**Jesus the Game Changer Church Campaign**

**Week 2 Sermon Outline**

**EQUALITY**

**All people are equal.**

If you went to a large gathering of people, say in a shopping centre or at a sports event, and asked people randomly if they believe everybody is of equal value and worth, my suggestion is that you will find very few people who would disagree with that idea.

It is a foundational value of most western democracies and is foundational for our democratic system of government.

What very few people in western nations don’t ever consider is, the origin of that idea and why we do believe that all people are equal.

**There are two caveats**

Before we go further, it is helpful to add two caveats on what we say about equality.

**First Caveat**

While we say we believe all people are equal, our society seldom treats people equally. It is an ideal we aim for, but mostly fail to live out either personally or as a community. While it’s true that we fail to hold this value, that does not mean we don’t have an underlying assumption that it’s a value that we ought to hold.

**Second Caveat**

While all people are equal, that does not mean all ideas are equal. Everyone has equal value, but the values and ideas people espouse are not equal. It is not hard to think of some abhorrent ideas that people have sort to implement over the centuries. Think of the ethnic cleansing and purging of communities undertaken by Hitler, Pol Pot or even the recent actions of the Myanmar military against the Rohingya minorities. In communities where we hold to people being equal, purging a society of an ethnic group due to their heritage strikes us as being appalling. Those who push these attitudes and actions are of equal value as anyone else, but that does not mean we give their ideas equal value.

**We have always believed people are all equal.**

If we ask people why we think all people are equal, the response will usually be that is what everyone thinks and that is what everyone has always thought. Neither of these responses are true.

**People have not always treated everyone as equal.**

At the time of Jesus, in the Greco Roman world, they did not believe people were of equal worth. The Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato did not believe people were equal. Aristotle believed that society was structurally unequal and that there was a subclass, the slaves, who were there to serve those who were the aristocracy. He referred to slaves as “anthropedon”, a neuter term, neither male nor female, a non-person. Aristotle also saw slaves as being born into that role, the property of their owners, and he viewed them as “living tools”. In his book ‘Politics’ he wrote “Indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life”.

It was into this world, a world of structural inequality, that Jesus taught and treated people with equal dignity and worth.

**Around the world today there are communities with structural inequality.**

If a nation follows the logical conclusions of Hindu teaching, the outcome will be structural inequality. This concept is underpinned by two key ideas. Firstly, reincarnation- where every soul returns again and again. Secondly, your behaviour in each life impacts your place in the next life, which is referred to as karma. So, the upper cast Brahmins felt justified in privilege as this reflects their past life. This is a culture where inequality is institutionalised via religious philosophy.

**So why did Jesus and the early church treat people as equal, and where did that idea spring from?**

This is an Old Testament concept from Jewish faith that is foundational for Christian belief. In Genesis 1:26-27 we read that God created humanity in the imagine of Himself. The scripture goes on to say that “male and female He created them”. All humanity has the stamp of God on them. The whole of scripture echoes this idea; you are of worth because you were created by God, reflecting the image of God.

This means that whether you are brilliant, powerful and wealthy, or poor, disabled, or unable to contribute in certain ways, you are of equal worth. It is a truth we believe and hold to.

The Psalmist reinforces this concept by writing (Psalm 139:13-16) NIV translation below:

“For you created my inmost being;

    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

    your works are wonderful,

    I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you

    when I was made in the secret place,

    when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

    all the days ordained for me were written in your book

    before one of them came to be.”

It is helpful to remember that this became the foundation for modern democracies such as the United States. In their Declaration of Independence, it states …

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.”

Recently, atheist scholar Yuval Harari (quoted in Os Guinness’ book “Impossible People” pages 132 – 133) has commented:

“The idea of equality is inextricably intertwined with the idea of creation. Americans got the idea of equality from Christianity, which argues that every person has a directly created soul, and that all people are equal before God.”

As an atheist and an evolutionist, Harari does not believe in creation so he believes these ideas built into the US constitution ought to be changed, his suggestion being: “created equal should therefore be translated evolved differently”.

**Jesus taught and treated people as if they were equal.**

As we have mentioned, at a time where they believed in structural inequality, Jesus taught equality.

Matthew 18: 10-14

Jesus tells a parable of a lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes after the one lost. This story demonstrates that everyone matters.

John 10: 1-13

This passage is a mix of two different ways in which shepherds dealt with the sheep under their care. The first is in verses 1-6. The scene here is the common pen holding sheep in the village overnight. A number of different shepherds would come in off the hills and place their sheep in a common pen for safe keeping until they were ready to take their flock back out into the countryside. When they were ready, they would go to the gate of the pen (v3) and collect their sheep. They entered through the gate, not over the fence, as thieves entered via other methods. They knew their sheep and called them out. The sheep followed the shepherd whom they knew and trusted.

The second way (verses 7-13) is where the shepherd is out in the countryside with his sheep for a number of days, away from the village and common pen. In this situation, the shepherd built a small holding pen from branches and bushes. There was no door to his pen, but the shepherd would lie down across the gap and he was the door and the protector of the sheep in the pen overnight.

Galatians 3:28

Paul writes to the churches in Galatia and reminds them that in Christ all the old barriers and classes have been broken down and destroyed. We are all now equal and he draws on three structural inequalities of the Greco Roman world to make his point and reminds his readers that this is now changed:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

**Christianity foundational to the idea of equality.**

As scholars have looked over the development of human history and the importance of the individual, they have found that the teachings of Jesus and the Christian church are foundational to the idea of equality.

This is demonstrated in the book “Inventing the Individual” by Larry Seidentop. After teaching at Keeble College in Oxford for several decades, he released this book which looks at the development in the significance of the individual in western democracies.

Seidentop writes:

“Christianity changed the ground of human identity... by emphasising the moral equality of humans, quite apart from any social roles they might occupy, Christianity changed 'the name of the game.' Social rules became secondary. They followed and, in a crucial sense, had to be understood as subordinate to a God-given human identity, something all humans share equally."

**Everyone matters equally.**

In a western world where wealth, power, social standing and prominence lifts some above the pack, leaving many feeling insignificant and irrelevant, we all need to hear this message clearly and we need to communicate it clearly.

Everyone matters!

Not because of what you have achieved, or who you know, or your number of Facebook friends or Instagram followers. Christianity does not teach that you matter because of how you perform, but you matter because God created you and loves you.

John wrote to his friends and said (1 John 4:10 GNB)

“This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

God loves you and wants you to know that you matter, you are important, you are loved equally and nothing you can do can change that.

This value has changed the world and it will change your life.