

The Peculiar Community

October 9, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

1 John 4:7-12

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Today we are starting a new series about the "Good and Beautiful Community." Before we do that, I want to briefly recap what we have learned from Jesus' sermon on the Mount. We have learned what it means to live without anger, to live without lust, to live without lying. We have learned what it means to bless others who curse us. We have lived without vainglory; that is, we have learned to live by placing God and the kingdom of God first rather than place ourselves first. We have learned that we can live without trying to accumulate possessions. We have learned to live without worry and without judging others. To sum it all up, when you follow Jesus and learn kingdom living as Jesus intended, then you are an odd person. At least as far as the rest of the world is concerned. Normal, everyday people do not forgive and show compassion. We followers of Jesus are a peculiar people.

I like how the King James Version reads for 1 Peter 2:9 – "But ye be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, *a peculiar people*; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." "Dictionaries define [peculiar] as "distinctive," "odd," "strange" and "weird." In a word, peculiar means different. Different from the ordinary, the common, from everyone else. Christians are peculiar in that they are different from everyone else.¹

When you think about it, Christians really are a peculiar people. And if they are not, they ought to be. Yes, sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between people who follow Jesus and those who don't. Religious people get in the news for doing scandalous things, and most the time there is more made out of that than a non-religious person, because popular culture judges that a religious person should know better. The problem

¹ Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful Community (The Good and Beautiful Series)* (p. 27). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

is, that religious persons and non-religious persons are all sinners, who stand in the need of a Savior.

So, the false narrative is that Christians are no different than anyone else. The true narrative is that we ought to be, and many of us are ... well ... a bit peculiar. Next time someone tells you that you are odd or weird, you can thank them for it. We are meant to stand out from the rest of the world—in a good way.

Why are Christians peculiar (or at least ought to be)?

The God that Jesus reveals is peculiar. This God loves humans so much that he became one of them and died for them. This God forgives when it is not deserved. This God is generous, never vengeful. If the God of Jesus displays wrath, it is only because this God is good and loving, and is rightly against sin because it hurts his beloved children. No one could have made this story up. There is nothing like it in all of religious literature. That is because in all of the other religions there is no God like the one Jesus revealed. God's ways are not our ways, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). God's values are different. He is like a father who gets mistreated by a wayward son and aches for him to come home (Luke 15:11-32). That was a peculiar notion to Jesus' hearers. God is like an employer who gives a day's pay to workers who worked only an hour (Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus shocked people with that narrative. "What kind of God is this?" the people must have murmured. Jesus revealed a God who was like no other god the world had ever heard of. This God was indeed peculiar.²

In the next few weeks we will be talking about the importance of Christian community. When people come to our church, they ought to be able to tell that there is something peculiar about us. They should be able to tell that we are a people who love one another, trust one another, and truly want to be around one another. And hopefully and prayerfully, like the woman in James Bryan Smith's story, there will be some new people who witness what we are up to, wonder about why we are so peculiar, and say, "After seeing all of these people who have peace and joy and love, I wanted to have what they have."

[Share with the congregation about Discipleship Bands www.disciplebands.com and the affects COVID has had on our sense of community]

² Ibid., pp. 31-32.