



THIS IS US. THE **REAL** US

Week 1 – Empathy

John 21:15-19

Introduction to Sermon Series --

Over the past year, we have all experienced collective trauma. We have been stressed and worried. We have missed social gatherings, eating at restaurants, and dare I even say it some of us have missed leaving the house to go to work. We have lost much. Some of us have even lost loved ones this year. In the midst of great suffering and our collective trauma, we have still clung to hope. We celebrated Easter last week and rejoiced in the promise and hope of new life. We celebrate a vaccine that is making it possible for grandparents to hug their grandkids again and for teachers to return more safely back to school. We still have hope. What's inspiring to me is how communities, cities, families, and churches have rallied together to do the best we can to just survive. Not merely trying to survive with a deadly pandemic rampant, but to survive emotionally and relationally.

[Add a specific story how you've seen your congregation care for one another in this season]. We have walked alongside each other, and since we have all been in this collective trauma together, it perhaps has been a little easier to walk in each other's shoes. Perhaps, it has been a little bit easier to have empathy with one another. This morning, we launch a new sermon series called **This is Us. The Real Us**. Over the next few weeks, we hope to capture the best of us, the best of humanity, the best of this church, and the best of people throughout a global pandemic, and discover how these values can sustain us for years to come. We will highlight values that have inspired us to keep moving forward as people of God – [insert the specific values you're discussing in this series.]

We begin with Empathy. **Empathy** is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing and having the capacity to place ourselves in their position.¹ It's not

¹ <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/empathy/definition#how-cultivate-empathy>

necessarily that we're experiencing the same thing nor have had the same experience in our own life. But it is the intentional act of love where we listen and care deeply for people. This is where I've seen the best of humanity over the past year and can be a model moving forward for us in love. We have had solidarity with one another, we understand what we're going through together. We all have not experienced the same exact way, but we have shared in the common struggle which had led us to be [at least I hope] more understanding, caring, and empathic toward each other. Simply, we could understand and relate to one another. **As we are rooted in our love for Jesus, we are propelled to deeply care and express empathy with our family, co-workers, and neighbors.**

In one of the most chaotic times in the life of Peter in the Gospel's, he experienced empathy from Jesus himself. Read John 21:15-19

Biblical Text --

In wanting to know how committed and dedicated one of his disciples was to Him, Jesus pulled him aside and asked him a provocative question. "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'"² Before we jump all too quickly into this familiar scripture passage (one that we have heard preached before), we have to pause and remember the emotional experience Peter has just had. Three years prior to being faced with this powerful question, Peter was minding his own business and doing what he did best, fishing. Jesus had invited him and his brother to "come and see"³ all that Jesus was going to do and be a part of. Peter left the comfort of the waters to follow a path in uncharted territory. For a few years, Peter witnessed Jesus love and amaze people.

Peter witnessed Jesus turn barrels of water into barrels of wine at a wedding. He saw Jesus provide abundantly for 5,000+ people who were amazed at Jesus' teachings. Peter saw Jesus love people like the Samaritan Woman and bring back to life his friend Lazarus. Moments before hearing this powerful question from Jesus, Peter witnessed him provide an abundant number of fish when Peter and his friends were casting their nets into the Sea.

Yet, Jesus asks, "Do you love me more than these [miracles]? Do you love me more than these things that you have seen me do? Do you love me more than these?"

² John 21:15

³ John 1:39

For Jesus knew how hard it was for Peter and his disciples to love. The incredible miracles Peter had experienced alone did not propel him to remain in love with Jesus. And we can't forget that days ago, in the panic, chaos, and confusion of the accusations against Jesus and the impending trials and crucifixion, Peter was asked if he was one of Jesus' disciples.⁴ Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Peter denied his love for Jesus.

This has been Peter's experience leading up to this powerful question *do you love me* that came out of Jesus' mouth. Instead of God throwing down the hammer, or shaming Peter, Jesus was walking with Peter, expressing empathy toward him. Jesus knows pointedly Peter's denial three times. Instead of being mad or bitter, Jesus chooses to see the situation through Peter's eyes and offer him reconciliation. Jesus is embodying deep empathy toward Peter. He did this through asking the same question three times bringing him back to the very foundation of his life.

