

Sermon: Learn to Love Well (Part 9/9) – September 5, 2020

Series: Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

Speaker: Kevin White

Scripture: John 9

Remember when we were able to go to large events together? I miss those days. I remember a few years ago I went to the ACC for an event. They very clearly said, “Don’t use your phones! No texting, pictures, don’t even pull it out. If you do, you will be immediately ejected and your money won’t be refunded.

When we got to the entrance of the building, they told us no cell phones. When they took our tickets, they told us no cell phones. They hired extra security who told us – no cell phones. On two huge screens at the front, they had projected – no cell phones. Every 5-10 minutes a recording would come on saying – no cell phones. The emcee did a 10-minute comedy routine about people getting kicked out and having no excuse because it was so clear about not using cell phones. I have never in my life heard a message so clear. If you’re watching this service live type in the chat “y” for yes if you’d be tempted to use your cell phone or ‘n’ for no if you wouldn’t be tempted to use your phone.

Before the show started, they told us that they were going to use footage from the night for a movie so please don’t use your cell phones at all. They told us that the night before 150 people were kicked out for using cell phones – and the footage they took was erased! Yet what do I see? In a seat by the aisle, a few rows in front of me, I see a couple huddled together over a cell phone. This is before the show even started! Moments later, an usher tapped them on the shoulder and escorted them out. They never returned. They missed the entire show! Why? Even though the instructions were so clear, they were blinded by the fact that they wanted to use their cell phone. Using their cell phone was the only thing they could see. Because of that, they missed out – wasted time, wasted money...

Today, we finish a nine-week series called Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. The main thrust of the series is that you can’t be spiritually healthy and emotionally unhealthy at the same time. I don’t think we could be any clearer. Every week, we have said that same message and presented a different tool that can be used on the journey towards emotionally healthy spirituality. At the time of the taping of this message, we find ourselves in midst of a global Covid-19 pandemic – it has exposed a lot as we struggle to deal with all the change and pain around us. There’s a real opportunity to deal with what is going on inside our souls. There’s an opportunity to pursue emotionally healthy spiritually and then to share that gift with the community around us. We need it, and they need it.

Going back to my story from before – those people who got kicked out of the ACC didn’t go to jail. They didn’t die. But they missed out on the full experience of enjoying the show. If you walk away from this series doing nothing, you won’t die. You won’t get kicked out of the Cornerstone family. But you will miss out on an opportunity to grow and to be more of who God is calling you to be. You will miss out on an experience to feel the love of God, and to leverage that experience to love yourself and others well. And we as your family will miss out.

This series (and also this message) are based on a book called, "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" by Pete Scazzero. Some of my outline is from a sermon he preached as well.

"It's one thing to grow physically into a chronological adult, It is quite another thing to grow into an emotional adult." – Peter Scazzero.

Today our topic is "Learn to love well." Let me say as a disclaimer that you can't and shouldn't try to do everything. I'm going to go over all the topics that we've covered in this series later in the message but my suggestion is to stick with one or two that you feel God speaking to you about and dig deeper with those. Talk to a pastor, talk about it in your small group, your family, counsellor etc.

As we wind down this series, I want to remind you that love is what ties it all together.

"Loving well is the essence of true spirituality. This requires that we experience connection with God, ourselves, and with other people." – Pete Scazzero

When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest command?" Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself." – Matthew 22:37-39.

Today I suggest that we "Learn to love well" when we:

1. Become incarnational – church word – it describes how God became flesh in Jesus. He entered our world and calls us to enter into the world of others.
2. Check our blind spots (we'll talk more about this later)

So WHY do we have to "learn to love well?"

We have to learn it because it's not how we naturally are. We can't help but live life with us as the center of the universe.

We tend to treat people as a means to an end. When we only listen to our neighbours, friends from school and coworkers so that they'll come to church, that's not loving well. If they don't respond the way we want, when we want, we move on. We get frustrated when they don't fit into our plans. Instead, we need to be incarnational – we need to enter into their world.

