

Life Group Notes

Sunday 23 September 2018

Speaker: Josh Betts

Series: Purpose, Culture, Vision

Title: Real & Accepting

Passage: Mark 10:13-16

In this short passage from Mark's Gospel, we find a scene that can challenge and teach us about what it means to be a Real & Accepting church family. The disciples hold back children from being blessed by Jesus – we can observe or envisage any reason why they did this: that this was not the correct cultural protocol for approaching a religious teacher; that the disciples had too high a sense of self-importance as Jesus's followers and set themselves up as 'brokers', 'go-betweens' to Jesus; that they expected (or preferred) a certain type of person, and these children did not fit the bill or have the necessary status; that they wanted to see a big miracle story – and these children couldn't produce that opportunity; or that they were bitter at those who could approach Jesus with greater ease or cost than they had themselves.

Jesus strongly rebuked the disciples for this – he takes the children in his arms and blesses them, saying that all must become like a child to enter the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom, announced by Jesus, is an 'upside-down' Kingdom. It may seem unfair on the disciples to criticise them for their behaviour, but what this story shows us is that sometimes our normal, culturally appropriate behaviour conflicts with the Jesus-centred behaviour that is now expected of us in the Kingdom of God what we have been welcomed into, and that we need to be continually awoken to the ways in which we are not like Jesus – and allow the Holy Spirit to 'conform us to his image' (Romans 8:29).

Jesus however, came to put things right between God and us, and between each other. He was fully accepted by the Father (Luke 3:22), but traded that acceptance for rejection on the cross and taking on a false identity as a sinner – we too rejected him (Isa 53:3). But, when we believe in the name of Jesus, we are given the right to become children of God! (John 1:11-12). But with this acceptance comes a commission – accept others as we have been accepted (Romans 15:7). Not only that, but God knows all our dark actions, and the darkness we have suffered from – but washes us clean so that we can be welcomed in (1 Cor 6:9-11). This means we be Real by:

- Getting accountable to a trustworthy person within church, bringing darkness into the light and receiving guidance and forgiveness (1 John 1:7,9) – remember the parking permit story;
- Taking opportunities for sharing Jesus by being counter-culturally open & real with people outside of church who are lonely and needing someone to talk to;

And be Accepting by:

- Welcoming people at on Sunday's if we do not recognise them or remember their name;
- Making space for people you would not normally spend time with – practice really helps become comfortable making conversations with people to help them feel accepted and loved;

Jesus is working to make us like him – to teach us how to live a Kingdom lifestyle rather than a worldly lifestyle. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to help us see ways that our 'old' ways of living, that seem so normal and appropriate to our context, undermine our commission to be Real and Accepting, whether on Sundays or the rest of the week.

Suggested Questions:

1. *Reflect on the reasons the disciples may have had to withhold or compromise access to Jesus – do you identify with any of them in your own life?*
2. *Can you think of ways that God's 'upside-down' Kingdom is different to the kingdom of the world – why is it hard for us to change (or is it)?*
3. *What did you hear in the passage or message that encourages you to be Real, and what steps are you going to take?*
4. *What did you hear in the passage or message that encourages you to be Accepting, and what steps are you going to take?*