

Loving God (Missio Dei)

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Date: 06 September 2020

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[0 : 0 0] And so we are the Table Church, and the Table Church has a vision statement, and vision statements, you know, they're like kind of corporate and business-y, but they're also important because they help the people who are part of the organization, the nonprofit, the church, know what we're up to, and they give us a sense of direction and purpose and calling and where we're going together.

So the Table Church's vision goes like this. It says, the table exists to call people to become authentic and thoughtful followers of Jesus and to join God in the renewal of all things.

So a couple key words, we want to be authentic and thoughtful, and we use words like that because we have experienced things that are not particularly authentic and not particularly thoughtful.

We've experienced expressions of faith, expressions of life that they were faking it. They were plastering on a smile and just hoping it all works out, and they were not particularly thoughtful because when they were met with critique, it fell apart.

So we want to be that kind of church, one that's authentic and thoughtful, and we say that we want to join God in the renewal of all things. And implied in that statement is that God is up to something good. God is up to the renewal of all things.

[1 : 1 6] God is not just going to let it all burn or set it aflame himself. No, rather, God is up to the work of recreating the cosmos and asking us to join him.

So that's our vision statement. And then we have some value statements. And our value statements, there are five of them, and that's what's going to kind of define the outline, the structure of these next five weeks of sermons.

We're going to talk five weeks about these five value statements. And they go like this, loving God, loving people, pursuing excellence, living generously, and having fun.

And because I'm a nerd and I like theology, I've attached each of these value statements with a Latin, a historic Latin phrase from the Christian faith. And not just because I'm a nerd and I like Latin, but because this is a reminder that our faith and our church is part of a larger, historic, broader, ancient movement of God's people following what God is up to.

So loving God is about the missio day, the mission of God. Loving people is about the imago day, the people being made in the image of God. Pursuing excellence is about the gloria day for the glory of God. Living generously is about gracia day, about the living thankfully gratitude.

[2 : 3 0] And about having fun is about ludicrous day, and I'm excited about that sermon. It's about the fun that God has and how we can join him in that. Now, when we talk about values, we talk about two different kinds of ways of thinking about these things.

There's two styles of thinking that we can have about groups of people, organizations, churches, nonprofits, all of that. There's bounded set thinking. And bounded set thinking is what we're used to.

There's an in group and there's an out group. Whose in is set by a set of boundaries, definitions, principles, and then whose out can't be in because they don't match the description.

Think about like dog, cat. You as a human being, you are able to identify what's a dog and what's a cat. There's a set of principles of things that look like dogs that don't look like dogs, and you know what the difference is.

That's bounded set thinking. But there's another kind of thinking, and it's not like better or worse. It's just a different approach of thinking about things, and that's centered set thinking. So a centered set says there is a center, a defined center goal, a direction that we want to be going.

[3 : 45] And as opposed to in and out language, we use language of towards or away. Are we going towards the center or away from the center?

Now, this doesn't make sense when you're talking about dogs and cats. Like cats can't become more dog-like, even though we all wish they would. Sorry, cat lovers. But like we can talk about Christ-likeness, about being filled with the fruit of the Spirit, being loving and patient and kind and all those kinds of things.

And like think about it in terms of fitness. Like is there a day when your Apple Watch tells you today you have become fit? No. Like it's a center.

It's a goal. There's a concept of what fitness is. But what my Apple Watch can tell me is am I moving towards fitness or away from fitness? Anthony, you have sat for 12 hours today.

Maybe you should do something about that. Or am I moving towards it? Like Anthony, you have exercised for more than a minute. Well done. Well, that's centered set thinking. Now, when a church comes up with value statements, what we're doing is we're setting a center that we want to move towards.

[4 : 50] There's not a day when I'll get a notification that says, Anthony, you have become loving. Like it just doesn't work like that. Rather, I am part of a community of believers that's asking me questions of am I moving towards the direction of lovingness?

Of loving people? Of being generous? Of being kind? Of having fun? Am I moving that direction? Or does my community hold me accountable and say like, Anthony, you've kind of been a jerk lately.

