

***To build the church Jesus envisioned. To love the world he died to save.***

This vision statement is built on the three declarative statements of Jesus:

The first is from **Luke 19:10, WHY:**

*“the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”*

We asked the question: Is Jesus’ why my why?

We get the **DO** from Jesus’ declarative statement in **Matthew 16:18:**

*“on this rock I will build my Church.”*

We looked at the beginning of the Church in Acts 1 and the words of Jesus there and asked:  
Are Jesus’ final commissions my first concern?

We get **BE** from Jesus’ statement about his disciples in **John 13:35:**

*“by this everyone will know you are my disciples: if you love one another.”*

We looked at this call to be people of love and virtue.

We asked the question – *“What would the church look like if everyone looked like me?”*

Would pathways be present or absent? Would virtues be fruitful or barren?

How does building the Church and becoming people of virtue seek and save the lost?

**John 12:32** - *“When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself.”*

Specifically and physically speaking, Jesus was going to Jerusalem to be raised on a cross to die.

This act of salvation would draw men to himself.

But it was also prophetic...

The Body of Christ rises up corporately as it is built.

Individually there’s a portrait of Jesus being held up by our lives.

Each day we lay down a stroke.

Each decision places paint.

Each conversation chooses a tone.

*What portrait are you painting?*

This portrait? **The Head of Christ.** or **The Sallman Head.**

It was painted by Warner Sallman in 1940. It has sold over 500 million copies since.

One scholar interviewed hundreds of people about their feelings for Sallman’s Head of Christ.

As one woman put it, the picture appeals to her simply because it shows:

*“just what Jesus looked like.”*

(It looks like a midwestern college grad than a Middle Eastern man)

*Are we being made more and more into the image of God,*

*Or have we shaped god into our own image?*

There’s an old song that speaks to this impulse:

***“We’ve put a mirror in the sky / We look up and see ourselves magnified.***

***Our god looks just like you and I / We’ve put a mirror in the sky.”***

The Ancient Greeks were some of the greatest storytellers in human history. They were thinkers and philosophers that considered the human condition, and their imaginations put their observations into epic stories.

## **NARCISSUS**

He is a figure from Greek mythology who was so proud and impossibly handsome that he scorned all lovers... until he fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. He became obsessed. And, eventually, he drowned in his pursuit of it.

Like many Greek tales, it speaks volumes about the human condition throughout mankind's existence. We seek out mirrors. Reflections. People who look like us. Believe like us. Talk like us. Vote like us. React like us. Eat like us....

We don't just put a mirror in the sky. We like to live surrounded by them. The Greeks knew this.

Ultimately, narcissism is what sparks classism, racism, sexism and other "ism"s and divisions. One such "ism" is tribalism - US vs. THEM  
Time and time again we get our identity and sense of self by excluding other people. We are social organisms that seem hardwired to make dichotomies about the social world.

And we like to build our barriers with mirrors,  
as we surround ourselves with those that reflect us.

Tonight we're talking about OUR MOMENT.  
Every church, intentionally or unintentionally, has a moment.  
Ours? We've verbalized it over the past decade as: **"you're family from the first hello."**

**Rom 15:7** - *accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.*

In order to fully appreciate our moment, we have to look back in history. Narcissism and tribalism in all its forms has been relevant and a problem through all of human history- not just American history- and including Church history.

Racism was a major problem in the Roman Empire. Division was a major issue. Racism. Classism. Sexism. You name it. Not just among Romans. Among God's people the Jews as God was reconciling non-Jews and Gentiles.

The gospel melted down walls and barriers that had existed for centuries. The first Christians in Acts saw themselves as a multicultural family that destroyed walls of hostility and hatred through the blood of Jesus.

It is what inspired Paul to speak the powerful words of **Galatians 3:28** - *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The Church was the first institution in history to bring Jew and Gentile, Male and Female, and Slave and Free onto equal footing. It was the revolution at the heart of revival.

**Azusa Street Revival** was a revival that rivaled any seen since Acts and the early church. It was led by a young black pastor named **William Seymour**, a one-eyed son of a former slave.

There were books full of miracles, but maybe the greatest miracle...

This revival was expressed in love along ethnic lines, generational lines and gender lines.

*A priesthood of ALL believers.* Blacks and whites in leadership. Women in leadership.

What many are less familiar with is what crushed the revival...

In October of 1906 a white pastor from the midwest by the name of **Charles Fox Parham** was invited by Seymour to preach. Instead of offering encouragement and direction, he saw what he considered the great sin of America - the mixing of races.

