

## Making Space for Jesus

Series: *Start With WHY*

Jan. 30, 2022

Revelation 3:15-20, etc.

Last week we began a series called *Start With Why*. In this series, we're focusing on Cornerstone's statements of purpose—our Vision and Mission, as well as something we call our Bedrock Statement.

We talked about how, like everyone else, Cornerstone is in a *liminal* season—an in-between season. We're no longer where we were before the pandemic started, but we're not yet where we will be when we finally get to the post-pandemic era.

We talked about the fact that many standard leadership practices— like casting vision and strategic planning— don't serve organizations all that well in times like these, because they're based on assumptions about how the future will unfold. And we all know from first-hand experience just how tricky it is these days to make any reasonably accurate assumptions about the future.

In these in-between times, it's very tempting to try to sort out WHAT we want to do as a local church, and HOW we want to do it. And there remains a place for that, even in a liminal season. But the wisest and most fundamental thing to focus on in times like these is not the whats or the hows, but our WHY—our God-given purpose, our reason for existence as a local church.

At the beginning of 2022, we believe God is leading us to *Start With WHY*.

And so, last week we began by exploring Cornerstone's Vision Statement —*Embracing the Jesus who embraces the world*. This biblically rich and motivating word picture represents the kind of local church community that God is calling us to be and become. Embrace is a metaphor, an image, a vision which reminds us that above all else, God has called Cornerstone to be and become a community of Christ-like *love*.

The greatest commandments, taught Jesus, are two sides of the same coin: Love God, and love others.<sup>1</sup> We love God by embracing Jesus, God's Son—following him as our Master. We love others when we embrace those that Jesus embraces, and on the cross, Jesus embraced the *world*. That includes people from all backgrounds and walks of life—no matter their age, gender, race, colour, nationality, ability or social status. Jesus' love extends to all, and when we embrace Jesus for who he really is, he makes our arms an extension of his own.

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 22:37-40

We also talked about how in order to embrace others the way Jesus does, we need to learn to live in God's loving embrace of us in Christ. "We love because God first loved us," says the Bible in 1 John.<sup>2</sup>

If you're new to Cornerstone, this series offers you a great opportunity to hear what this church is all about, and to connect with what we're doing here as the Lord leads you. A great first step would be to check out our Discover Cornerstone newcomers' class [[www.cornerstonechurch.ca/discovercornerstone](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/discovercornerstone)], which takes place every other month. The next class is scheduled for March. To learn more, and to sign up, just visit the link you see on your screen.

Now if you've been with Cornerstone for some time already, this series will reinforce your sense of our God-give purpose as a local church, and why God has placed *you* here to be a part of it all.

In the time that remains, I'd like to unpack Cornerstone's next statement of purpose— our Mission Statement:

### **Cornerstone's Mission Statement**

*Making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love.*

Some years ago, God imparted this statement to us as a result of a prayerful process of leadership and congregational discernment that took the better part of a year to complete. So this is no afterthought.

Our Mission is what we do to live out our Vision. If our Vision is *embracing the Jesus who embraces the world*, then the way we go about doing that is by *making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love*.

Our Mission Statement targets a particular need that we as a church share in common with the greater community and culture that God has called us to serve. That need has to do with **making space...**

As is the case in most North American urban centres, people in the Greater Toronto Area tend to be space-challenged people. In this society, many lead overcrowded lifestyles, with jam-packed schedules, preoccupied minds, and cluttered hearts.

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<sup>2</sup> See 1 John 4:19

During the pandemic, some of us find ourselves even busier than we were before—for example, working at home while trying to coach your kids through online school at the same time.

There are others, of course, on the opposite end of that spectrum—people whose lives have become much quieter and in many cases lonelier as a result of the pandemic. But as the old saying goes, “Nature abhors a vacuum.” So even when we’re not overly busy, what do most of us tend to do?

We tend to fill our space with distractions of all kinds, which are now continuously available to us. Social media, email, messenger apps, web browsing and streaming options galore are never farther away than your pocket.

Recently, I’ve actually gone as far as to implement the use of blocking apps on my devices to force me not to do things like searching the word “Raptors” thirty times a day and then scanning for the latest hoops articles. Over-checking email is a temptation for me as well, so I actually deleted the email app from my phone the other day, and am trying to stick to dedicated times for checking email on my laptop each day. I’ve also been implementing the spiritual discipline of silence in my daily life, and I find that even when I slow down enough to be silent and still, my mind can continue to race for quite some time before it settles down.

The point is, whether you’re busy or not-so-busy, many of us tend to be space-challenged people in one way or another, and so, so many of us are inclined to fill our available space with distractions. If you can personally relate to that, you can virtually raise your hand in the chat by clicking the button that says, “I’m a space-challenged person!”