You're moving away from the center. That's centered set thinking. So we talk about values. This is not about who's in and who's out. Or rather defining a center so we can hold each other accountable towards are we moving towards the center or away from the center.

What we're focusing on today is the value that the table church has of loving God. And I wanted to pair this with the ancient, historical, orthodox Christian idea of the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God.

Because loving God actually doesn't start with us. Loving God isn't actually something that just begins, is instituted, has its genesis, its origin within ourselves.

[6 : 04] Rather, this is what 1 John 4, verse 19 says. As John writes, we love because God first loved us.

We, as God's creation, as God's created human beings, are capable of love because God was the first mover towards us in love.

We are capable of being loving creatures, loving human beings, because God was the one who gave us the grace and the ability to do so in the first place.

And so if we're going to talk about what it means to love God, we need to be able to answer a couple questions. Who is God? And what is love? I'm sure you all have the song in your head.

What is love? Baby, don't hurt me. That's what we're going to be talking about today. So here's the outline for the sermon. We got three myths or lies or mistruths or alternative facts, whatever your preferred word is.

[7 : 05] Three myths, three truths, three kinds of love, and three therefore. Okay? So three myths, three truths, three kinds of love, and three therefore.

So let's get right into it. Myth number one, you may have heard something like this. Because of the sin in your life, because of your sin nature, sin with a capital S, sins, plural, because of who you are, what you've done, God cannot stand to be in your presence.

God is so holy and just and other that because of your sin, your sin nature, what you've done, your history, your past, your very being, your very core, because of that, God cannot stand to be in your presence.

That's God's holiness. And God really just doesn't like you. He can't love you. It's his very nature to not be able to love you because of what you're like.

But thank God for Jesus. Because Jesus came and there was this massive gap between your nature and God's holiness. And then Jesus got in the middle and said, no, but really, God, they're okay.

[8 : 09] And that's this gospel, what Dallas Willard called the gospel of sin management, that the only reason that Jesus exists and came was to convince God that actually just don't look at them, look at me instead.

Don't look at their sin and their faults. There's plenty of them. Look at me instead. And then maybe then you can love them. And so Jesus is like holding God at arm's length and making sure that God doesn't actually see what we're really like because God would have no choice but to destroy us, send us to hell.

Now, that's not really how the Bible talks about God and God's love for us. This is the truth that we want to proclaim instead, that God always moves towards his creation, and that's you and me, towards us and his creation in love, even when we're at our worst.

And this is like the story of scripture, even all the way back to like Genesis 1 and 2 and 3, when Adam and Eve, they fail, they mess up, they hide, they lie. And God's first response is not like, I got to get out of here.

I'm too holy for all this crap going on. No, God goes into the garden, and he goes looking for Adam and Eve who are hiding. And that story, that Genesis 3 story, is like a microcosm of the entire story of the cosmos, that even though we have our tendencies to rebel and to fight and to not want to listen to the kind of God that God is, God moves towards his creation out of love, out of an abundance of mercy and grace.

[9 : 51] God isn't so holy that he can't stand to be in our presence. God is so holy that he moves towards us even in our darkest, worst moments. Listen to Romans chapter 5.

This is what Paul writes. Paul says, And remember, like any sort of theology that pits God against Jesus is not Trinitarian historic Christian thought, because historic Christian thought says that like you have God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and what is true of the Spirit is true of Jesus, is true of God, because they are all divine.

They are three persons, but one God. And so it's not like God's really pissed off, and Jesus is like, well, let me talk him down. I'm like, no. Jesus is, in fact, God in the flesh.

So God showed his great love for us by sending Christ, God in the flesh, to die for us while we were still sinners. Ephesians 2 puts it like this.

God, who is rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

[11 : 06] God, and I love, like Paul's tripping over his words. God, who is rich in mercy out of the great love for us with which he loved us, love, love, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

And this is the idea of the missio dei, the mission of God, that God is on a mission to save his world, that his world, let's admit it, it's broken. Like, we're going to talk in a few months from now about, like, sin and what sin is and why it's so a useful word and why we got to talk about it.

But, like, it's brokenness. It's the fact that we have to talk week after week after week about systemic racism. It's why we have to talk week after week after week about a pandemic that won't go away.