He then set up an alternative "revival" across the street so whites could remove themselves. His revival didn't last. Predictably. But the wedge of division between races had been placed, and pressure continued. Pressured, white pastors left the Black Church of God in Christ which they were a part to form all white congregations and denominations.

Divisions can creep in and cripple the greatest of revivals.

The Church today cries out for a revival like Azusa Street.

Yet we don't weigh the history of division and it's presence today.

The Azusa Street revival was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Now, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our struggles and isms caused by narcissism are much the same. Even amplified.

How? **Technology.**

In our technological, media driven society we get to curate the voices that surround us.

What happens? We create echo chambers.

There's a less famous part and character in the Narcissus story: **ECHO.**

*She was talkative. And she interrupted Zeus' wife Hera to the point Hera finally cursed her to only be able to speak when she was repeating what another person just said.*

*One day after she was cursed, she came upon Narcissus and fell for his beauty. She was admiring him from a rock and naturally began repeating everything he said as he gazed at his reflection.*

*Narcissus became convinced his reflection was talking to him, making him all the more convinced it was another being, which led to his own drowning in pursuit.*

Again this speaks to our human tendencies.

We set up echo chambers because it makes us comfortable. It affirms us.

But what it does to us spiritually and ultimately is damaging.

***When our “FAMILY OF FAITH” is contingent on people that look like us and sound like us... we’ve begun worshipping ourselves, not God.***

And I truly have come to believe that in the modern era, where echo chambers are a trap we all fall into, the Church’s greatest gift is that a healthy church with an active family of faith will fracture your echo chamber and remodel your hall of mirrors.

And this fracturing is a healing and a gift... as you won’t be able to take them in Heaven.

**Revelation 4:1** says - *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

In church culture, we focus so much on getting to Heaven, but we forget that the prayer Jesus teaches us isn’t “get me out of here to Heaven,” but it’s:  
*“your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.”*

Our prayer should be that Heaven comes to Earth.  
Our moment and our church should be one that reflects this.

But we’ve come to realize **“family from the first hello”** means more than a smile, handshake, and feeling welcomed your first service.

*It means* embracing diversity. Not uniformity. But unity amidst diversity.  
*Worshipping and doing life with people who may not look, talk, vote, or live like you.*  
*It means* being a place where people from all backgrounds can step forward and follow Christ together.  
*It means* being comfortable with the Church shattering your echo chamber, and giving you something better – a diverse family of faith.

The author Christina Cleveland once said:

*“People can MEET God within their cultural context but in order to FOLLOW God, they must cross into other cultures because that’s what Jesus did in the incarnation and the cross. Discipleship is cross-cultural. When we meet Jesus around people who are just like us and then continue to follow Jesus with people who are just like us, we stifle our growth in Christ and open ourselves up to a world of division. However, when we’re rubbing elbows in Christian fellowship with people who are different from us, we can learn from each other and grow more like Christ.”*

To live in a hall of mirrors and echo chambers stifles growth and hurts the Church.  
And it keeps us from following Christ.

*“in order to FOLLOW God, they must cross into other cultures because that’s what Jesus did in the incarnation and the cross.”*

**“Follow me.”**

From the first followers who followed Jesus in the flesh, following Jesus meant reconciliation.

*Imagine being a Jewish fisherman. Blue collar. Barely getting by. You’ve grown up oppressed by the prolific Roman empire. Meanwhile you’ve been robbed by tax collectors- usually your own people, aligned with the Roman government for their own profit. The interest they charged is what gave them their profit, all while robbing your loved ones. Imagine the hate. Imagine the caricatures you’d subscribe to. Tax collectors are trash. Traitors. Broken. Good for nothing... Then right there in the 12 disciples, at all the meetings, in all the prayer circles, in your face daily – Matthew. A tax collector.*

**From the beginning, from the very first disciples who followed Jesus’ command to follow, following Christ and reconciliation have been inseparable.**

Our impulse is tribalism. To live in a hall of mirrors. To live in echo chambers. Following Jesus will always take you across lines in the sand in the name of love.

“Those people” on the other side of whatever line in the sand become caricatures.

All progressives are: \_\_\_\_\_. All conservatives are: \_\_\_\_\_.

All people who voted for Trump are: \_\_\_\_\_. All immigrants are: \_\_\_\_\_.

Just like “All tax collectors are: \_\_\_\_\_.”

Jesus always calls to see beyond broken cultural caricatures and see one another’s common humanity again.

But we are an American Church where most congregants spend exponentially more time consuming cable news than we do scripture, and it shows.

It shows in the way we love.

It shows in the dividing walls we let remain standing in our lives.

It shows in the lines in the sand we operate from.

