

God's Love in Caring

1. Intro & Context

- This term looking at God's love in action
- Aiming to explore what's it look like to be a community that loves and cares for one another
- If our mission here at C@P is to '*live to be and make disciples of Jesus*' ... then it's clear as you read the Bible ... that to *be a disciple of Jesus* ... means being a person who puts love and care of others into practice
- And therefore, love and care of others ... ought to characterise the community of believers who follow Jesus

- This morning I want to explore this with you ... God's love in caring
- Before we get into it I want to point out ... what we are doing here is a topical sermon ... its part of a topical sermon series
 - This is not our normal practice for preaching here at C@P
 - Normally we pick a book of the Bible or a section of a book ... and work our way through that
 - Reason being ... we want to let God set the agenda and tell us what we need to know ...
 - But from time to time we'll pick up a topic and see what God has to say on it
- What that means is ... sermons like to today seem less grounded in the Bible ... because we're often looking at lots of different passages and taking a broad sweep what the Bible has to say ... rather than digging deep in a particular passage
- Today will have a different feel to what we normally do
- As we explore what it looks like to be a community that puts love and care of others into practice ...
 - Culture shaped community
 - Christ shaped community
 - Caring shaped community

PRAY

2. Culture shaped Community

- Part of the brilliance of Steve Jobs and Apple is they know and understand the culture they sell to and operate in and their products reflect that!
 - iPod
 - iPad

- iPhone
- They all reflect what Jobs understood ... that we live in the iWorld in which everything revolves around 'i' ... that is the individual

- Individualism isn't a recent phenomena
 - Not like it start with the invention of Apple
 - But it has certainly become a dominant worldview in our modern western world
- The roots of individualism that marks our culture go back to the Enlightenment in Europe 300 years ago
- Since that time we've seen the rise in what might be called 'political individualism'
 - Equal rights every individual
 - Worth of every individual
 - Dignity of every individual
 - Freedom of every individual

- Behind that is the biblical ethic that all people are made in the image of God
 - Christianity was a dominant worldview in Europe at that time
 - And the rise of individualism comes from Genesis 1 ... that
 - all people are equal in the eyes of God,
 - all are valued and loved and have great dignity ...
 - because all are made in the image of God

- But according to philosopher Charles Taylor (Secular Age) it was post WWII that this political individualism exploded into expressive individualism
 - Previously the rights of individuals were considered important, but there were boundaries
 - The rights of individuals were exercised in the context of the good of the family, community, the church or the country
 - The rights of the individual were subject to the needs of the collective
- But post WWII individualism started to become absolutised and the good and rights of the individual began to outweigh the good and rights of the community ... and to say otherwise is considered evil and oppressive
 - Lots of reasons for this
 - Sexual revolution¹
 - Consumer revolution > growth of capitalism and materialism²

¹ Sex became an end in itself and part of one's identity rather than to build community

² Advertising promotes individualism as it encourages people to be different and stand out when you use product X

- Technological revolution³
- More recently the modern desire for authenticity which
 - *'encourages us to create our own beliefs and morality – the only rule being that they must resonate with who we feel we really are. The worst thing we can do is conform to some moral code that is imposed on us from outside – by society, our parents, the church or whoever else.'* (Author - Jonathan Grant)
- Now this is important, because the way we think about ourselves and our society ... will inevitably determine how we operate as a community
- If a culture thinks the individual is the primary unit within a community ... then it follows that the good of the individual must be prioritised and maintained
- There are many good things that flow from this
 - End to the slave trade and racial inequality in places like US
 - End of gender inequality that allowed women to vote
- But there are many dangers that individualism causes communities
- One of consequences of individualism is that it leads to loneliness and social fragmentation
- **Illustration – Bowling Alone**
- Robert Putnam wrote the book – Bowling Alone
 - His point is that Americans (where individualism is the norm) are becoming less and less community orientated
 - Seen in declining numbers of members and volunteers in organisations like
 - School P&Cs
 - Rotary
 - Lions Club
 - Red Cross
 - Scouts
- He puts it down to individualism
 - To illustrate why this decline in membership in social organizations is problematic, Putnam uses ten-pin bowling as an example
 - Although the number of people who bowl has increased in the last 20 years, the number of people who bowl in leagues has decreased

