

Bringing our grief into conversation with Jesus

Series: Keeping Hearts Alive For The Long Run

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Mental health, Grief

John 11:1-35

So let us wrap up the conversations we have been having and start a new one. We have had weeks of journeying through different things that have become our reality this year; mentally, emotionally and even spiritually reality.

My call has been to bring those realities into conversation with Jesus because our hearts are as alive as the extent to which we are having conversations about our reality with Jesus.

Now all those feelings and realities we talked about, were brought about by all the change we have been in this year. Anxiety, anger and irritability, loneliness, the feeling to hide behind masks, grief, all these are because we have gone through so much change in such a little time.

The thing is, most people do not like change. It's uncertain, it's uncomfortable. Yet change is constant. You can depend on things to change.

The universe is expanding, that's change. O heck even information on COVID 19 that should mostly be scientific keeps changing every day.

Our country is in conversations about political changes. The US for some of our friends who are watching from there are in an election year, things are changing. Whether Trump loses or wins, things will be very different.

Around the church world, there is change happening. With the important conversations on race happening around the world the church has had to face these questions too. The questions of Jesus' race and how that matters. Some of you have probably seen an artistic impression by a Dutch artist of how Jesus might have actually looked like as opposed to the often white depiction from most of the famous moves. That is causing change within theological circles.

Well, even the question of what role church should play in politics and issues of civil rights and social justice.

We are living through a moment of so much change. And change makes us anxious. Yet change is not necessarily a bad thing. Change can mean that something is decaying,

dissociating, or just becoming worse. And the change could also mean something is growing, its maturing, it is becoming better.

Change is not always bad. But it could grow in us a lot of the things we talked about the last five weeks. Anxiety, anger, loneliness, wanting to cover up and hide and grief over what has changed.

The thing is, we are wired to look for stability. The best place to see a picture of this is when people are getting into relationships. Often people talk about wanting a stable relationship. Looking for someone who is financially stable.

Or this, we describe our family experiences as either stable or unstable. Everything we could describe our families as usually summarised as stable or unstable, with the preferred being stable. When people look for jobs, they are often looking for some financial stability.

What we are inadvertently saying is, everything around us keeps changing and we long for something reliable and constant to plant ourselves in. Unfortunately, the one thing we constantly keep getting wrong is that the things we often end up planting our souls in are often the changing things.

We bank our future, our meaning, our identity and our souls on financial status, science, theology, relationships to give us a sense of control. Yet the one thing they never fail at is changing. And you know what that means? That we will constantly be disappointed and heart broken when they do change yet we had sunk our souls into them. And whether they are changing for the better or worse, change makes people anxious.

So if wired to, where can we?

So, if we are wired to plant our souls in the unchanging, what things can we bet on? What can we actually plant ourselves in? And today as we wind up one conversation and start a new one, I wanna invite us to plant ourselves in God, the one who is unchanging.

Here is what the Bible says about God

Psalms 103:17

But the unfailing love of the Eternal is always and eternal for those who reverently run after Him. He extends His justice on and on to future generations,

The nature of God is as God himself, always and eternal. Not changing even once.

Psalms 90:2

Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God.

That even as landforms themselves change; rivers form and rivers dry, oceans rise and fall and freeze and thaw, God remains the same.

And if you are here or watching and you are an agnostic, or even for atheists, the thing is for you I think ion there is a God, he has to have existed before time itself and has to be unchanged by all of it.

Isaiah 40:8

***The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever.”***

This one kinda says, ‘hey we have observed that even the most beautiful things in life change but God does not.’

This is my personal favourite.

Malachi 3:6

***“I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are
not already destroyed.***

Here is what I get, we live in a changing world that could send us spinning with whiplash and all and leave us even destroyed but because God is unchanging, we can be sustained through change.

We are somehow wired to search for something unchanging. We have a yearning for the unchanging to ground us in an ever changing world. Read in that we are wired to search for God. We have a yearning to be grounded in the unchanging on.

A vineyard pastor called Adam says that what we mean by God does not change is that he does not mature, he does not dissipate, he does not decay, he does not resolve, he does not grow. In a growing and constantly changing world, God is constant and true. His nature, his essence, his charter is sure and true.

But then how can we know the character of God? The unchanging nature of God? Well, Jesus is the image of God. He came to show us who the father is. What we see in Jesus is who God is.

Here is how the writer of a letter in the Bible says it

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus the Anointed One is always the same: yesterday, today, and forever.

We can sink our roots in Jesus. The invitation to follow Jesus, is an invitation to satisfy the longing in us for something unchanging even as we face a life of constant change.

How do you plant your soul in the unchanging God? It has to be an intentional planting of ourselves in God. It won't just happen by accident. It is a question of how we spend our time and life and resources. It is a question of what forces we allow to shape us.

Plants don't just appear one day. They grow over time. You need a plan for following Jesus. We do not become like Jesus on accident. And for plants to grow there are two things, we have to get rid of the bad things that may try to choke it like weeds and pests and then we have to give it the right nutrients.

For us it means being aware of the forces around us that are trying to shape us and be intentional about them. In this world there are so many forces that are constantly trying to shape us. And it won't just happen that we will turn out great.

We have to weed out some of the things that could try choke us.

For example, we are the product of our time now and our past. How our parents raised us, wounds and joys from the past shape us even now. Our history as a nation and a people shape us as individuals. If we are not aware that we will not be able to decide how they shape us.

Some people walk unaware of how much the wounds of their childhood have shaped them and are shaping them today. And some of those need intentional uprooting if we are to follow Jesus.

The histories of our nation have shaped our stories and often there are some of it that needs uprooting inside us if we are to follow Jesus.

Our present times has forces trying to shape us. That was part of the journey we took the last few weeks. Being present to the realities that surround us this year. Being aware of them, naming them and bringing them into conversation with Jesus.

Unfortunately, nothing in our culture naturally invites us to life? Culture will always bait us to the edge then look down on us when we cross the line.

The culture of our day around sex, alcohol, divisive politics and tribalism, the culture around consumerism, they are all forming something in you. So if you are not intentional about what you spend your time on and around, you will over time realise how unlike Jesus you are. Because your life will have been planted in something else. But sadly, they are not only bad places to plant our lives in, but they also keep changing.

Yet just like with plants, even if you take out everything that can choke it but not provide the right nutrients then it does not grow at all. It too will die. Other than being aware of the

other forces not of God that are trying to shape us, we have to intentionally pursue Jesus, we have to intentionally pursue the good.

But then being aware of the negative forces and naming them and trying to not fall prey to them usually does not yield so many positive returns. It's like telling someone who is panicking not to panic and then they spend the rest of their time panicking about not being able to stop panicking. Our focus on trying to be right or good never quite yields the results we think they will.

Here is how Paul says it in his letter to the church in Philippi

So keep your thoughts continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. And fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God,^[1] praising him always.

Philippians 4:8

Maybe that's because the important side of it is to focus on Jesus. It is to chase Jesus, to follow Jesus. To chase after the good. To plant our stories in the one who is unchanging.

Have a plan for following Jesus. Have a plan on how you will build your life and anchor that in Jesus because he is unchanging.

And some of that looks like what we talked about around Pentecost. It is an intentional surrender and commitment to God's word. An intentional community to gathering in fellowship with other believers because the life of faith was never meant to be a solo act. A devotion to prayer and worship. A life defined by generosity. And that requires a plan. It won't just happen.

Yet, in a changing world, with souls that desire to be rooted in something stable, our best bet is to plant ourselves in God, the unchanging.

Let's pray