My wife Michelle (who was leading the singing) is good at that. There was one time we went to Niagara Falls and she went indoor skydiving – I was going to go but I was – what's that word for when you want to do something but then the thought of it not working holds you back? (scared). Anyways, we went, I watched, and right before Michelle was going to go a man with special abilities comes in. Michelle used to be a teacher working with students with special abilities and one of her top strengths is empathy. One of my top strengths is consistency – I like

things to be fair. Since we were there first, I'm assuming we're going to go first. But Michelle is saying, "I think I'm going to let this guy go first. He looks like he's ready to go and it usually takes them so long to do stuff, if he's ready and doesn't get to go now, he might not go at all." Not only did she let him go first, she went in with him. She entered his world – was incarnational – she helped him have a successful experience at skydiving. She treated him as someone who matter even though she got nothing out of it. I imagine that guy felt so special.

But you know who's even better at that? Jesus. Let's look at John chapter 9. We'll start with verses 1-12. This is the story of Jesus healing a man born blind – sorry for the spoiler alert.

Read John 9:1-12

Here, right off the top, you have the disciples seeing the man as a means to an end. They use him as an opportunity to have a philosophical discussion about sin. You have Jesus seeing the man as someone who matters. Jesus sees him, comes to him and heals him. Jesus makes space for him. What's our first response when we see someone in need? Do we talk about why they are in that spot in the first place? Do we pass judgment? Do we help? Cornerstone's mission statement talks about "making space." We learn to love well when we become incarnational. When we enter another person's world. When we make space. This whole story happened because Jesus was in the habit of paying attention to the needs of others. He stopped. He SAW a man blind from birth.

How can we see people the way that Jesus sees them? The way he sees us? How can we see where God is at work and join in?

Looking at this story, do you realize that no one – none of his friends, family, no Pharisee, no one in the crowd – no one it seems asked him about what it was like to see for the first time! No one entered his world. No one said, "Yay! You can see – I told you I was good looking ain't I?"

No one was incarnational – no one was fully present with him in this most incredible moment of his life. Are we fully present in the moments of the lives around us? Do we make space for those who are rejoicing? For those who are mourning?

We learn to love well when we are incarnational. When we enter another person's world.

The next way we learn to love well is to check **our blind spots**.

For those of you who drive or have been in a car, you know what a blind spot is. There's a space where even though a car is near you – you can't see it. I want to suggest that in order to love well, we have to check our blind spots. On the road of life sometimes we see things but choose to ignore them. Other times there are things in our lives that we really can't see. Either way, we need a tool, something to help us see what's in our blind spots.

All of the sermons in this series were potential blind spots in our lives. We might not know that they are there, or we might know that they are there but just don't want to deal with it. Either way, left unchecked, we run the risk of being blindsided and crashing.

Here's a list of the sermon topics in this series:

1. The problem of emotionally healthy spirituality
2. Accept the gift of your emotions
3. Look beneath the surface
4. Break free from the past
5. Live in brokenness and vulnerability
6. Receive the gifts of limits
7. Restore your soul with sabbath
8. Enlarge your soul through grief and loss
9. Learn to love well

Which one of these is the Spirit saying to you to dig deeper in? Listen to that sermon again. Read that chapter on it from the book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Don't let this blind spot continue to be there. Get counselling. Speak to a pastor, talk about it in your small group, have some trusted friends keep you accountable...

With regards to the specific topic today, "Learn to live well" Our blind spot exposes that we are not fully emotionally healthy yet. Even though we're online at church today, even though we give money to support, even though we serve the community, we still have issues that like icebergs have so much beneath the surface that need to be dealt with. We keep plugging along, until something happens. We get hurt. We get tired. We hit a wall. And then we shut down. We retreat. We no longer have it in us to keep on keeping on. So we stop.

Let's look at John 9 again.

Read John 9:13-23

Look at the parents and their blind spot. They were afraid of the Pharisees. It was no small thing to be kicked out of the synagogue. It was the center of their whole community. Like a student in a small town being kicked out of a school. There's no other place for them to go. They pretty much either move or are alone.