³ Technology (TV, internet, gaming) has driven us back into the homes away from traditional social interaction

- More and more people are bowling alone
- The phenomena of bowling alone typifies the eroding effects of individualism on community

- Not only does individualism leads to loneliness and social fragmentation, ... it also leads to social liberalism
- Many of the liberal ethical decisions society has made in a the last 50 years stems from individualism
- For example, we see it in things like
 - The individual rights of parents to decide what sex they want their baby to be ... will trump the rights of the unborn child who is aborted
 - The rights of an individual cancer patients are prioritised to push for euthanasia ... over the need to protect the vulnerable and unwanted elderly in community who are at risk of euthanised by uncaring families
 - The individual's right of an adult to watch pornography overrides the tremendous damage and harm it causes to those who consume it and particularly the women who are exploited in it

- So while individualism ...
 - brings good things to community
 - it also undermines good community

- But is the alternative any better?
- The alternative to individualism is collectivism
- Collectivism says the community or society as a whole is the basic unit ... and therefore the rights and the good of the whole take priority over the individual
- At times collectivism is a good thing because it will guard the vulnerable in our society from individualism
- Collectivism will
 - Charge taxes of individuals and redistribute it among the needy in our society
 - Insist that children are vulnerable people and therefore insist you can't work with children just because you want to ... but that you need to have a valid WWCC
- At times, collectivism is good for community

- But like individualism ... collectivism also has its dangers ... because there are times when the group is put ahead of the individual ... then there is great scope to undermine individuals and their rights

- One way this is experienced in more traditional cultures such as Africa or Asia which make an idol of the family
 - When the family is put ahead of the family this often leads to evil and violence being suppressed or overlooked
- When the people make an idol of their country... you end up with situations like Nazi Germany where the people were so caught up in their nationalistic pride ... they were blinded to the atrocities of concentration camps and Jewish extermination
- There's a Christian cult called Twelve Tribes that live in Katoomba
 - It requires total allegiance to the group ... such that you must
 - Live in that house / farm
 - Work in the cafe or farm
 - Home school kids
 - Not contraception
 - Marry within the clan
 - That's weird collectivism
- Communism is the ultimate expression of collectivism ... and communism is far from perfect

- So like individualism, collectivism also undermines good community

- So how can we experience good community where the good and rights of the individual are upheld, but not at the expense of the good the community as a whole ... and vice versa

3. Christ shaped Community

- One of the blessings of God revealing himself to us throughout history ... is that he shows us a way to live in community that ensure that neither the good of the individual nor the good of society is able to dominate the other
- God first did this in the OT at Mt Sinai when he gave Israel the Law and the 10 Commandments

- And then when Jesus came he was asked what was the greatest commandment in the Law ... his response was
 - *Matthew 22:37-39 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Deut 6:5) ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Lev 19:18)*

- The question is of course ...

- what does it mean to love your neighbour?
- what does loving your neighbour look like?

- On the night Jesus was arrested, just prior to his crucifixion, one of the many things he said to his disciples was
 - *A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you so must love one another – John 13:34*
 - And the very next day, Jesus showed his disciples how to love ... by willingly, sacrificially and unconditionally going to the cross and laying down his life to atone for their sin and reconcile them to their Father in heaven
 - It was an act of utter selflessness, other person centeredness and ultimate love

- And Jesus is saying ...
 - "This is how you are to relate to one another"
 - "Model your love for one another ... on my love for you"

- And so those who follow Jesus ... those who call themselves disciples of Christ ... are to relate to one another in selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love
 - And because Jesus says 'love **one another**' ... it's not a one way street ... it goes both ways
 - It's a mutual loving of one another
 - I love you and you love me

- **Application**
- What this means ... is the Christ shaped community is one that is characterised by 'mutual love relationships'
- It's a community that is not built around individualism or collectivism
- It's a community that is shaped by Christ's love for us ... expressed in mutual love relationships with one another

