

Christ Community Covenant Church
A Family Church: Living upright in an inclined world
Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 10, 2012

We are off and running on our 4Cs Story. Last week we talked about values. We noted a lot of them, from eating healthy to running to sports and then on to some higher values like family and freedom and our relationship with God.

Have you heard of something called non-negotiable values? When we talk about non-negotiable values it is talking about the core truths of our lives, the core beliefs that if we were to break them we would no longer be ourselves. To hold non-negotiable values is to say that these things we believe in are so important that I would be willing to die, to sacrifice all, to assure that these values survive. A person can't have all that many non-negotiable values because it would be impossible to keep track of them all and to be true to them all. Usually five or six is about all any one person can or should hold.

And when values come into conflict with another person or society, this is when it gets to be dicey. In a conflict of values, I am fighting for my very survival. We know that family is important. Historians, Sociologists and Anthropologists have agreed:

The family unit – principally a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace – is and always will be the basic social organization or unit of any society. This relationship alone provides stability in a sexual, emotional, intellectual and social way as no other can. This statement may seem prejudiced or biased against other forms of social organization, but it has proven true over hundreds and even thousands of years. ~ Lawrence Wilson, MD and Sociologist

Dr. Lawrence goes on to say:

Other forms of societal organization include most people remaining single or unattached, homosexuality, or various forms of collective living arrangements that are called free love societies, communes, kibbutz living in some cases, and others.

None of these have worked out on a large scale nearly as well as what is called a monogamous man-woman relationship in terms of stability and happiness for the couple, and for the society as a whole. When the families are strong, society is strong, as a rule. When families are weak, societies begin to break down.

Last week the first value that we suggested here at both congregations was the value of family. Both services; I think that is interesting. ***Do you think that family as a value is harder to live today than it was say 50 years ago? [Discussion]***

Last week when we began the process of identifying “the five stones” – the five building blocks that make up the methodologies of satisfying our mission to love God, love others and advance the Kingdom together – that we pulled these values by looking at the non-negotiable values of the Scriptures and DNA of our church. Our church has always been about family. We have seen this value in action in our commitment to youth ministry and children’s ministries.

Illustration: This next week starts Vacation Bible School and as you know we decided to make a change here so that we could more rightly support our value of family. We believe that parents should not drop their kids off (not just at VBS) and expect the church to do the heavy lifting when it comes to knowing God. Parents are the primary character givers and truth tellers in the life of their children. The church can aid and support but we must not usurp the role of parents.

What does it mean to be Pro Family in the 21st century?

First we have to define our terms a little bit . . . let's go to Scripture to first take a look at marriage as the foundational building block of marriage.

Genesis 2:24-25

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

"In a perfect world . . ."

- Heterosexual (male and female)
- Monogamous (single not plural)
- Permanent (one flesh)
- Intimate (naked and unashamed)

We are made to be in relationship. And not only that but deep intimate relationships. In a perfect world like the garden, where there was no sin, there was also no curse of a sin nature – of an inclination to sin – to mess things up. And unbridled intimacy was the standard for relationships. To be totally vulnerable and unashamed – that was the norm of the garden. But it is no longer a perfect world, is it? Relationships now are a struggle at our deepest most desperate core:

Genesis 3:8-9

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

In our 'Non-perfect world' we have:

- Confusion instead of Clarity
- Promiscuity instead of Promise
- Contracts instead of Covenant
- Intimidation instead of Intimacy

Confusion instead of Clarity

Have you noticed it too that the definition of marriage and the definition of family is under pressure to conform to a world's standards rather than God's? In some 30 states, there have been votes to establish a state constitutional amendment to define marriage as solely between a man and a woman. Six states have approved same sex marriage and another three states have approved same sex marriage but are under a judicial review. Civil unions as a way of giving same sex relationships legal standing has been up front and center in the news. When the debate increases, the confusion increases. Polygamy is finding traction again in some places. When surveyed, one third of married women said their pet was a better listener than their spouse, and 14% would choose their pet over their spouse. If you go online you will find many reports of people marrying various animals. There is confusion.

