

Week Six: We Celebrate the Friction

Mark 9:38-50; Colossians 3:8-14

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Think about the different tribes you're a part of: family, faith, political, sports. What are some of the common bonds that unite those tribes?
2. Now think about those tribes some more: how far could someone deviate from the norms of the tribe and still be included? Can someone be a Republican even if they're pro-choice? Can someone be a Christian even if they believe in evolution? Can someone be a Cardinals fan even if they think Yadier Molina is past his prime? What is a different belief someone could have and still be a part of *your* tribe?
3. But what is the one non-negotiable? What thing *must* someone do or believe to be an accepted part of your group?
4. Now read Mark 9:38-41. What was the disciples' concern?
5. What one thing did Jesus call out as sufficient for someone being allied with him and his ministry?
6. As you do some self-reflection, have you more naturally sided with the disciples' position or Jesus' admonition?
7. As we close out a series on "bridging divides," pray for God to reveal obstacles that you have placed in the path of welcoming people into God's covenant community. Ask God to use you to be a welcoming person in a time of division and hostility.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. If you had to describe Jesus' personality in a word or two to someone who didn't know about Him, which words would you pick?
9. Now read Mark 9:42-50. How does this speech from Jesus compare to the personality you described?
10. We often talk about how forgiving Jesus is. But in this speech, what does Jesus say will be the consequences of our own sins?
11. This portion of Jesus' speech seems especially odd, compared to how Jesus began it! Look again at Mark

9:38-41 (the passage from Day One). How would you reconcile these two seemingly contrasting arguments?

12. In verses 38-41, Jesus is talking about how we judge other people. In verses 42-50, He's talking about how we should judge ourselves. What is the difference?
13. In general, how would you evaluate the job that Christians have done of maintaining this kind of distinction? How well do you think you've done at being graciously inclusive of others, while treating your own sins seriously?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN by thanking God for His grace and mercy for all people, even ourselves with our sinful hands, feet, and eyes! Pray that He would help you share His mercy for others, just as He is merciful with you!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. What is the reason that an unbelieving world should look at Christians and believe in God? In other words, what is our "selling point" which shows that God is true and He loves us? Is it joy? Truth? What one thing would you boil our Christian witness down to?
16. There are a few good answers to that question, but Jesus gives what may seem like an odd choice. Read John 17:20-26. What does Jesus pray for God the Father to give to His disciples so "that the world will know" (NLT) the truth of Jesus' message?
17. Why might this be more foundational to our witness than truth, or hope, or love?
18. By this metric, what grade should the contemporary church receive? (If you need help with this question, google "number of Christian denominations"!)
19. How "unified" do you personally feel with the larger Christian body of believers? Why do you feel that way?
20. This is a big question, and one that we'll more fully explore tomorrow, but think about this: what would it take for Christians to live out the unity that Christ prayed for on our behalf?
21. Pray and ask God to send His Holy Spirit of Unity into you, and all the brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that He would help His people be the force for unity that He designed us to be.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. What practical skills does it take to maintain "unity" within your family?

23. Read John 17:20-26. How realistic is Jesus' prayer for unity for His followers, do you think? Why?

24. While unity is not impossible, it is certainly difficult. It requires a willingness to be humble and ask questions about the other side. What is a conflict that you are currently going through?

25. Work through these questions from Tim Otto about this struggle: "How is God at work in this conflict? How can we cooperate in the midst of this conflict?"

26. "What might we learn from this conflict about church unity and being one in Christ?"

27. "How can we work to make Jesus' Gethsemane prayer (John 17:20-26) a reality?"

28. End your FIFTEEN by praying and asking God to help and guide your efforts.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Picture a person who seems to be good at welcoming all different kinds of people. What do you think it is about them that lets them be such a person of peace?

30. Read Colossians 3:8-14. What two ways of living is Paul contrasting?

31. In the "new life in Christ," what kinds of divisions no longer matter? (See v.11)

32. What are the updated 2018 versions of these divisions? What identities divide people nowadays?

33. In verse 12, Paul gives us the "antidote" to divisions. What are they?

34. Of these things we can "clothe" ourselves in, which one comes most easily to you? Which one is the most difficult?

35. Conclude your final FIFTEEN this week by praying to God in His mercy that He would continue to help you develop His virtues for peace: mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.