

“The Pandemic of Division”
Surviving the Pandemic: Ancient Practices for a New Normal
Matthew 16:24-26
Dr. Mark Foster
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Introduction: People don't want to _____ Jesus. They want Jesus to take their _____.
Despite what you may be told, God is not a Republican, Democrat, or Independent.
Jesus is the King who came to _____ the order of things.

First Century Context

Pharisees wanted Jesus to pick a _____. Jesus would not play their _____. (*Matthew 22:15-21*)
Sadducees wanted to make religious and political alliances with the rich and _____.
Zealots marched in the streets and planned to _____ what was theirs by violence if necessary.
Essenes _____ to the Judean desert to fast, pray, read scripture, and perform sacred rituals.

Today's Context: How does Christianity fit into a two-party system? It _____.
If God has all the _____ opinions as your political party, you are not worshipping God.
If you are red or if you are blue, it is _____ how often Jesus agrees with you.
What color represents Jesus? _____ represents royalty and Christ's sovereignty. (*John 19:1-5*)
We can never be more concerned with _____ than loving.

What Did Jesus Do?

Jesus _____ himself. (*Philippians 2:6-8*)
A servant is one who leverages their life to _____ others. (*Philippians 2:9-11*)
Jesus _____ others. (*John 13:3-5*)
The Church looks more like Jesus when we serve _____ rather than ourselves.
Jesus prayed for _____. (*John 17:11b, 20-21a*)
Why was this Jesus' prayer? So that the _____ may know God's love. (*John 17:21b-23*)
Jesus _____ those who thought they were “better than.” (*Luke 9:51-55*)

What Will We Do?

Welcome All: Whomever God sends. Church requires people who _____ differently than you. (*Philippians 2:2-3*)
Love Authentically: We will love and serve people with whom we _____. (*Philippians 2:4*)
Let Our Light Shine: We will be ridiculously _____. (The Golden Rule) (*Philippians 2:14-15*)
“We can model for our community what it is to live together
and disagree politically and love unconditionally.”

Action Steps

Humble yourself by allowing Jesus to _____ your political views. WWJHMD?
_____ someone this week with whom you disagree politically.
_____ for your church every single day for unity, innovation, and impact.

Daily Reading and Reflection

September 21-25

Monday – Hebrews 2: *“For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.” Heb. 2:16-17*

Yesterday Pastor Mark preached a message on the pandemic of division that we’re experiencing in our country and around the world. He directed our attention back to how Jesus responded to division, and specifically, division rooted in politics and power dynamics. As disciples we’re called to do the things that Jesus did: humble ourselves, serve others, pray for unity, rebuke one another when we get too big for our britches, and lastly, welcome all. If Jesus descended from the heavens for our sake, we can start by humbling ourselves before one another.

Let someone into your lane when traffic merges.

Tuesday – John 13: *“Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.” John 13:5*

Have you ever volunteered to pack food at a food bank, or participated in building a home with Habitat for Humanity? Have you been a part of installing a water well with our partners in Guatemala, or purchased snacks for Frontier Elementary? When we serve alongside one another, and when we serve others, our focus is no longer on ourselves, our politics, or even our economics. Serving others places us within the mind of Christ, and we are compelled to respond to the needs of others with compassion and unity. Service gets us out of “me” mode and into “us” mode.

September is Hunger Action Month for the Regional Food Bank. Pick one of their action items and follow through with it this week.

Wednesday – John 17: *“All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” John 17:10-11*

It is not coincidental that Jesus’ prayer in his last hours was focused on our unity. Jesus knew that in the aftermath of the events to come there would be division among Roman authorities and Jewish people, division among Jewish religious sects, and even division among the disciples in how they would respond. Division occurs when the most ancient parts of our brains are triggered to fight or take flight. Unity occurs when we pause and allow the spirit of God to move within us so that we are not frightened or threatened by “the other.”

Pray this prayer: “May I be one with my neighbor, Jesus, as you are one with the Father.”

Thursday – Luke 9: *“When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.” Luke 9:54-56*

This is a busy chapter in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus grants the disciples heavenly authority, prophesies, and performs miracles. Near the end of the reading, Jesus and the disciples are on the road in Samaria – a land and a people whom Jews detested – and when the Samaritans fail to extend hospitality to them, James and John see an opportunity to make use of their new authority. Instead, Jesus rebukes them and reminds them that they are humble servants, and not everyone they encounter will receive the Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not exclusive to us. Remember Monday’s reading – Christ came for all.

Be mindful of snap judgments you make about others. When you find yourself making one, consciously remember that they are a child of God.

Friday – Leviticus 19: *“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.” Lev. 19:9-10*

Pastor Mark likes to say that when the Bible says something three or more times, we better pay attention. This chapter in Leviticus provides holy repetition regarding how God’s people are to respond to one another. Whether we are rich or poor, from here or from there, regardless of our stories or in spite of our pasts, we are called to welcome all. It is a core value of Acts 2 because it is a core value to Jesus. We receive people where they are and how they are, and we love them with God’s love.

Invite someone to Church Outside (worship and fireworks!) on Saturday, September 26 at 6:00 PM.