The parents are afraid of losing what is familiar to them. Their friends, community support, social standing. Maybe even their livelihood. They decide it's better for the son to face the consequences himself than for them all to suffer. They don't incarnate – they don't enter his world. They don't check their blind spot. They know something incredible has happened but instead of it being the happiest day of their lives, it seems to be the most heart wrenching. What will happen if they stand up for what they know is right?

What about us? What's our blind spot to learning to love well? You have a friend that is so emotionally unhealthy and clearly needs help but you are so scared to say something because you are afraid they may be offended and it will ruin the friendship. So you say nothing. Maybe it's someone at school. Maybe at work. You don't want to be a trouble maker. Maybe there's someone in your family that has an issue – anger, pride, whatever. And you just don't know how to say anything without getting into a big fight. We just leave it. We think this is healthy. But actually it's unhealthy. It's false unity. It's not loving well.

Maybe it's you. Maybe you are the one people have been talking to. But you get defensive. You blame others. You don't think you need to deal with anything that bad.

Look at the Pharisees. They have a blind spot. There's something. Someone new bursting on the scene. It's a threat to their system.

They use the Sabbath as a smoke screen. That way, they don't have to deal with how Jesus is messing with their system.

If we allow Jesus to truly shed light into our lives, he will mess up OUR system. Sometimes we make excuses – I'm too busy right now to deal with my blind spots. I can't lie, I do that all too often. Many times, the people who need the most help, make the most excuses. As a husband of a wife who is compassionate and patient, I see that I need help to be more compassion and patient - but I make excuses.

If you're watching live online type in the word "excuse" if you make excuses from time to time instead of dealing with your blind spots.

We learn to love well when we are incarnational. When we enter into another person's world. We also learn to love well when we check our blind spots.

We know this, so what holds us back?

As someone who is trying to follow Jesus there is a cost loving well. It costs to be incarnational, to enter another person's world. It costs to check out blind spots. It costs us emotionally, physically, financially and spiritually. If you love well, it will affect your life.

This pandemic has taught us what we already know but sometimes forget – church is much more than a building. We realize that it's all about people. We're trying to show the world that we have answers to the questions and longings that they have. We have hope. We have joy. We have the antidote for a sick world. We really do. We have Jesus.

If you're watching live type "Amen" in the chat.

At the same time, we have questions. We feel hopeless at times. We need to be healed. This is the tension that we navigate. So we struggle.

If you're watching this online, type "true" if you struggle from time to time.

Maybe you are watching and you feel the tug to be more incarnational – to enter the world of other people. Ask God to help you. But then don't just pray about it – be a part of the answer to your prayer – get in the game and do it! Prayer and action. You need both.

Maybe you are watching and you feel like in order to learn to love well you feel like you need to take a step back and work through some things that were exposed through this series.

Our prayer is that we would grow from emotional infants to emotional adults. That we would learn to love well. That we would go back to our past in order to go forward. That we would embrace the gift of our limits. That we would look beneath the surface.

Take the time, work through the iceberg issues in our lives so that we can in turn be used by God to bless other people. Go back over the series and work through whichever topic you feel the Spirit guiding you to. Don't do it alone. Contact a pastor. Connect with your small group. See a professional counsellor. A trusted Christian friend.

Maybe you're ready to take the first step of following Jesus. If you'd like to know more about that and get someone to pray with you one of our hosts would be honoured to pray with you. Indicate that in the chat and click the button that says prayer.

You can't be spiritually healthy and emotionally unhealthy at the same time – so let's get healthy. Together. For the glory of God.

Amen? Amen.

## COMMUNION

Now let's prepare for the Lord's Supper.

Through the cross of Jesus, God gives us new life. As we celebrate communion, let Jesus' love in today.

The bread that we share in the Lord's Supper—the one loaf—is an emblem of the way physical way God came to us in Jesus – actually took on flesh. He didn't just stay in heaven and think about us. He entered into our world. He felt pain. He suffered. He died. He was betrayed.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying:

This is my body, broken for you.

In the same way, after the supper, he took a cup of wine, and said:

This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, remember me.

At this time, let's celebrate Jesus, who laid down his life for us so that we could learn to love others well by first embracing the way Jesus loves us.

Let's take a moment now to eat and drink together...