So we live in a space-challenged culture. And it’s quite common for church people to become infected by the same ailments that infect the culture at large. It’s very easy for confessing Christians, like most of us, to pretty much let Jesus and his priorities get crowded right out of our lives. We may call Jesus Lord and Master, but the reality is that far too many of us leave precious little space for Jesus in our hearts and minds, in our routines and schedules, in our work and relationships.

You may be surprised to learn that that this problem isn’t entirely unique to our own era of history. Something similar was going on in the church of Laodicea in the first century. In the book of Revelation, Jesus issues the people of that church a powerful wake-up call:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm— neither hot nor cold— I am about to spit

you out of my mouth... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.<sup>3</sup>

Now ancient Laodicea was a happening city. Located in what we now know as Turkey, Laodicea seemed to have it all— thriving textile, medical and financial industries—and all the wealth and lifestyle perks that go along with a bustling economy.

But for all the city had going for it, it did have a particular shortcoming that was something of an embarrassment. It lacked a good water source.

Water had to be piped in from Colossae, which was about 16 kilometers away. Fresh and cold at its source, the water became lukewarm by the time it had travelled through the pipes all the way to Laodicea. Water from natural hot springs was also piped in from Hierapolis, only 10 kilometers away, but the end result was the same. The only water that flowed from Laodicean taps was lukewarm.

With this background in mind, Jesus tells the Laodicean Christians that they are *spiritually* lukewarm. They had become so conformed to the culture around them, that their faith in Jesus was neither hot nor cold, but tepid.

Have you ever taken a swig of a beverage that you were expecting to be either refreshingly hot or cold, only to end up with a mouthful of lukewarm “yuck”? When you get a mouthful of lukewarm, your instinct is to do what? Spit it out. Jesus minces no words in his effort to wake up the lukewarm Laodicean church to the spiritual gravity of their situation. He says, “Hey guys— I’m about to spit you out of my mouth!”

You see, Jesus loved the Laodicean church too much to allow them to remain in their comfortable but perilous spiritual stupor. And so he said to them:

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.<sup>4</sup>

What is Jesus telling them, essentially? He’s telling them, “You’re spiritually lukewarm because you’ve been crowding me out. What you need to do is make space for me. Hear me knocking, open the door, and let me in.”

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 3:15-16, 19-20 (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 3:19-20 (NLT)

You see, we're not really all that different from the Laodicean Christians. We stuff our lives with what the prevailing culture says we should, with the result that Jesus gets squeezed out.

Therefore, in living out Cornerstone's Mission Statement, *we must begin with ourselves*. How can we share Jesus with the greater community and the world unless we first make space for him in our own lives? When we make space for Jesus in our daily and weekly rhythms—through practices like prayer, scripture reflection, Sunday worship, and fellowship with other believers who spur us on in our faith—when we make space for Jesus in our hearts and minds, in our calendars and agendas—he begins to fill our lives with the beauty of his transforming presence.

That's what Jesus is getting at in Revelation when he promises to enter in and eat with anyone who opens the door of his or her life to him. He spoke those words not to non-Christian people, as is popularly believed, but to Christians—to church people.

In biblical times, to eat with someone was to be in intimate relationship with that person. Table fellowship, as they called it, was a sign of a family bond or a close, loving friendship. In this passage, Jesus is inviting us to make space for him by opening the door of our space-challenged lives to his intimate presence— not just every now and then, but all the time.

Can you hear his voice today? Can you hear Jesus knocking? In what ways is he calling you to make space for him? Will you open the door to him? What needs to go so that there will be space for Jesus?

As we make space for Jesus in our daily lives, his Spirit will **shape us together in God's love**. That's the next part of our Mission Statement. The Bible makes it clear that God is at work to shape his people to be like Jesus. Romans 8:29 says:

God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.<sup>5</sup>

In shaping us to be more and more like Jesus, God shapes us *in his love*, because God's love is most perfectly revealed in Jesus, especially in his cross. Being shaped in self-sacrificial Christ-like love is at the very centre of God's purpose for all of us.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:29 (MSG)

That's why the Bible says things like:

Above all, clothe yourselves with love...<sup>6</sup>

Do everything in love.<sup>7</sup>

The Apostle Paul goes as far as to say:

So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.<sup>8</sup>

Self-sacrificial Christ-like love is the whole ball game. It's the all-or-nothing of the Christian life. If we don't get love right, there's nothing else worth getting right. As a church, and as individuals, you are I are called to be shaped in the love of God by the Spirit of Jesus.

This is the goal of discipleship—to be shaped into radical lovers of God and others. And we can never become radical lovers by our own strength and effort. Our job is to make space for Jesus—and his Spirit will do the shaping.

This is where our mission to the greater community and the world finds its impetus. When we become a community of faith that looks like Jesus—that loves like he loves—our neighbours in the greater community will be drawn to the Jesus they see in us.

