

Healing the City One Person at a Time

The City

Eric Cepin

August 11, 2024

Healing the City One Person at a Time is our motto at the Village. Once a year, we want to think about what this means and reassess our belonging. So for 20 years, we've been doing these kinds of talks prior to the Belonging Service (on Sept 1 this year). Last week, I spoke about Healing and I want to review that a bit to prepare us for talking about the City.

Healing can be miraculous from a disease, but I want to remind you that we are all going to die. The main kind of healing here is centered in the cross and is about finding forgiveness through Jesus. Here is an outline meant to disrupt you a little bit:

Healing

From Chaos to Peace

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going **astray**, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The Cross

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Forgiveness

Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you

We want to move from chaos to peace, as seen in I Peter 2:25. You were wandering away from the place that is good for you. With no shepherd and overseer of your soul, you are like a child without a parent or adult supervising them. When this happens, you have something like the situation in *The Lord of the Flies*. The results are very negative when you have no overseer of your soul.

But now you have Jesus (Gal 2:20) *Who loved me and gave himself for me*. I am inhabited by the one who loved me and paid the price for my sin so I could have an eternal relationship with him. There is future hope: the chaotic person has been crucified.

This happens within community (Eph 4:32). We operate with others in kindness and compassion and forgiveness. It's easy to say but difficult to practice. We are able to practice this because our forgiveness is in response to being forgiven. We forgive because we know the person we are interacting with has already been forgiven.

With these three verses and concepts in mind (chaos to peace, the cross, forgiveness), we can move onto the idea of ownership of our identity as an ambassador for Christ:

We embrace the forgiveness from Christ and offer it to others. This is what reconciling to God means and accepting the identity given to us.



An **ambassador** is a person going to another country and working from a space (an embassy) that is actually sovereign land in a foreign country. You as an ambassador, a living sacrifice, are holy ground and wherever you are or go, you bring the holy ground of God. (the ID of Christ and the movement of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness). This also applies to your home, a place where collective people come together. This church is another holy place of Christ. These are places where you define and have some control over speaking as ambassadors.

Ambassadors are always sent to foreign lands. This is both individually and collectively:

City set on a hill

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. **A city set on a hill** cannot be hidden; 15 nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Your light **must** shine before people **in such a way** that they may **see** your good **works and glorify** your Father who is in heaven.

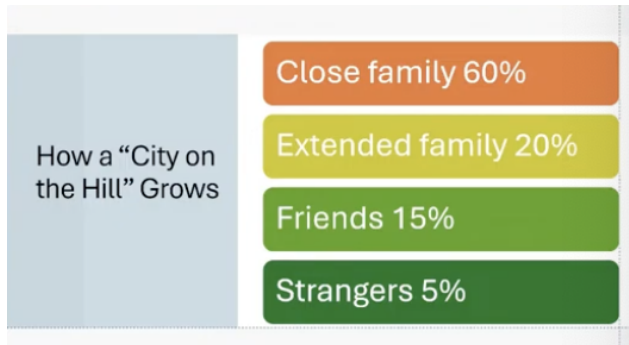
Notice that people must see your good works in order to glorify God. This applies to all the churches in a city.

We are called to model kindness, compassion, and forgiveness so they can be seen by others. You should experience these things here at The Village. People

should experience these in your home. This model is transformative.

The invitation is to hold on to this tightly. We must think strategically: My life focus is not about enhancing my career, what spouse I might get, my degree, or how many children I might have. The primary focus is being an ambassador of Christ and how this will be practiced.