It's why we have to talk about all these kinds of things that keep happening, that keep going, because there's sin and there's brokenness. And God's response wasn't to just get away. God's response was to move towards us and to launch a new creation.

That is the mission of God. And so the kind of love that we see in this, the kind of love that God is revealing is a word you might have heard of. There are a bunch of words in the Greek language for love, and one of them is agape, or if you want to be technical, agape, okay?

[12 : 24] Agape love. And this is how one theologian defines it, and I love this. He calls it in spite of love. It's acting intentionally to promote overall well-being, even in response to that which brings ill-being.

It's God's movement of love towards us in spite of the fact that as a creation, as a cosmos, as a human race, we rebelled.

In spite of that, God still moves towards us. That's agape love. Fantasy author Patrick Rothfuss puts this kind of love like this.

In many ways, this is the main character thinking, In many ways, unwise love is the truest love. Anyone can love a thing because. It's as easy as putting a penny in your pocket.

But to love something despite. To know the flaws and love them too. That is rare and pure and perfect. That's the kind of love that God has for his creation, or one of the kinds of loves.

[13 : 32] That God loves us even in spite of our rebellion, even in spite of our sin and our oppression, and the way that we've messed things up and rebelled, and have spoken untrue things about God.

God still moves towards us in love, even in spite of all of that. Therefore, it's our first therefore of the night. We love God.

How? Through worship and through loving others, even when they hurt us. Like, this is the part that makes us a little uncomfortable, right? This is the part that's hard.

That there are people who hurt us, that harm us, that make us really angry and upset. And when we want to show the kind of love, the kind of agape love that God has for us, we love them anyway.

And love doesn't mean just like letting them do whatever they want. Love has an intention towards overall well-being. And that's what we want, even for our enemies.

[14 : 31] Because that's the kind of God that God is. Myth number two. Myth number two says that there is nothing good or desirable about you.

You may have heard a gospel like this, that you are utterly worthless, you are a worm, that you are despicable, despicable, and that there is nothing that God could possibly want to do with you because of your sin.

And so you are just on your own, by yourself, despicable worm. I mean, there's a word for it. It's called wormism. Like, go look it up in some of the pietist thoughts from the like 16, 1700s.

There's just nothing to you at all but dark, broken ugliness. But again, this is not how scripture talks about humans. This is the truth that you were created in the image of God.

And that God loves you, likes you, even enjoys you. Wants to spend time with you. Wants to be with you. Wants to be in your presence. Wants to be with you. It's related to the first one, right?

[15 : 37] That God is moving towards us out of a desire for relationship. Genesis chapter 1 gets right at the heart of it. God created humankind in his image, in the image of God, he created them.

There is something innately valuable about us, something dignifying about the human race that God has placed inside each of us.

Acts chapter 17, Paul is preaching to a crowd in the city of Athens and Paul quotes affirmatively one of their poets that says, we are God's offspring.

And remember, like, Paul is not talking to a church. He's not talking to a bunch of believers. He's talking to people who don't know, yet know Jesus or believe in the resurrection. And Paul is still able to say like, no, listen, you are God's offspring.

God made you. God calls you his child. Ephesians chapter 1 says this. It says, how blessed is God and what a blessing he is.

[16 : 41] He's the father of our master, Jesus Christ. And he takes us to high places of blessing in him long before God laid down the earth's foundation. So like before time, before creation, before you were able to like do something good or do something bad, long before that, God had us in mind.

God had settled on us as the focus of his love to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago, God decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.

And what pleasure God took in planning this. God wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift giving by the hand of his beloved son.

And so this shows us the second kind of God's love and that's a Greek word called eros or eros. Now, many of us, we've heard like the idea of erotic love and it's like sexual love, the love that you have for like somebody you're attracted to, right?

Well, like eros eros in the Greek didn't just mean that. It had the idea of because of love, loving someone or something because of their inherent worth and beauty and dignity.

[17 : 54] And so eros love affirms what is good and beautiful and valuable and seeks to enhance it. And so like eros kind of love, one of the loves that God has for us isn't just about like, well, I love you in spite of how bad you are, even though that's true.