This question that Jesus asks Peter is one of the most important questions ever asked, and one that needs to be asked more. In our season as a denomination, in the season of our nation, even in the season of our own personal journeys, this may be the most important question we ask each other. ***Are we people who are in love with Jesus?*** If Jesus was before us and asked, "Do you love me?" how would we respond. "Are we people who are in love with Jesus? Are we people who are in love with Jesus?"

But before we answer too quickly, we have to think about what Jesus is *not* asking. Jesus is not asking: how often do you read your Bible? How much money do you give to our local church or other non-profits? How much are you accomplishing in your work? How many people take you seriously? Instead, the question is a little more real and a little more personal, Jesus is asking, *do you love me? Do you love me?*

Are we people who are in love with Jesus? Are we people who "seek first the Kingdom of God"? Are we people who seek Christ to be at the center of it all in our life?

To begin answering this question "Are we people who are in love with Jesus?", we must first remember a simple truth. The simple yet profound truth that Jesus first loved us! God loves God's beloved people, and God wants us to not forget that we were first loved by God.

⁴ John 18:17

Sometimes especially during difficult and painful moments of life, we need to be reminded of this simple and yet profound truth of Jesus. That Jesus loves us, and there's nothing we can do about it.

[Insert names from your congregation, leadership, or staff – and say these words over them], Jesus loves you! Friends in the midst of our unsteady world, Jesus loves you! Our leadership and staff, living out the good news inside and outside of the church walls, Jesus loves you!

Do you love me? Do you love Jesus? The very nature of this question is one of love and grace. Peter had just denied being a part of this Jesus movement. He didn't want to be recognized with Jesus. And now, despite or perhaps because of this denial, Jesus is giving Peter another chance. He is asking Peter: do you love me? And if so, please follow me and feed my lambs. For Jesus to even ask Peter, for Jesus to even want to be near, or around Peter is a true act of love and grace. This love that we are to have for Jesus is not simply about our vertical love, but it extends horizontally as well.

Illustration --

"An eight-year-old boy had a younger sister who was dying of leukemia. He was told that without a blood transfusion, she would die. His parents explained to him that his blood was probably compatible with hers and if so, he could be the blood donor. They asked him if they could test his blood. He said "Sure." So, they did, and it was a good match. Then they asked would he give his sister a pint of blood... as it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight. The next day he went to his parents and said he was willing to donate his blood. They took him to the hospital, where he was put on a gurney beside his six-year-old sister, both of them hooked up to IVs. A nurse withdrew a pint of blood from the boy which was put into his sister. The boy lay on his gurney in silence while his blood dripped into his sister until the doctor came over to see how he was doing, then the boy opened his eyes and asked, "How soon until I start to die?"⁵

This little boy wanted his sister to know how much he loved her. When tragedy struck in their family, this little boy was willing to stand up and literally offer his life for his sister! This young boy although ignorant of medical procedures, grasped the profound nature of love. He

⁵ Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird

was willing to lay down his life for his sister. Do we love people enough, care for people enough that it leads us to a life of love and empathy?

This is where we've seen the power of Jesus over the past year! What does it mean to be people who are in love with Jesus? When we are people who boldly say **Yes, I love Jesus** there are practical and spiritual implications in our life. We are to embody a sense of love for people that I believe shows up through **empathy** that was modeled by Jesus and this young boy.

So, the question is: **how will we continue to express our love for God with others? How might we be people who are empathic to others?**

If we are honest, there are moments in our work, families, and everyday lives that make it difficult for us to love Jesus and others. Other things take priority, other items grab our attention more, and our love for Jesus and care for others takes the back seat. Or maybe, Jesus doesn't get a seat at all. This is less of an indictment and more of a moment of humble honesty. Sometimes in the midst of a demanding week, I neglect to pray. Sometimes in the midst of a chaotic situation, I express my stress with unhelpful tones, comments, etc. Sometimes when it seems like I'm journeying through life, I forget about Jesus all together. There are moments where I forget that Jesus loves me.