Preacher Tony Campolo tells the story of a drunk named Joe who was miraculously converted to Christ at the Bowery Mission in New York City. Joe was known throughout the Bowery as the worst kind of wino, a hopeless derelict of a man, living on borrowed time. But after his conversion, everything changed. Joe became the most caring person anyone associated with the mission had ever known. He spent his days and nights hanging out at the mission, helping wherever he could. He would never balk at even the lowliest of jobs. He mopped up vomit and urine and cleaned up drunks no matter what their condition.

One evening, the director of the mission was delivering the nightly gospel sermon to the usual crowd of sullen men, their heads hung in penitence and exhaustion. Among them, there was one man who suddenly looked up, got out of his seat, and came down the center aisle to the altar, where he knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him change.

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<sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:14 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:14 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:7 (MSG)

This repentant drunk shouted over and over again, “Oh God, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!” The mission director leaned over and said to the man, “Friend, I think it would be better if you prayed, ‘Make me like Jesus!’” The man looked up at the mission director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, “Well is he anything like *Joe*?”

Our Mission Statement calls us to be so given over to making space for Jesus that we becoming a living embodiment of his presence to others. Oh that more and more people in the Markham-Stouffville community would cry out to God, “Make me like the people at Cornerstone! Make me like the people at Cornerstone! Make me like Bethany and Mali and Keegan and Jon and Mymy and Dave!” And like each of you worshipping at home.

You see, if *making space for Jesus to shape people together in God’s love* starts with us, it very quickly extends outwardly, to the world around us, because the Jesus we embrace is the Jesus who embraces the world, as we saw last week when we looked at our Vision Statement.

Our mission to make space for Jesus includes making\_spaces where others in the greater community and the world beyond can encounter and be shaped by Jesus themselves. As author Debra Hirsch writes:

The chief role of the church is to create the right environment for all people to be able to encounter Jesus. Everything else that we do is relative to this great cause.

- Debra Hirsch

That’s why God called us to build the physical space that we’re livestreaming from right now— Cornerstone Centre—and we’re looking forward to re-opening for in-person worship on February 13<sup>th</sup>.

This unique physical space functions as a church building and a community centre at the same time, enabling us to create many relationship-building spaces where the people of this church can serve and connect with those in the greater community that don’t know Jesus yet—spaces such as sports and rec programs, Open Table Thursday dinners, parent & tot groups, youth drop-ins, and large scale community events like fun fairs and farmers markets and the list goes on and on.

In the context of such relationship-building spaces, our pre-Christian neighbors will meet Jesus in and through us, and then further connect with us as a worshipping community. We’ve seen it happen over and over again.

The pandemic has us thinking of new ways that we might be able to leverage Cornerstone Centre to even better serve the greater community, including our community partners, in the years to come.

One thing I like about Cornerstone's Mission statement is that it's so wonderfully multifaceted. It encompasses all of life. It calls us to acknowledge and address the ways that Jesus tends to get crowded out of people's lives, including our own. It compels us to consider what *making space for Jesus* might look like in our hearts and minds, in our schedules and daily routines, in our homes, in our marriages, families and friendships, in our finances, in our worship services and small groups, in our children's, youth and young adults ministries, in our programs, as well as in our church facility itself.

Really, it's hard to think of any aspect of life—whether personal, congregational, or public—where the mission of *making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love* does not apply in some way, shape or form.

Over these past two years, we've even added a wonderful range of *online* spaces to help us live out this mission as well, and in a moment, I'd like to invite you to check out one of those online spaces in particular.

You see, our Mission Statement is essentially another way of saying that Cornerstone exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Earlier I mentioned that the more we're shaped in God's love, the more we're going to look like... Jesus, because Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God's love. And the goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus.

If our Mission is to make disciples by *making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love*, how do we go about doing that exactly? What does that look like?

Well, our Discipleship Pathway [pls show graphic and URL below at this time]—which flows directly from our Mission Statement—breaks it down. Specifically, we make space for people to:

- ESTABLISH Identity in Jesus
- EMBODY the Jesus' Way of Life
- EXPLORE Jesus' Call to Life Mission
- EXTEND Jesus' Love in Life Mission
- EXPERIENCE Jesus' Care and Healing



Now, to tell you about that online space I mentioned a moment ago. We have developed a custom online spiritual life assessment tool based on the Discipleship Pathway, and you'll find it at the link you see on the screen. Discipleship Pathway Assessment: [cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway](https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway)

The tool is designed to help you zero in on which one of these 5 areas you most need to grow in at this time. From there, the tool will connect you with a range of great resources and opportunities you can choose from to help you *make space for Jesus* in that area.

I want to close this message by simply encouraging you to take or re-take the online Discipleship Pathway Assessment today. Just before the worship team comes back, here's a short [video](#) to tell you more about it...