

Marion weekly update

SERMON February 4 - "Mwe" 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

This week we consider a summary of a session led by Dr. Dan Siegel. What is incredible is that we're going to see that there are Biblical principles that have been proven through research and scientific experimentation. In the presentation he focused on a term he coined, MWe. The term is the result of his research into how we think, what makes for the most productive thinking, and how humanity best lives together in community with one another. What he spoke about has direct linking to several of our previous messages. The idea of wholeness and purpose are key in the sense of living together most fully. Dr. Siegel had an interesting sentiment regarding addiction. What is the opposite of addiction? In his experience the answer is connection. Living in a very individualistic and self absorbed culture, so many of the things we are told are the answers to questions about life are incorrect. Chasing after them doesn't satisfy and so more and more is what we think we need. There is a very real sense in the mental health community that post COVID perhaps the greatest epidemic is loneliness and isolation. As a society we are fragmented, not integrated. Integrating is the healthy combination of having our own sense of self and at the same time recognizing our linking to one another. Here comes the MWe. I am my own individual self, the me. I am also a part of a greater whole, the we. But in the fullest expression of community these aren't separate, they merge together. They form the MWe.

One of the factors in not only seeing one another, but also cultivating the greatest possibilities for problem solving involves awareness. Awareness of self, others, all that exists around us and of which we are a part. His research has shown that there is a common result of people across the board who seem to have developed the fullest sense of awareness. When asked what really matters, what purpose revolves around, what is the key to life the resounding response was one word. Love. Does this sound like anyone we tend to talk about on Sunday mornings?

Dr. Siegel has a model he's developed that is more involved than what I'm about to share, but the summary is useful in cultivating humility, as well as giving us the best chance to explore as many options as possible in problem solving and certainly in expanding our potential to see God's answers to our questions and prayer. He somewhat lightheartedly shared that he found G.O.D. This is an abbreviation for Generator Of Diversity.

This isn't diversity as we're used to hearing about it in our social and political language. It's about the greatest diversity of possibility that is available. It unlocks creativity and uniqueness in finding solutions. The diagram has a vertical plane called probability and a horizontal plane called awareness. Awareness encompasses every possibility there is, or for us the ones we can grasp. The broader the awareness the greater the creativity and possibility. The probability plane is about how much we allow our boundaries on what we think will work or we're willing to do intrude on exploring the possibilities. The more we put onto the vertical plane, the more limited our possibilities become as we rule them out without exploring their potential.

Of course once we've explored and have to develop a plan other considerations come into play. What we're talking about is how much gets ignored or ruled out, that might have had great potential to achieve what we're looking for.

This is so connected to our faith. When we go to God, how much have we already ruled out? God is infinite which means there are infinite possibilities of what we might get in response. When we enter the experience with what we think we already "know" and either won't do don't want to do, or assume won't succeed we've just taken an infinite God and placed God in our own cage of expectations. Yet we also say that God can and does do exceedingly more than we can possibly imagine.

Two more terms are important as we look at the fullness of relationship in community are intraconnection and interconnection. Intraconnection is about what's going on inside of us. Are we whole? Do we know ourselves? Have we found our purpose? What does our actual relationship with God look like? Is it genuine? Does it have integrity and consistency? Where do we ourselves in the grand scheme of a much bigger whole of humanity?

Interconnected celebrates our individuality in the midst of being connected to those around us. For people of faith it is about how we put others first. Loving our enemies. Allowing our individuality to be tempered by the example and witness of Jesus Christ.

Putting them together forges the best spirit for being with one another. What is going on inside drives us to see that we aren't just one with ourselves. We aren't just one with God. We are one with everyone. Our individuality is then celebrated within that greater whole. We are part of the MWe.

Think about this. We have the ability to be in contact with people half a world away. One stray comment on media and someone half a world away can disrupt someone else. If they go into a rant they affect the people around them. Family, friends, co-workers, etc. Something happens in another country that affects shipping or trade and the world feels the pinch at the cash register. The more global things get, the more we affect one another next door and across time zones.