- Mutual love relationships means we relate to one another in a way that upholds the rights, value, dignity and freedom of each other as individuals ... as individualism does
 - But because there is **mutual** love for one another ... the rights or desires of one ... wont overthrow the good of others ... as valued by collectivism

- Mutual love relationships, modelled on Christ's love for us ... therefore begins to mould and shape a community that's able to uphold the strengths of both individualism and collectivism ... while avoiding their pitfalls
- And in that sense ... the Christ shaped community is therefore the ultimate expression of community
 - Because you as an individual are known and loved for who you are
 - And yet your mutual love for others will ensure you do what is best for others ... and not just for yourself

4. Caring shaped Community

- Let's explore what that looks like in reality
- Just as God gave direction and clarity to Israel with the Law and 10 Commandments ... so he gives us direction and clarity in the New Testament how to be a Christ shaped community
- One of the primary ways he does that is through the various exhortations about how we are to treat and care for 'one another'
- There are almost 50 'one another' statements in the New Testament that spell this out for us
- For example ... disciples of Christ are to ...
 - Be devoted to, honour, live in harmony, instruct, be kind and compassionate to, greet, accept, bear with, forgive, submit to, teach and admonish, live in fellowship with, encourage, serve, agree with, build up, pursue good for, accept some responsibility for, live in harmony with, confess to, pray for and love one another and show humility, kindness, and hospitality
 - Avoid provoking, passing judgment, slandering, envying, biting and devouring, criticising, lying to and complaining about one another
- Part of being a disciple of Jesus means learning to understand
 - that I am no longer the centre of my universe ...
 - but actually God is ... and others are too
- Other people matter
 - Others are no longer just the backdrop and supporting cast in the drama that is all about ME
- And the 'one-another' commands in the NT show us what loving one another looks like

- **Illustration – The Castle / The Vibe**

- In the movie, The Castle, Darryl Kerrigan is about to lose his house to an airport extension masterminded by a big company
- Darryl goes to this dusty small-time solicitor, Dennis Venuto, who insists the matter is way out of his league
- But Darryl's boundless optimism puts them both before the bench of the High Court of Australia
- However, the best argument Dennis can master is that to take Darryl's house is against the Constitution
- And when the judge says which section of the Constitution, Dennis says
 - "There's no one section ... it's the vibe of thing"

- If someone was to ask
 - "What does it look like to love one another in these mutual love relationships modelled on Christ's love for us?"
- The best way to answer is to quote Dennis Denuto
 - "There's no one thing ... it's just the vibe"
- Because it's not just one single thing
 - It's just lots of little things
 - It's a vibe!

- Each of these one another statements ...
 - reiterate mutual love relationships
 - and how the Christ shaped community cares for one another

- **Application**
- Living this out ... learning to 'one-another' is part of us living out our mission here at C@P
 - Our mission – we live to be and make disciples of Christ
 - One-anothering ... mutual love relationships ... is part of the way you and I live to be disciples

- And what happens when a group of people come together and begin live out this vibe of mutual love relationships
- Well you start to experience true community
 - A community that loves and cares for one another as individuals ...
 - Yet doesn't put their own desires, whims or preferences ahead of the good and needs of others
- Why?
 - Because I now participate in a community of others who really do matter and who generally are equally as precious as my precious self

- And in a world where 'bowling alone' and the rapidly disappearing presence of real community ...
 - through the Christ shaped community that cares for one another ...
 - God is redeeming the good community that he desires for us and for our world

- Part of God's intention in creation is for people to experience the blessing of community
 - The last book of the Bible in Revelation 7 ... depicts people from every nation, tribe, people and language ... gathered in harmony around the throne of God for eternity
 - A loving, Christ shaped community is part of our eternal purpose
 - And as we live out these 'one another' exhortations ... we start to get a glimpse of what the eternal community is like for all who are in Christ
 - You and I get to experience ... albeit in its imperfect state ... the goodness, joy and wonder of true community ... when we seek to live out mutual love relationships ... in our 'one another-ing'

