

New Hope Sermon Living in Cross-Cultural Community 10/6/19

Whenever the Scriptures talk about shalom, the context is always community. So we open with hello in many languages!

The well-being and wholeness God desires for each of His people is nurtured and strengthened when we are committed to intentional community in the church. Today I want to unpack what living in cross-cultural community means for our church and why it is central to our ethos at New Hope.

Loving One Another As Our Way of Life

The scripture text that describes this is:

“7 Those who are loved by God, let his love continually pour from you to one another, because God is love. Everyone who loves is fathered by God and experiences an intimate knowledge of him. ¹¹ Delightfully loved ones, if he loved us with such tremendous love, then “loving one another” should be our way of life! ¹² No one has ever gazed upon the fullness of God’s splendor. But if we love one another, God makes his permanent home in us, and we make our permanent home in him, and his love is brought to its full expression in us. ¹³ And he has given us his Spirit within us so that we can have the assurance that he lives in us and that we live in him.” (1 Jn 4:7,11-13 The Passion Translation)

As Romans 15:7 says *“We are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.”* As we make *“loving one another our way of life”* (1 Jn.4:11), we live with one heart, not creating status or privilege because of race or gender or background. (Gal. 3:26-28). Instead we come together in the oneness Jesus has made possible through his death, resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. We are on a journey to become *“global Christians, living by the Spirit in alignment with what God is doing and wants to do in our world, with our core values of prayer and community committed wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ.”* (New Hope Mission Statement).

That’s the vision and passion of this church. And it is possible because every believer who comes to Christ *“is made a new person – the old way of seeing Christ and seeing others is gone, a new life has begun”* (2 Cor. 5:17). I know in my life after I became a Christian, God has done a radical rearranging of my sense of identity and love for people who are so different than I am. He brought me into a fellowship in the church that continues to be my baseline for everything God wants to do in and through me with others in the world.

An understanding of how geese fly gives us a model to follow:



FACT # 1: “Geese fly in a V formation. As each goose flaps its wings, it helps to lift up the wings of the birds that follow. **Application:** That’s how community serves each member.

FACT # 2: When a goose falls out of formation, it loses the lifting power of the bird in front of it. It discovers the problems of flying alone and moves back into formation. **Application:** God established the church because we need each other.

FACT # 3: The bird at the front of the formation experiences the most wind resistance. When it tires, it moves to the back of the formation and another goose takes the lead. **Application:** We live together with rotating leadership as the “whole Body ministers to the whole Body.”

FACT # 4: Geese flying in formation honk to encourage those ahead of them to keep up their speed.

Application: The gift of encouragement provides strength and courage to others.

Hello Around The World



FACT # 5: If a goose gets sick or wounded, two other geese drop out of formation and go down to the ground with it. They stay with that goose to protect it until it recovers or dies. Then they join another group of geese flying overhead or catch up with their original flock. **Application:** In light of that model, we not only share our praise, understanding of growth and evidences of power; we also share our struggles. We allow a theology of groaning where we *carry each other's burdens* (Gal.6:2) and strengthen each one through their struggles with the confidence in God's grace, His goodness, and His sustaining presence. This is a precious part of our community life and the vulnerability of sharing our struggles as well as our joys has helped so many of us be encouraged and cared for. That is certainly true for me as we struggle with the daily implications of Keith's Alzheimer's.

Developing cultural sensitivity

But I want to acknowledge that choosing such vulnerability and commitment to community cross-culturally is neither automatic nor easy. In many ways it is easier to just be with people of the same culture, language and values. To be at New Hope challenges us to develop cultural sensitivity skills that permit us to understand others who come from different cultural backgrounds. We have to deal with our prejudices and let God help us see others as God sees them.

That means first we have to understand ourselves and how our cultural values shape all we say and do. Then we have to acknowledge and begin to change our assumptions "that everyone else is just like us. And we expect everyone to behave as we do" (Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*).

You won't be here long before you realize the terrible problems with those assumptions. We have differences in core values of individualism or community centered identity; we have different ways of communicating. Even the basic approach to being direct or indirect in conversation is different and takes lots of grace from each of us. How do you communicate "no" to another person? We have to ask questions and ask people to help us understand each other in order to minimize any frustration or misinterpretation of people's intents etc.



I know I have struggled with this issue specifically because of my innate North American directness. When I ask a question or talk about a project with someone and they give me a response, I expect that response to be their real and final answer. If it is not, I have to work through my assumptions of what is "honest" and get to the heart of what the other person is actually communicating. In the book *Managing Intercultural Negotiations*, authors Casse and Deol give 7 common ways people from non-direct cultures say no:

1. "hesitate or are silent
2. present an alternative offer
3. postpone a decision.
4. blame a third party or an outside circumstance for rejection of a proposal
5. avoid a direct response
6. Give general acceptance but without any action on specifics (this should always be a warning light to us direct-answer types)
7. Or, shift the discussion to another idea or proposal."

Can you think of an instance recently when this has happened in your dialogue with someone from a different culture? How did you react? Did the Spirit flag any negative attitude or misinterpretation you might have had?

Bernard Adeney in his excellent book *Strange Virtues* makes this wonderful comment about cross-cultural conversation: "Real conversation is a treasure that seems all too rare these days. When such opening of the heart occurs between people from radically different cultures, it is a miracle of grace...Each person, and each culture, has a unique secret. Each is capable of knowing something of God which no one else knows. In cross-cultural

friendship, we have the opportunity to share that treasure with each other” (B. Adeney, *Strange Virtues*, p. 141). Seeing others as treasures from God can build the kind of harmony and shalom in our midst that is God’s (and our (!)) desire.

That’s why living in cross-cultural community provides a special stimulus for our growth into Christ-like character! For example, think of what Paul tells the Ephesians – (4:30-5:2) “*Do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*”³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*”³² *Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*”⁵¹ *Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.*”² *Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.* There’s that theme again: in Ephesians 4 “*live a life filled with love.*” In 1 John 4 “*loving one another should be our way of life!*”

Becoming Bicultural

In this process of cross-cultural living at New Hope, I think God is doing one more thing which can better equip us to be effective as global Christians. Our close encounters with those of other cultures challenges our own identity and moves us toward becoming bicultural people. This is actually a skill-set and life change that makes us better witnesses for Christ in our global world.

Here are some of the characteristics of bicultural people:

“We understand that “to enter into another culture means to allow yourself to feel the pull of another way of seeing the world” (Bernard Adeney, *Strange Virtues*).

- We seek to recognize the strengths of others’ cultures alongside the strengths of our own culture of origin.
- We choose to be bridge people, between those of different cultures and thus bring hope and harmony to our fractured world.
- We are committed to break down hurtful stereotypes and model how diverse people work together in love and prayer on God’s great Kingdom agenda.
- We choose to model the inclusivity of God’s heaven.



God’s saving plan for all humanity is clear – Revelation 7:9 “*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb....And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”*” A great multitude from every nation, tribe and language!

Wherever you go in the world, may you share this passion for God’s global agenda – for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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