

## Creating Hope through Relationships

### Philippians 2:1-4

Sunday, February 10, 2019

Words not only have meanings, they have feeling. The word community has a good feeling. It has become known to us through the relationships we build with others, in the institutions we work, live and worship in. But there is a complaint among many of us today that we have lost this. Which means we are losing that part of our life that offers safety and freedom, without the fear of judgment. It also provides us the context of moral and spiritual growth.

When Jesus died on the cross, he not only provided forgiveness to the world, he established a relationship of hope with the world. For his accusers and killers, he established relationships of unequal power in the world, and a chance at redemption. His accusers believed they were the ultimate power but Jesus let them know that their form of power robs people of dignity and was provisional and not ultimate. Jesus' relationship with them was **confrontational**, providing them a way to turn from their role as dictators to servants. Jesus' relationship with those that were victims was **compassionate**, being an advocate for them against the powers that kept them down. He set aside judgment in order to hold them up to find the grace that could heal their lives. For them Jesus took on the role of a big brother who would fight for them.

For those that loved him and were seeking his guidance, his relationship with them was one of **friend**. He invested his life and love with them. He gave them the best of himself hoping that they would give their best to each other. He could count on them to do what was necessary and useful. His relationship with them was more **mutual** in nature. While he was the leader he did not let that determine everything. Finally, Jesus' relationship with God was based on **trust, obedience and love**. It was God who sent him into the world and set his life toward a course for the hope of humanity and he accepted it. Jesus believed God and God believed in him. **They were one like no one else. Each felt the pain of the other, both felt the love of the other and both saw the same problem and the same solution.**

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In everyone's life there is a correspondence between the meaning of life which one has found, and the style of life that one conducts. Relationships form a style of life based on the meaning of life we have found and believe. All relationships are guided by what we have found to be the meaning in our life. We seek those that stand against us because without them knowing who we are and breaking down the barriers we fail to reach the goal of being peacemakers for Christ. We stand with the brokenhearted because we believe that all life has dignity and meaning. We sacrifice and commit ourselves to friends because we believe our life is better with them in our lives.

Civilization, communities and institutions are all supported by the relationships contained in them. They rise and fall based on the integrity and trust of the relationships that are fostered. If relationships are based on indifference and selfishness then divisions will rip apart what these institutions are trying to achieve. The church at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must develop all kinds of relationships---with those that are accusers of the church, those that are victims of the powerful, and those that are friends of the church and with Jesus who is looking to establish relationships with everyone. Relationships are established by a purpose. Relationships fulfill something that we are seeking. It all begins with living a life worthy of the gospel in the shadow of the cross. Relationships begin there. They do not begin out of need. They begin with God. To establish a life worthy of the gospel we must as Paul says, "lay down our interest for the interest of the other." In so doing we carry on the meaning of the cross. Jesus came into the world as its lord, but he didn't hold that over us. He gave it up to help the world live out its purpose, even if he had to die on the cross.

For relationships to flourish, becoming a tool of peace and hope, we must put our interests aside and commit ourselves to the purpose of God. This is what is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to re-establish the church as the foundation of hope and promise. The church, like all of us, needs to develop a lifestyle that is recognizable by the world. This lifestyle must be identified as relational, evangelical, open and real instead of legalistic. It has to be free of barriers and more concerned about being instruments of change through mutual respect.

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