



Transforming Love:

"I will build My church" (Mt. 16:18)

I. Introduction:

AS WE ENCOUNTER JESUS IN AND THROUGH HIS CHURCH, we are transformed. In fellowship with others, God's grace is freely given and received. In sharing the life and love of Jesus, we find connection and empowerment to share Him with others. Fresh encounters with Jesus through His church, transform us more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Our text reminds us that the true church is His church—it is birthed by Him and exists to fulfill His purposes.

- Canadian philosopher, Jean Vanier illustrates the power and purpose of true community through his worldwide work among those with disabilities. After a noted career in the Navy, Vanier was moved to change directions in his life, and went to Paris, where he earned a doctorate in moral philosophy. During that time, the Lord impressed upon his heart to begin serving people with disabilities. He asked two men with Down's syndrome to come and live with him. This act of service has grown and culminated into the L'Arche movement, with well over one hundred communities worldwide, an organization that serves alongside and lives with people with disabilities. These communities have impacted literally the world with the love of God. And Vanier has discovered what real community looks like as a result of his extended work with people with disabilities. He writes:

"To be in communion means to be with someone and to discover that we actually belong together. Communion means accepting people just as they are, with all their limits and inner pain, but also with their gifts and their beauty and their capacity to grow"... "To love someone is not first of all to do things for them, but to reveal to them their beauty and value"... "To be in communion with someone also means to walk with them. Those

of you who have had the privilege of accompanying people in distress and inner pain know that it is not easy to walk with them, without having any answers to their problems or solutions for their pain" ... "The essential at such moments is to walk with them, accepting them just as they are, to allow them to be themselves. It is important for them to know that they can be themselves, that even though there are wounds, and pain in them, they are loved" ... "In a relationship of communion, you are you and I am I; I have my identity and you have yours. I must be myself and you must be yourself. We are called to grow together, each one becoming more fully himself or herself" ... "Communion...entails a deep listening to others"

II. The Mystery of His Church

In today's message we will explore the mystery of connecting with one another in true fellowship. We will entertain the possibility that it is actually God, who is loving us through His people!

Sermon Synopsis: No one has seen God, but His love is revealed through other people (1 John 4:12)! God supplies all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ (Philippians 4:19). This affirms that we have a loving, and a need-meeting God. This passage also affirms that God provides for both physical and relational needs. But we should be struck by the fact that many of God's glorious riches are found in His people (Ephesians 1:18). Therefore, a part of God's design is for us to first receive His acceptance, comfort and support through our relationship with Him and other people. Then we are called to meet these same needs in the lives of others. Through the loving connection of fellowship, we grow to see Jesus more clearly, love ourselves more like Jesus loves us and then we are able to express His love more effectively to others.

Experiencing Scripture: Romans 5:11 "...We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

The pastor leads the congregation in the following experiential:

This passage reminds us that before we were drawn into a personal relationship with God, we were separated from Him. Because of our sin we had no friendship, no relationship and no peace with God. But because of His grace we were saved from our eternal separation from God. We were reconciled, brought back and restored in our relationship with Him. Could you take a few moments and reflect on what your life would be like without God? Could you just imagine what your life, your family, your health, and your circumstances would look like if you had not been a recipient of His reconciling grace?

Pastor: share a personal testimony of your own reasons to rejoice in God's reconciling grace.

I'm especially glad that God brought me to Him becauseor I rejoice in God's grace because without Him, I would

III. Key Facets of the Mystery:

Philosopher Vanier goes on to say that it is impossible to resolve one's own inner pain without an encounter with God. He says, "We must be touched by the Father in order to experience, as the prodigal son did, that no matter how wounded we may be, we are loved. And not only are we loved, but we too are called to heal and to liberate"... "We are called to discover that God can bring peace, compassion and love through our wounds." :

“Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . .” (Col. 3:16).

Would you pause quietly before the Lord as He reminds you what life would have been without Him?

Ask Him to remind you of His grace and how the Lord brought you back, made things right and restored you.