So what the devil does this have to do with our Corinthians passage?

We're going to break this passage out broader than it's specific context. This is about sexual immorality, yet there is something much bigger going on here. It's about to whom we belong. To what do we belong? There are three levels here. There is belonging to self, belonging to each other, and belonging to God.

Belonging to self in this is about how we treat what we've been given. How do we treat our bodies? How do we treat our relationship with the Lord? Do we understand that we can actually harm ourselves spiritually by the mistakes we make? The way we conduct ourselves towards one another always has a resulting effect on us as well. This honesty brings humility and should tie us to one another in a way that we love our neighbor with great care. With the love of Christ. Not only is this loving to them but it's also loving to ourselves. Love others as yourselves I believe Jesus once said.

Then there is the related belonging to each other, particularly if we claim to follow Christ. When the passage says that sexual sin is the one sin we commit against ourselves, the negative space is just as important. Every sin we commit is against someone else. Once again. Love your neighbor. For that matter love your enemy! There is such a clear notion that for the world to come into its fullness we have to look out for one another. Everything is connected together. God's plan brings us united in a direction that brings peace, contentment, and joy not just for a few but for all.

You've heard me say many times that we needn't look any further than Cain and Abel. Cain after murdering his brother asks "am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is a resounding "yes". It's the great MWe. This integration. We are one with ourselves and we are also one with each other.

For us there is one more factor. MWe is all encompassing. Nothing is removed. Especially God. This is the end of the passage. We are not our own. We are bought with a price. If we are in Christ, we belong to God. We are called to be one with God. Faith gives deepened meaning and clearer direction to all that we are.

What is the price we were bought with? Sacrifice. Jesus' willingness to give all of Himself for the better of everyone else. Will we do the same? This sacrifice of Christ is the ultimate MWe. In the garden He struggled with the Me, but recognized that His purpose was one with the needs of all humanity. His was the ultimate interconnection with others. He suffered and died so that others might, as scripture says, have abundant life...and eternal life.

We know what this means in terms of how we are to be in relationship with one another Biblically. We have science to demonstrate that this is the healthiest and fullest way for us to share this world together. The rest is now up to us. Can we fully embrace ourselves and at the same time set ourselves aside to belong to God and one another, uplifting all of us to the greatest we can hope to be?

BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel 5 and 6

This week we looked at two chapters. Chapter 5 is quite short, and the two are fairly inseparable in my opinion. We're seeing that there are some strange chapter division thus far. The book as written had no chapters or verses, this was someone else's decision later down the road. At the end of chapter 6, it kind of takes the beginning of 7 to put the clarifying cherry on top of that final detail.

The ark of God has been captured by the Philistines. As a trophy they have taken it and placed it in the temple of their God Dagon. This is their way of saying that Dagon is greater than God. The first night Dagon topples face down before the ark. What they thought is being undone. Dagon is bowing before God. They set their idol upright. The next night Dagon topples again, and breaks into pieces. His head and hands are at the threshold of the room. There is thought that this represents that God and Dagon had a fight, Dagon was soundly beaten, and he was crawling away trying to escape before expiring or passing out.

From that day forward that spot became superstitious and no one would step on it. I liken it to an extent to the old childhood rhyme "step on a crack, break your mama's back."

While this may seem strange to us today, it really shouldn't. The Israelites at the time had a similar relationship with the ark. They hadn't acted in consistent faith towards God for a long time. Yet like the proverbial rabbit's foot they thought the good luck charm of the ark would give them victory in battle. They were wrong. Today people think that wearing a cross will give them protection. Some believe that if you crack the right code or formula of words God is obligated to give what we ask for. We can make a mini idol out of anything.

Idols have been made out of church buildings. There is a facility to carry out God's ministry, yet we dare not use it for fear of "messing it up." The Bible has even been made into an idol. "Don't dare question this book or get too curious about it. That's the pathway to hell." The book has become an idol. What is really being said here however isn't "don't question this book", it's "don't question MY interpretation of this book."