Promiscuity instead of Promise

There is a reason that there are vows in a marriage ceremony.

To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

These words establish a promise that protects the couple. These words give significance and security to the couple. They create trust. Sadly, the statistics for Christian marriages when it comes to fidelity are not very sterling. I know that homosexuality has become a very significant issue for many Christians but frankly the problem of heterosexual promiscuity is by far a more

profound concern and damaging by the raw numbers alone and we rarely get spiritual heartburn over it. Sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage is epidemic in our country and serial monogamy is rampant and it is destroying marriages and society. Promiscuity instead of promise.

Let's keep going. In this imperfect world we live in, marriages have been reduced to legal contracts with escape clauses instead of an unbreakable covenant.

Contracts instead of Covenant

You can go online and find pre-nuptial agreements that define the terms of the marriage and what constitutes compensation for when the marriage fails. This behavior begins the marriage with the expectation of failure. A covenant on the other hand is considered unbreakable.

[Salt Illustration]

There is a greater reason than sociology to be concerned about the current failing status of marriage and family. It is spiritual. Marriage is a picture of God's character and of His love for the Church and the church's love in return:

Ephesians 5:31-33

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Intimidation instead of Intimacy

And now we find abuse of all sorts rampant across the world. Instead of the intimacy found in the garden where a couple could be naked and unashamed and without fear, now we find that we must have safe houses for battered women. What has the world come to?

How are we to respond as a church?

How are we to make a difference in this most important value of 'family'? First and foremost we need to have an understanding that this is not their problem - this is our problem. Romans 3:23 says:

Romans 3:23

. . . For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .

The problem of the curse – of the inclined nature of the world – is a problem for Christ Followers as well as for those who do not yet believe in Christ. We have much to confess as Christians when it comes to marriage and family, much to repent. Getting our own relationship with God back to solid ground is job one. Then we must respond with love and truth.

With Love and Truth

That means that rather than 'lower the bar' and 'wink at indiscretion,' we must hold the standards of family high and fight for them. First in our own families and marriages. We must be relentless in protecting and promoting the health of our families. No one will ever love your family as much as you will.

Family is supposed to be the one place where you find unconditional love, absolute truth and safety in a dangerous world.

It must be a matter of prayer, discipline and attention. And parents must step up. And kids must step up too.

With Grace and Mercy

When it comes to a fallen culture that surrounds us we must respond with grace and mercy. I have seen that too often the church seems to be about judging. Singles will tell you they often feel like second class citizens when they come to church. Those with a history of divorce and those who have blended families are often on the defensive, having to defend themselves against the raised eyebrows of the legalist. Again let me say, in a perfect world things would be different, but this is not a perfect world and no one is perfect. I am not talking about lowering the standards for marriage and family. I am talking about giving the same grace to others that we have received.

With Sacrifice and Honor

The mark of love when it comes to a Christian is to die to self and to consider others more important than ourselves. Listen to these words by Margaret Mead:

“Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we've put it in an impossible situation.” ~ *Margaret Mead*

Our task is to move toward Christ together.

Moving toward Christ

All of us are on a journey. All of us have made mistakes and most all of us are terribly sad about that. We have hurt the ones we love the most and have disappointed ourselves and God in the process. We must not be so proud so as to expect that we can go it alone. And we must never forget that we are on a journey and so are those in the room around us. We set our standards high and we value family and the hope and life that it provides. And we must also recognize that we live in an inclined world and I will fall and others who love me will fall. And then it is time for repentance and forgiveness. It is time for the church to extend her family to the unwanted and the unborn. To the single and single again. To the young and restless and the old and marginalized.

We are a Family Church and I suspect we will always be a family church. It is in our DNA and we will love marriages and families with all our heart and soul and mind and strength because to love our family is to love God.

Prayer