Yet Jesus is asking in a moment of love and grace, if we are people who are in love with Jesus? Are we people who in the midst of chaos, look to Jesus. Are we people in the midst of the joys of ministry point all the glory back to Jesus? Are we people who can accept the grace of God in our moments of denial? Are we people, who in the very midst of uncertainty, lean into Jesus with an empathic spirit toward other people?

This love for Jesus is something that should define our entire life. This love is sacrificial, it's a love that requires all of us. A love that is willing to surrender all. A love that leads us to follow Jesus in the wilderness, feed his lambs, tend his sheep, and a love that could mean laying down our very lives for Jesus.

This love that we have is a love from Jesus, and a love that propels us to love God and others better. This love keeps us loving and empathic toward others when they might need our love the most. This love reminds us it's not about us. This love helps us engage in difficult conversations because we realize that we're all seeking to **love** Jesus better. This love propels

us to love difficult people, love people who think differently than us, and love those who are in need.

[For a conclusion and next steps, feel free to tailor them for your own church context and community.]

Vulnerability – Road to Emmaus

April 18, 2021

Luke 24:13-35

Ever since the first humans sat around a campfire, stories have been told.

Stories about adventures, people, everyday life.

Each of us are storytellers. Whether we are telling our story, or a story that connects to us.

People love stories, Nancy Duarte says in her book, *Resonate*, because life is full of adventure and *we're hardwired to learn lessons from observing change in others*. Life is messy, she says, so we empathize with characters who have real-life challenges similar to the ones we face. When we listen to a story, the chemicals in our body change, and our mind becomes transfixed. We are riveted when a character encounters a situation that involves risks and elated when he/she averts danger and is rewarded. *Resonate*, Duarte, pg 16

This last year will be memorialized in stories. Some funny. Some sad.

Stories are powerful ways of remembering.

Stories also create emotional connectedness.

Stories link one person's heart to another.

Stories arouse emotions and energy.

Stories evade defenses, quicken curiosity, and inspire imagination.

And, stories convey values, beliefs and norms that intertwine between the storyteller and the listener.

As the two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they were talking about everything that has happened. v.14

This is a great reminder that we need people in our lives with which we can process the events of life. Imagine these two discussing Jesus' ministry, the events of the last week- including Jesus' death.

For these two men, there were probably more questions than answers.

That may be true for you as well, that you have more questions than answers. BUT, are you willing to open up and tell someone? Are you willing to be vulnerable with another person?

Jesus provides all of us a lesson on storytelling.

Start with understanding the story of another person. One of the best lines you can use to learn about someone else's story is simply, 'Tell me more?'

No one has arrived where they are today without a lifetime of experiences, questions, emotions. No story is as simple as the opening line. There is more to unpack.

Stories have layers.

One of the best things we can do is to help others peel back the layers, one at a time. Don't rush! People are only willing to peel back a layer of vulnerability when they know their story can be trusted in your hands.

Jesus retold the timeless story that these travelers already knew. He connected the dots along the way in retelling the story.

Stories reveal timeless truths.

One of the ways that we can help others see the timeless truths in their story is to connect the dots. Stories are often unconnected parts that need connected to the timeless truths of life.

When Jesus and his companions were ready to part ways, they invited Jesus to stay. They reveal in that invitation that a good story will leave us wanting more. As they said, their hearts were burning within them as Jesus talked. v. 32

Good stories always leave us wanting more.

A good story, the ones that connect with us, leave us with questions. Questions about the story, yes. But more importantly, questions about ourselves, questions about our response. A good story always leaves us wanting more.

Some days our stories are rather mundane, while other days, our stories are filled with tears. Some days our stories are overwhelmingly heavy, while other days our stories leave us with more questions than answers. Some days our stories are filled with laughter and joy. Every day is a unique story.

Add to our stories the ones that are taking place all around us each day. And, suddenly our stories begin to intertwine. We become connected to each other's stories and we find an emotional connectedness.

While we often feel a connection to the stories we read or watch on the screen, in real life, people actually invite us in to their stories. They want someone to connect with their emotion. They want someone to link up with their heart.