God also loves us because of who we are, because of our inherent dignity and worth. And so like, don't hear me wrong. I'm not like, you know, if you love your house plants, you love it because it's green and vibrant and like it's something living inside your home or your apartment.

Like, I'm not telling you to erotically love your house plant, okay? This is like how bad sermons go bad. But like, you love it because there's something valuable about it.

When you love somebody that you're attracted to, when you love a family member, when you love a friend, you love it because of the value that it brings. And like, not just in a selfish way because that becomes like covetousness, but you love it and you want to add value to it.

You want to add joy to that person, to that thing. That's the kind of love that God has for us. And so the therefore statement is this, we love God and God's creation by building communities of belonging that value each other's inherent dignity and worth.

[19 : 13] So if you want to know how to love God, we love God through loving his people even in spite of the things that they do to hurt us.

And if you want to love God, you build communities of belonging because of the kinds of people that God has placed in our lives. Myth number three, you may have heard a gospel that says, you are nothing but an underling in God's kingdom.

Now, like, as a pastor, I've been told, you know, subtly versioned of this most of my life that I need to lay my life down on the altar of ministry.

I need to give it all, sacrifice it all. It doesn't matter what relationships or family relationships suffer because there is nothing more important than just giving and serving and sacrificing for God's kingdom, for God's service, for God's ministry.

And maybe you've been told something like that before by a church. They're like, hey, I know you're tired. I know you're exhausted. I know, like, everything's going bad for you. That's just a sign that you just need to serve more, that you just need to volunteer more, that you just need to give even more.

[20 : 14] You are just an expendable soldier in God's army. Come on now. I think that's a myth. This is actually how God speaks about us and our relationship with him, that we are called to be God's friend and partner in the recreation of the world.

And this friendship language, this partnership language, doesn't make us peons or slaves or expendable nobodies, but rather it elevates us to what we said before, people made in the image of God.

1 Corinthians chapter 3 tells us that we are God's co-workers. The Greek word synergoi, we've talked about the idea of synergy before, that God's loving energy and our loving energy combining together to remake the world into something beautiful and whole and no longer cursed or broken.

2 Corinthians 6, as ones who are partnering with God, again, that word synergy, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. God is reaching out his hand in partnership with us so that we can join God in his work of renewal.

Romans chapter 5 puts it like this, if while we counted ourselves God's enemies, God initiated reconciliation to us through the death of his son, how much more will we be saved by the son's life?

[21 : 40] Our Lord Jesus Christ has restored our friendship with God. And of course, John chapter 15, Jesus talking to his disciples says, I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning.

No, I am naming you my friends because I have let you in on everything I've heard from the Father. Jesus calls us friends of God and God is letting us in on his plans and how he intends to redeem and save the world.

And so this is philia kind of love. Greek word that often gets translated as brotherly love, Philadelphia. And I think this is alongside love.

This is love that establishes deeper levels of cooperative friendship. Philia is what co-labors for good. Therefore, we love God through worshiping God, through loving people in spite of how they hurt us and harm us and how they've hurt creation.

We love them that way. We love God through building communities of belonging and affirming the dignity of worth of everything and everybody God has created. And we love God by accepting God's partnership and being conformed to the image of Christ, joining in God's mission of saving the cosmos.

[23 : 02] And so we see agape, eros, and philia in spite of love, because of love, alongside love, worship, community, and mission.

This is the center that we are moving towards as a church, that we want to be known as a people who love God, not because we're frightened of God, not because God thinks of us as despicable and if we don't shape up, then our lives are going to fall apart.

We love God because God loved us first. We love God's person. We love God's nature. We love God's character because God is already up to something good.

God is on a mission to save creation. God is on a mission to save the cosmos, to save you, to save me, to redeem us and to restore us and everything broken, everything sad, becoming untrue.

And so we love God by saying, yes, I want to be a part of that. I want to join you in what you're up to and I want to submit my life to that work because it is good and it is beautiful and it is true.

[24 : 12] thank you and I'm going to take care and thank you so much for bringing your life and your life and your life and your life can South and your life and your life and your life to the Pen and your life and your life and your life and your life and my life and your life and your life and your life and your life and your life and your life