

Undivided: Body of Christ

Cultural Awareness Sunday

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Text: Mark 3:20-29

Scripture:

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family[b] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." 22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." 23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. 28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

Introduction:

Darks and Lights while doing laundry.

A dinner plate so your peas aren't touching your mashed potatoes.

Cubs and Cardinals fans at a home game. (Think of any two rival teams)

The edge and the inside pieces of a puzzle.

Some things are meant to be separated, but people? People were never intended to be separated or divided. Yet, it seems like everywhere we go, we are hearing a new story, watching another video, seeing a horrific incident, and feeling the impact of division within our homes, neighborhoods, country, world-and yes, even within the Church. It's devastating, heartbreaking, and frustrating all in one. If we, God's people, weren't intended to be separated or divided, then why are we?

Division comes from ignorance.

Division comes from misconception.

Division comes from hate.

Division comes from the inability to embrace beauty in our differences.

Division comes when people are misunderstood.

Jesus experienced division during his life here on earth, and he certainly was misunderstood. In the gospel of Mark, the author shares an account of when Jesus was misunderstood by his family, friends and the teachers of the law.

The teachers of religious law from Jerusalem attributed Jesus' apparent madness to his being possessed by Satan. Jesus' opponents within this account, credited his miracle-working ability to Satan or as sorcery. Jesus acknowledges the issue at hand and speaks up towards the accusations made against him by providing a better explanation of his ability to cast out demons. Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior, Son of God was introducing God's Kingdom and rescuing his people from the evil one.

The concept of division is not a new thing; it has resonated since the very beginning. Division has been a part of humanity since the fall. Division was created between man and the rest of creation. Division caused the first murder in scripture between Cain & Abel. The Israelites enslavement was an outcome of division and the separation of Jews & Gentiles until Christ's resurrection. There's plenty more examples to share of division in scripture, too. Although division has been a part of humanity, basically, forever, it still does not make it acceptable. Remember, division was caused by disobedience; it is a result of the fall. Division is evil. It is against our initial and perfect state.

Division continues to occur when we choose to be blind towards injustice and mute in times where advocacy is needed.

Today, we are going to explore those concepts a bit more and how our relationship with Christ-- the Savior of the WHOLE world, the one who brings unity and peace--should be transforming our blindness and muteness.

Point 1: What divides the Body of Christ? What tears down a community? What separates us from one another?

I would argue that two things divide the body of Christ: blindness towards injustice and muteness when advocacy is needed.

a. Blindness towards injustice.

In our parable today, Jesus is at the house of a possessed boy, who is literally blind. I can't help but think of his blindness as spiritual imagery within this context of our "divided house." Division arises when we are blind to the injustice around us.

Illustration: When I was in school, it was so easy to walk through the hallways in between classes and ignore the world around me. I honestly thought I was better off. The less I knew what was going on within the lives of my peers, the safer I was going to

be. The less I knew about people, the less I felt I had to care. However, one day, when I opened my eyes, I was actually able to see the pressures, wrongdoings and injustices that were taking place within my own school. I was one of two girls that had lockers within our quad. I hardly ever stopped there because it was, of course, in the most inconvenient hallway. It was one of those weird hallways that was off the beaten course and wasn't anywhere near my classes. This particular day, I decided that I needed to grab my backpack from my locker, which had been just hanging in there for a while, I'm pretty sure I was grabbing it for a weekend trip. When I visited my locker, I noticed that the boys were bothering the one other girl within our quad of lockers. They were harassing her. At first, it started with catcalling, and then escalated to verbal comments, and then one of my locker buddies laid his hands on her. That was it! I couldn't pretend to be oblivious any longer. I couldn't just walk away, even though not addressing a hallway full of male upperclassmen would have been a much more comfortable situation. The incident was directly in my face, I couldn't be blind to it, which also caused me to speak up, to be an advocate.

In life, each of us would be able to identify injustice if our eyes were opened. Once our eyes were opened, we couldn't help but see. We couldn't help, but fight for good. We wouldn't be able to walk on by without speaking up. At least, that's the way it should be.

b. Muteness of our advocacy.

In our parable, the boy is not only blind, but he is also mute. Can you imagine living life as a young child who wasn't able to see or speak? We wouldn't be able to call our best friends and talk over the phone, sing, "Happy Birthday," or tell our spouse, "I love you," not verbally. It's important to us to be able to communicate verbally to our family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Being able to speak is such a vital asset to our livelihood. Yet, when it comes to speaking towards someone else's livelihood, we often times don't use the voices with which we are gifted.

What would have happened to the other girl in my locker quad if I simply shrugged my shoulders and walked away? Who knows what they would have done! In that moment, although I was nervous and intimidated, I knew the right thing was to speak up, to be her voice. To not be mute any longer.