Now invite the congregation to live out the testimony of Romans 5:11. To “rejoice in God through whom we now have reconciliation.” The leader encourages the congregation to rejoice over God’s grace by finishing the sentences:

“I’m especially glad that God brought me to Him because . . .”

“I rejoice in God’s grace because without Him, I would . . .”

Allow the participants to share with one or two others in the worship service. Then remind them of how each of them has blessed and pleased God today. The Lord smiles when He sees His people living out His Book, experiencing the scriptures.

“Love, acceptance, forgiveness—those three things are absolutely essential to any ministry that will consistently bring people to maturity and wholeness. If the church is to be the force for God in the world that it should be, it must learn to love people, accept them and forgive them.”

For His church to be “a force for Him in the world,” it’s imperative that we explore and embrace several key facets of this mystery:

- Our God who is love, longs to meet our needs from His glorious riches. “My God shall supply all your needs” (Philippians 4:19). Sometimes God meets our needs directly as we walk with Him, pray to Him, read His Word and encounter His Son.
- God also longs to share some of His love through His people. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened . . . in order that you may know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).
- Receiving and giving from God’s “many-sided” grace (1 Peter 4:10) connects God’s people in loving fellowship (the goal of the body of Christ, especially our small group ministries). God demonstrates His love through us as we accept them with His acceptance (Romans 15:7), comfort them with His comfort (2 Corinthians 1:2-4), support them with His support (Galatians 6:2) and encourage them with God’s encouragement (Romans 15:4 and Hebrews 10:25).
- Connecting in true fellowship brings great blessings. We come to see Christ for who He really is, as we encounter Him in others! (1 John 4:12). We come to embrace our own identity as God’s beloved, as we experience His love through others. We are challenged to love others around us through vulnerability, accountability and encouraging love. As we experience this kind of true fellowship we are able to partner together in the Great Commission because our loving connection attracts others to Jesus.

Encountering Jesus: “Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” Luke 6:40.

Let the entire sermon lead the congregation toward this encounter with Jesus.

Imagine Christ standing before you—the only true Teacher (Matthew 23:10). He is the One who is love (1 John 4:8). He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He is the One who is humble and gentle (Matthew 11:29-30). He is the One who is often moved with compassion because of the needs of people (Luke 15:20). Jesus is the One who, by His Spirit, encourages us in Scripture (Romans 15:4); He bears our burdens and supports us in life’s struggles (Galatians 6:2).

Now imagine that He invites you to become like Him, to express His life and love, to extend the light of His presence in a dark world. He invites you to experience His transforming love so that you might be a reflection of His love to those around you.

Pause quietly to consider this question: “Lord, for me to better reflect your love, I sense it will be important for me to become more _____ (comforting, gentle, compassionate, encouraging, supportive, or attentive, etc.) to those in my life. Change me Lord, make me like You.”

Engaging Fellowship:

And now, after you have sensed God's leading, let us engage the strength of community by praying with one or two others, simply asking God to change us in this way.

As we stand and gather in groups of two or three, You might say just a sentence or two in your prayer: "Change me Lord, to become more like you. By your Spirit, make me more encouraging, attentive, or compassionate that I might better reflect your love. Change me, Heavenly Father."



Possible Visuals:

- Include an image of God's grace—a many-sided diamond.
- Include Christ's image—one that captures His glory for the closing experiential.
- Display this question for closing experiential, "Lord, what must I become for me to better reflect Your love?"

Music to Include:

- "Holy Spirit Rain Down" by Russell Fragar (Hillsongs)
- "The Power of Your Love" by Geoff Bullock (Word Music)
- "If We are the Body" by Casting Crowns
- "We are the Body of Christ" by David Hampton and Scott Wesley Brown
- "We Break this Bread" by Chris Rolinson

¹Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, The Wit Lectures of the Divinity School of Harvard University (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 16-17.

²Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 21.

³Jerry Cook with Stanley Baldwin, *Love, Acceptance & Forgiveness: Equipping the Church to be Truly Christian in a Non-Christian World* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 11.