our society and the church well that's my first point we're a forgiving community secondly being a multi building a multi church like this will mean we're a community repenting as well we're a repenting community of racism and ethnocentricity repentance is a personal and a relational term it signifies going back on what we have done before and renouncing the misbehavior and the attitudes that have caused harm to ourselves and to others in the bible repentance is a theological term pointing to an abandonment of a course of action or course of actions of which God has been wronged himself our action against God which has been wronged by embracing what he dislikes and forbids the Old Testament Hebrew word for repentance means to turn or to return it means to return to God the New Testament Greek word means to change one mind it's 180 degrees same sort of concept heading in this direction in life and all of a sudden I go that direction in life towards God it means going back to God repentance means to alter our habits our behavior attitudes our outlook our policy our direction and our behavior repentance is about spiritual revolution so what does it mean to repent of racism and ethnocentricity repenting first and foremost is to God to God all sin is ultimately sin against him against his will and his good creation it's crucial

that we repent for the more deliberate ways that we have violated the image of God neighborhood love love of our neighbors and the new creation and the gospel of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ now keep in mind that we are all called not only to repent of deliberate and known sin but also for the sins that we are unaware of such as Job repenting on behalf of his children just in case they sinned Psalm 19 verse 12 but who can discern their own errors forgive my hidden faults that's a prayer of repentance from Psalm 19 please forgive me for the things that I don't even know that I've done so the Christian should be willing to repent for the ways in which we may be committing the sin of racism and ethnocentricity of which we are barely even conscience of I'm of the view that corporate repentance at least comes to grips with the way that our society has treated various groups of people in the past I'm of that view the Bible always says that we have not repented if we have not changed and we have not produced fruit in keeping with repentance that's Matthew 3:8 and this fruit of repentance will take various forms depending on who's doing the repenting now I think there are two ways that a church like this can produce such fruit of repentance the first way we bear the fruit of repentance is for members of this church to make sacrifices of power and comfort so that we continue to grow into a church that shows how in [29:02] Jesus Christ the racial and cultural barriers that divide this world outside the church do not divide it inside the church because of the power of the gospel that's one way we bear the fruit of repentance that in itself should tell us that fruit of repentance is hard it is filled with difficulties and it causes a whole lot of people to walk away from a multi ethnic church because they do not want to surrender power and comfort that's not a reflection just on this church anywhere in the world where a multi ethnic church is seen to be built power and comfort must be surrendered and those who have it do not want to surrender it it's a difficult journey fraught with danger the second way for Christians to bear the fruit of repentance is to work against racial injustice and inequality in society and the possibilities there for us are frankly just way too numerous to mention in a sermon like this in the society in which we live but I'll pick on one very briefly I would be very keen for us to be supporting justice and mercy ministry amongst the aboriginal people of our country finally a loving community that's what it takes to build a multinational church is a commitment to love now recently I preached on the parable of the good samaritan and the call to love your neighbor so I'm not going to re-preach that but there was one point I left which I'll pick up now it's just a very brief point the teacher of the law posed the question to Jesus who is my neighbor you'll be familiar with that hopefully and we are told in that passage he wanted to justify himself he wanted in other words to put limits on what it means to love and who I need to love now we need to be careful that we don't do the same thing we can put limits on love and justify ourselves by turning the command to actively love people into a passive thing I don't do bad things to people the command to love gets turned into a passive I don't do bad things to people in other words in your mind you can actually fulfill the love the command to love people in your mind if you're turning into a passive by simply withdrawing from people I have nothing to do with people if I have nothing to do with people I don't do anything bad to them and therefore I must be loving them that is self deception that is putting your place in the position of the lawyer here saying what limits can I put on love love you cannot love people without engaging actively with them a Christian community is an actively loving community now because it's our vision series I'm going to mention four ways to build a loving multi ethnic church here and I'll do it really quickly because it's the heartbeat of us as a church they are very quickly time talents treasures and testimony so very quickly first time easiest way to build a multi ethnic church is with your time don't underestimate the role you play simply by turning up and that's why I think online church is brilliant for those who are not able to get here but it's not the answer I invite you to come come come and join in with the people it's not about the Christian church is not about Christian education it's about building a community so I invite you to come build relationship with people and especially with someone who is different from you take the time to talk to encourage to listen to pray with as you speak the truth in love to them you are ministering to them to our life together together it takes secondly talents ministry doesn't stop with conversation God has equipped every single one of us if you are his by his holy spirit with special gifts in order to build up the church that's those that's what they're there for to build up the church to serve others if you are not using those gifts to serve others in the church you are not actively loving them thirdly we build a multi ethnic church community by sharing our treasure right now I'm asking you to give give give towards raising \$70,000 to serving the next generation and to regularly give in our ministry

operations here now if you are new here you might be unfamiliar with the way the Anglican church works basically the way the Anglican church works is we do not have a pool of funds sitting outside of St.

[35 : 16] Paul's where the staff and everything gets paid from centrally there's not an Anglican center link it does not exist for us if anything we send money their direction it doesn't come our direction so what that means is we fund all the ministry of this church from this church no less than five times in the New Testament the language of supporting a missionary or supporting a church financially is described as ministry as service this is a key loving service that all of God's people are involved in regardless of your gifting it is to use our treasure gifted from God for his glory to serve the world like our talents there is something that we do in differing degrees we give according to what we have not according to what we don't have the principle I like to use consistently here at St.

Paul's is equal giving but equal sacrifice it is love towards others it's service lastly we build a multi ethnic community here by sharing our testimony every single Christian has got a story of how God drew them to himself how his love poured into their hearts and changed them and can I just be clear here often those stories are not dramatic you know they're not dramatic stories necessarily it is God's unique word in your work in your life however it's your testimony so pray that God will give you the opportunity to share that testimony with others so that they too might have a testimony of God's unique work in their life

God's ongoing work in life and our growth in faith in him nothing fills my heart more than to hear those stories and so friends in the next week you're going to receive a card this is your commitment to a life of forgiveness and repentance and love by building up a multi church church here St Paul's Chatswood I'm calling you to buy into our vision to commit to give of your treasures to pray that you might share your testimony with that one person that you might explore the scriptures grow in faith and testify to God's ongoing work in your life to your church family here and to serve love one another by giving of your time your talents to the building of the community of love here at St Paul's human he who