When we choose to be mute on behalf of others, it brings division. When people don't speak up, especially the Church, for the oppressed and marginalized, the more difficult it becomes for the oppressed and marginalized.

The good news is there's hope! Jesus not only can heal us of our blindness, but he can also heal us of our muteness.

Point 2: What encourages unity? What brings us together? What builds a community?

- a. Jesus healing our blindness towards injustice.

It's much easier to remain in what is comfortable, but sometimes what is comfortable is the absolute opposite of what God desires from us. Our faith requires us to be no longer blind to the injustice around us. This requires us to engage in a similar healing. The boy who was physically blind needed the intervention of the Savior to give him his sight. We also need to be touched by the Savior to heal our blindness to the injustice around us. We need Jesus to touch us and see the human trafficking happening in our cities, to see the drug abuse, to see the abused and neglected children, to see those being forced to live in sub-standard housing by slumlords, who willfully take advantage of marginalized people. We need to open our eyes to prejudices, racism, and hate that is taking place within us and around us. We can only begin to see the world around us when Jesus heals us of our blindness. Many of us walk through life totally blind to those around us and Jesus is calling us to be people with 20/20 vision, perfect sight to the injustice within our world.

- b. Jesus giving us a voice of advocacy.

Once I opened my eyes to the injustices throughout the hallowed halls of my school, I was conflicted with this tension of: "Okay, I can't believe this is happening," vs. "Okay, this can't be happening and I need to do something about it." When I was no longer blind to injustice, I had a choice. Do I allow myself to fall mute and aid in oppression for the sake of my comfort, or do I speak-up and advocate for those in this difficult situation? When Jesus gives us eyes to see the world around us, he then calls us to use our voice and lives to advocate for those trapped in injustice.

The best thing about allowing Jesus to heal us of our blindness and muteness is that it doesn't only benefit us, but when we experience healing and reconciliation with our Savior, it also impacts the relationships we have with others. Our relationship with Christ, can and will bring peace, unity and reconciliation in all areas of our lives if we allow him to heal.

Point 3: Unity brings Peace.

The Church will remain divided if its people do not seek healing, speak-up, and fight for peace.

Jesus is the greatest example of peace. Within our scripture today, even when He was falsely accused and rejected by the people he loved the most, he remained

peaceful. He defended who He was and what He was doing, yes. He acknowledged the misconception; he saw where the false teachers were coming from, although, he didn't agree. He still listened, and then He spoke up! He advocated for justice and understanding.

As hate, misconception and ignorance produce division, a church who does not fight for peace, brings conflict. This is one practical way that we can move towards unity. Seeking peace puts our faith into practice. It causes the church to stand, to remain as one. One that is diverse, beautiful and unified.

“The Salvation Army believes it is God’s intention for all people in all their relationships to experience peace that is just, sustainable and leads to fullness of life. The causes of violent conflict are always complex and multifaceted. The Salvation Army disagrees with those who argue that violence is inherent to religious belief. Jesus proclaimed a gospel of peace. Despite knowing that there would perpetually be troubles in this world, Jesus declared that human peacemaking in a troubled world is blessed by God.

Violence remains prevalent in the world at interpersonal, organizational, communal, national and international levels. Violence is frequently associated with religion, but The Salvation Army disagrees with those who argue that violence is inherent to religious belief, and recognizes instead that the causes of violent conflict are always complex and multifaceted. Peace is often threatened when those who do not hold power are unheard and disrespected; when they are ignored in the determination of the common good; when they are denied justice, and do not receive apologies for wrongs suffered.” (sections from The Salvation Army, Positional Statement: Peacemaking)

Challenge & Final Remarks:

Are we a healed people? Are we seeking healing from our blindness and muteness? Are we people who see injustice, speak-up in advocacy, and fight for peace? Are we the Church that God desires us to be? Are we working towards division or are we working towards unity?

What are some things you need to surrender to your Savior, your Healer, in order to play a transformational role within your community, country and world? Do you act, think or speak unjustly towards a certain people group or individual? How are you working towards unity?

Division comes from ignorance.

Division comes from misconception.

Division comes from hate.

Division comes from the inability to embrace beauty in our differences.

Division comes when people are misunderstood.

Unity is formed through knowledge.

Unity is formed through clarity.

Unity is formed through love.

Unity is formed through the ability to embrace beauty in our differences.

Unity is formed when people are heard and understood.

Unity is God's desire. It's His perfect design. Unity is found in Him, as we are all made in the image of God. Let's be the church that chooses to celebrate our differences, to accept one another in love, who seeks Jesus, whose eyes are open to injustice and our mouths are vessels of hope and advocacy. Let's be the church - undivided.

As we rid the old, and put on the new, as we allow Jesus, to heal and transform, let these words written to the Church of Colossae be your encouragement today,

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14.

Time of Response/Commitment