- In John 13 after Jesus commands his disciples to '*love one another*' ... he goes on to say
 - *By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*

- In other words ...
 - Others will know you are my disciple in the way you love others
 - And as Christians live out mutual love relationships ... the community outside ought to look in and see true community
 - And therefore, the Christ shaped community that cares for one another ... will be attractive to others who don't know Jesus
 - Because it will be a true community that genuinely loves others

- **Illustration – Plagues**
- Sociologist and non-Christian, Rodney Stark wrote *Discovering God*
- In his chapter on Christianity he writes about the factors that led to the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire
- One of those reasons was the good works of Christians who would do things for others that pagans would not
- He said

- Nothing demonstrates this so vividly as the ways Christians and pagans responded when the plagues struck the empire as they did in AD165 and again in AD251
- The pagan response was panic and retreat
- Those who could, fled to refuge in the countryside
- Ordinary Greeks and Romans who couldn't flee attempted to avoid all contact with victims
- Hence when their first symptoms appeared, victims were thrown out in streets by their own families to join the piles of dead and dying
- But this was not how the Christians responded
 - Neither wealthy Christians nor clergy fled but took part in efforts to nurse the sick, not only of their own kind, but many pagans as well
 - Some of those who nurtured the sick lost their lives as a result
 - But as many as two thirds of those who were nursed and who would otherwise have died, lived
- And it was this witness of 'one-anothering' love and care during the plagues ... that lead many people to consider the claims of Christianity and come to put their trust in Jesus
- Now, it will never be enough for someone to become a Christian simply by seeing Christians loving one another
 - You need to hear the gospel
 - You need the Holy Spirit to soften your heart, open your eyes and bring you to repentance and faith
- However ... the witness of caring for and loving one another in mutual love relationships ... enables the good news of Jesus to be heard
- Without it ... Christians and the message of hope they have to share ...
 - will be dismissed and ignored because non-believers don't see gospel being lived out ...
 - They don't see it in action ...
 - And therefore they don't think it's a message worth listening to
- But when the Christ shaped community lives out mutual love relationships in the way that it cares for and loves one another ... it's a powerful witness to the gospel
- So ... true community is experienced when we live out these mutual love relationships modelled on Christ's love for us
- But how do you do that?

- What's going to help you and I go out from here and put that into practice
 - What's going to overcome my natural self-centeredness that wants to look after me
 - What's going to persuade me to push back against the culture of individualism that we swim in
- It's interesting that Rodney Stark said that in the days of the empire, it was impossible for paganism to match the love Christians showed to others
- Paganism was utterly incapable for generating the commitment need to motivate such behaviour
- What's going to motivate you and I to love and care for one-another in true community

- As for those in the plague, so for us ... it's the gospel!
 - It's the good news that Christ has shown you and I amazing grace
 - It's knowing when the plague of sin was upon us ... Christ didn't flee to the countryside to leave us to die
 - He didn't avoid us who were dying⁴
 - He came to us, he restored us ... and it cost him his life
 - Because at the cross he took on the plague of sin that should have claimed our life ... but instead ... at the cross it claimed his

- It's no coincidence ... that when we look at all the ways we're called on to care for and love one-another ... Jesus has done exactly the same for you and I ... only in a more profound and perfect way
 - You're not called upon to do anything Christ hasn't already done for you
- For example
 - Rom 15:7 - Welcome one another > Jesus welcomes us
 - Gal 5:13 - Be servants of one another > Jesus served us
 - Gal 6:2 - Bear one another's burdens > Jesus bore our sin
 - Eph 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tender-hearted and forgiving one another > Jesus is extremely kind, tender-hearted and forgiving of us

- As you and I absorb and comprehend the amazing goodness and grace of Jesus to us ... in the way he loved and cared for us ...
 - It will equip and motivate and impel you and I to love and care for one another
 - And as you do ... C@P will an expression of the true community that God intends for all of us ... now and for eternity

⁴ He said ... *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*
(Mark 2:17)