It shows when we operate from “us and them”

When we adopted Raj, our now three and a half year old son from India, I had a lot of conversations about it along the way. And along the way I got questions like:

*“Why don’t you take care of the kids who need help on your own soil?”*

*“Why don’t you take care of your own?”*

We will see the fruit of the Gospel in your life and if the Gospel has changed you

By the way you define “*your own.*”

By who you host at the dining table.

By who you’d let your son and daughter marry or not marry.

By who you’d consider adopting or exclude from the conversation.

Our impulse is to subscribe to tribalism, to form our identity by inclusion and exclusion.

But grace always replaces exclusion with embrace.

**What the Church needs isn't to see more agreement from pew to pew.  
The Church needs to see more grace flowing pew to pew.**

Black or White. Red or Blue.

*There are no lines in the sand at the foot of the cross.*

The Bible calls for unity. And unity by its nature is found amidst diversity.  
Unity isn't uniformity, or found in agreement on all of life's details.  
Unity is found when we have grace for all our distinct differences.

Race and Politics are huge... It's why they've been addressed tonight. They are the most effective tool of the enemy to infiltrate the Church.

And as I was prepping this week I felt like there were three ways our mirrors get in the way of loving our family that may be less common, but they are also more subtle

### **MATURITY / IMMATURITY**

**Carlo Carretto** – *God loves what is not yet. What has still to come to birth. What WE love in a person is what already is: virtue, beauty, courage and hence our love is self-interested and fragile. God, loving what is not yet and putting faith in us, continually begets us, since love is what begets. Love is what helps us emerge from our darkness and draws us to the light.*

*And this is such a fine thing to do that God invites us to do the same.*

When you don't like people for who they are, or when you can't respect what they've done,  
Dare to love what is not yet. God invites us to do it.

How many of you had a wall or doorframe as a kid where you marked off growth?

- There is a realization that where I'm at now isn't where I'll stay.

- There is liberation in the realization that we are unfinished products.

Our families got this. May the family of faith have the same understanding.

And show each other the same patience that God showed us.

### **PASSIONS**

*Why don't other people in the church have the same level of passion for global missions?*

The implication is there's something wrong with them and they need the awakening that we've come to... but often they've simply been awakened to similar but different passion!

They're asking about...

*social justice? orphans and foster kids? the trafficked?*

Yet if we are family – we will all have unique passions the same way all brothers and sisters don't play the same sports or have the same pursuits.

We want the Church to be full of people with our passions.

But the presence of a diversity in passions is a gift to the Church!! Everyone can't do everything.

## BETWEEN CHURCHES

We've realized "family" speaks to not just our church family, but the Church at large. There are churches that live in isolation. Other churches are deemed competition. But reaching a city and a region and the world for God isn't the work for one church. It's a work for many. And it will take unity and partnership.

Nearly every letter Paul writes to Churches has a statement on division and unity.

### **Galatians 3:28**

*There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

**1 Corinthians 12:13** - *Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.*

**Colossians 3:11** - *In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

**Ephesians 2:14** - *For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.*

**Philippians**... a clear cry against division in gender or race or other line in the sand is absent. Why?

Philippians is the only letter we have in scripture where Paul isn't correcting teaching or rebuking behavior. They got unity. They avoided the trap of tribalism and division. How? Why would they? The answer lies in the plant team we meet in Acts.

**Lydia** is Asian woman we meet in Acts 16. She's wealthy. She's a fashionista.

Next we meet a **Trafficked Slave girl**

Lastly we meet a **Roman Jailer**

So we've got a wealthy Asian fashionista, a formerly possessed and trafficked slave girl, and a blue collar Roman jailer. Three people with wildly different backgrounds, behavior, and worldviews. These people were superficially incompatible. And they- with Paul- planted one of the healthiest churches he built.

The church should be a community that never would have formed on its own.

Aside from the grace of God, a fashionista, blue collar jailer, and former demon possessed slave aren't rubbing shoulders weekly.

How will you respond when you find yourself worshipping next to your tax collector?

The person you seemingly fundamentally disagree with?

The one who believes and behaves differently than you do?

**Romans 15:7** gives us a motto for our moment:  
*accept each other just as Christ has accepted you*

**WHY**

*...so that God will be given glory.*

John 17:

*“I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”*

If Jesus is going to be lifted up and the world will know God’s glory... it will take us laying down our mirrors, stepping out of our echo chambers, and coming alongside the diverse family of faith in worship.

Not due to agreement in all things.

But because God’s grace has covered all things.

***Accepting others as Christ has accepted us... so that God will be given the glory...***

heaven now, Heaven forever...

It’s a moment we taste of Heaven’s glory. No longer tied to tribalism and division, but every tribe and party and tongue... praising his name.