Mistaking physical or otherwise things for having some kind of hocus pocus, or letting them take prominence over actually doing the work of God is a recipe for problems and troubled theology. And this proves out with both Philistine and Israelite alike thus far.

What follows us a set of bad things happening to whatever city the ark is residing in. They are struck with plagues of rats and tumors. The thinking is that this is something similar to the Bubonic Plague. Ashdod moves it to Gath, Gath to Ekron. By the time it gets to Ekron there is a very clear sense of "get that thing away from us!!!!" God is throwing them into a panic. Without the help of a single Israelite God is defeating the Philistines.

One of the questions that came up was "how could the Philistines touch the ark and not die?" Good question because the rule was that if you touched it, and weren't a priest of God, you'd be struck down. A simple answer is that the Philistines didn't believe in God so it didn't apply. This is shallow thinking. Truth doesn't cease to be truth just because someone doesn't believe it. I rather offer this. A parent makes rules for the children, however if there's a good reason the parent can suspend that rule for a time. Perhaps this is what God is doing.

By allowing the ark to be captured several points are being made. God is demonstrating that what matters to God is faith, not trotting the ark out as a last ditch effort. Faith is where it's at. The Philistines are being taught just whose God is mighty. The Israelites are being shown that it is they that need God to thrive, not the other way around. This moment is a teacher. Certainly God can suspend the rules to make such points.

Not unlike many today, the Philistines are slow on the uptake. It takes a full seven months for them to realize they should probably give the ark back. You'd think that this would teach them a severe lesson, but given that it was the Philistines still having trouble with Israel when David is introduced to us clearly the message didn't stick. Nevertheless, they realize that the only thing to do to get relief is give back the trophy. This is no small thing. To do this would send a message of vulnerability and weakness. Still, better do that and live than hold fast to the ark and perish.

The priests of Philistia advise sending a guilt offering. Once again, what they suggest is odd yet symbolically sound. Send them golden tumors and rats. At the end of it there were a lot more rats than tumors, giving only five tumors representing the five rulers of the Philistines. The offering is fitting to the plagues they are asking to stop. If the offering is acceptable the hope is that the rats will subside and the sickness will abate.

They send it with some very specific cows towing it. They are calved, never been yoked, and the calves have been penned. It's one more test to see if God was really behind all of this or if it was happenstance. If the cows head to Israel then it was God. That they were never yoked is important. Had they been seasoned animals that have drawn plows or carts they would be familiar with the territory. They would have been trained to remain in specific areas. Cows that were fresh to the experience have no reference point. They would just wander with the destination being random. If they made their way to Israel, particularly not returning to their calves, the message would be clear. It was.

When the Israelites see the ark coming the leap for joy. They do what I would think would be fitting. The Israelites were a group of people whose connection to God was largely sacrificial. So they sacrifice. They break up the cart for wood and the cows become the offering. It's a celebration and a thanksgiving. Maybe they are getting the message.

The mention of the Levites placing the ark on the rock is important. They are doing it right. The Levites are responsible for the ark and none other should handle this holy object. Sadly not everyone seemed to get the memo. Some of the people touch or peak inside the ark. There is no mention that they are Levites, and treating the ark with curiosity over reverence is a sign they aren't receiving what God is trying to say. Seventy fall dead. If some were beginning to see the light, it wasn't all in this field where the ark returned to Israel.

Not unlike the Philistines they are terrified by the power contained by the ark. They ship it off to a town nearby. Where they ship it is also significant. The man mentioned in chapter seven is known to be a priest. They are sending it to a town where there is at least a priestly presence, perhaps even a Levite town. They are putting it where it belongs, in the care of the priests. Eleazar is consecrated to watch over the ark. To me this is a sign of reverence and responsibility. Perhaps Israel is moving in a new direction.