But most of all, they are looking for people who will enter into their story to...

Unpack the layers...

To find the timeless truths...

To ask the deeper questions...

That's the weird thing about disciples of Jesus. Every day we get invited into people's stories.

We get to listen to people's stories.

We walk with people as they unpack the layers.

We remind them that they are not alone in their story. That while their story is unique, their story is timeless, it's been told before. And those who have told their stories have provided us handholds to keep climbing.

And, we lean in and ask the hard questions. Questions that make us think about ourself, our situation, what we are learning.

Humility

Philippians 2:1-11

Week 4

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

***6 Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.***

***7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.***

***When he appeared in human form,
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.***

***9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,***

***10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,***

***11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.***

Intro Video – clip of Marching Band Salutes

1. ME – Drum Major h.s. & college
 - a. George N. Parks drum major academy
 - b. First day taught the salute ...
 - c. I'm a big personality – acquired taste...
 - d. My natural inclination – it's my band
2. WE – human nature has this ME personality about us
 - a. Called pride, boastfulness
 - b. Somewhat celebrated in every culture
 - i. 21st cnty created an entire vocation – social media influencers
 - ii. Sports Heroes – how they can slam dunk
3. GOD – yet faith is clear, over & over again in scrip learn that following Jesus isn't about ourselves
READ Philippians 2:1-11 (or just 1-5)
4. Church at Philippi
 - a. Paul wrote during his imprisonment, date ??? as late as 62
 - b. Church itself – Greek culture is starting to infect
 - i. Forgetting how to follow Jesus
 - ii. They've been fighting amongst themselves
 - iii. Reminding them of the power Jesus Christ
 - c. V. 1-2 tying up the thoughts of Chap. 1
5. V. 3 moves into the heart of living the faith
Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

- a. Paul says, Don't be selfish & be humble
 - i. That goes against our natural human inclinations
 - ii. We're wired to think of ourselves first
- 6. Sermon Series ... looking at the values that we can take from COVID
 - a. What good has God brought out of this really rough year
 - b. Today

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS VALUE HUMILITY.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. (Philippians 2:3 NLT)

- 7. Paul says, Don't be selfish & be humble
 - a. Small phrases but hard words to live out
 - b. Again, contrary to humans broken thought processes
 - c. Especially in Paul's time
 - i. Culture valued honor/shame
 - ii. To gain honor it meant someone else was shamed
 - iii. Like today – you know those people who put others down
 - 1. b/c they want to feel better about themselves
 - d. So when Paul tells the Philippians Be Humble
 - i. He's telling them to go against everything they've been taught and understand in the world
 - ii. YET – that's exactly who we are called to be today
 - 1. Don't puff ourselves up ...
 - 2. Don't put others down ...
 - 3. Rather – think of others as better
- 8. Early on I listened to a news story about the number forced into food insecurity during the pandemic
 - a. It opened talking about huge lines [pic]
 - b. Then talked about what could be a possible outcome =
 - i. We all realize we are 1 tragedy away from ...
 - c. Or we've certainly learned Humility during 2021
 - i. Got excited for every at risk friend who got their vaccine
 - d. As we move to the 'new normal' – let's continue to embrace Humility
- 9. And then Paul gives us tangible ways to practice our humility
 - a. Immediately in v. 4

Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

- b. If you want to live out the value of humility
 - i. Take an interest in others ...

TO BE HUMBLE, SERVE.

Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Philippians 2:3 NLT)

- c. Possibly share stats on poverty in township
 - d. Ways to do this in your community ... (Possibly treat this as your offering time)
 - 10. V. 5-11 Goes into what's considered the oldest creed
 - a. Beautiful theology/Christology
 - b. Also considered a hymn
 - i. Talks about Jesus humbling himself
 - ii. And very first verse says
- You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.***
- c. Jesus' life is our guidebook on faith

- i. He humbled himself, even to cross
- ii. Served – washed disciples feet, even to cross
- iii. WE – follow that example
- d. And to do that – put on the attitude of Christ
- e. We do that through Obedience

TO BE HUMBLE, OBEY.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (Philippians 2:5 NLT)

- f. To obey = prayer, practice