How Church Communities (like the Village) grow:



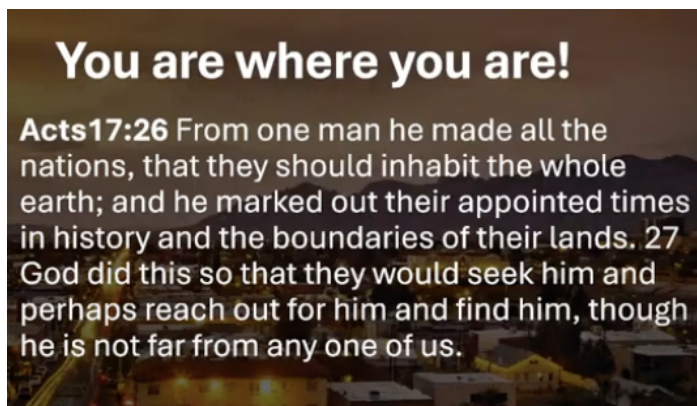
These statistics apply to the whole world: God's word most often spreads through families and friends. Rarely does it grow through strangers but it happens. In fact, I recently heard about a story of 2 guys at a gas station and they chatted with a girl who asked them where they were going. They told her "church" and she said she had never been to church so she went and became a Christian. She was a stranger and they were acting like ambassadors.

What you think strategically, your first mission field is your family. It's primarily with your immediate family and your extended family. But your family cannot be insular, it must be outside-focused so others can see the grace of God playing out in your family.

The next questions are

Who are my friends?

How can I be outward-focused with strangers?



This a beautiful summary of the Old Testament but it also applies to you practically: You as a follower of Jesus (an ambassador) have something unique to offer to this time and space. You are invited to think about where you live, who you live with, where you work, and what boundaries God has drawn for you. He is very close and active.

C.S. Lewis's book "Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer." Letter 15

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito. And the incognito is not always hard to penetrate. The real labor is to remember, to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake."

God is there (Acts 17)! As followers of Jesus, we are to be aware that he is always acting in our friends and families. We are to be awake and anticipate what God is doing. This impacts our conversations and the way we relate to one another. This takes discipline! What are you doing in my family's lives? It's easy to get caught up in the tyranny of the urgent.

When you are an ambassador, you first need to look at what is good. Here are some things that make Tucson unique and desirable:



We have beautiful mountains.

We are an outdoor city most months of the year.

We are ethnically diverse (2020):

45% hispace

41% white

5% african amer

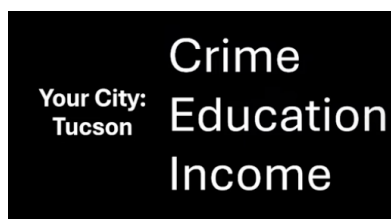
5% Native amer

3% Asian

Tucson is a community that values creativity, even if it isn't pointed toward God.

Also: we have wildlife, great weather, birds, impressive food, casual living, monsoons, rock climbing, great size, no freeways, nice people.

We also have some downsides:



We also have elevated **crime** (700+ violate incidences/100,000 people...national average is 300+)

Education (78% high school graduation rate, nationally 83%; 28% have college degrees but nationally it's 33%)

Median **Income**: \$45,000 but nationally it's \$67,000. 23% of people in Tucson live below the poverty line; nationally it's 13 percent)

Safety, economy, and education are chaotic and dark...these are areas that God may be calling us to push into.

Let's talk about dysfunction and division because in every city, the three ideas below are what you will be dealing inside your family and with friends and strangers:

Dysfunction and Division

Power

Authorities

Reality

Power: the context of the oppressed and the oppressor.

Authorities: How do we understand, talk about, and engage in the authorities that rule over us

Reality: What is actually real and true

Power

Luke 22:25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles **lord it over them**; and those who **exercise authority** over them call themselves **Benefactors**. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the **youngest**, and the one who rules like the one who **serves**. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? *But I am among you as one who serves.*



Jesus invites us to act as ambassadors by modeling a different kingdom:

As ambassadors, we are primarily called to **be the one who serves**, even when we might deserve respect and honor. If you want to know where Jesus is, you have to be involved in caring for others. He turns the understanding of power upside down.

He also does this with authority; we have no concept of how difficult it was to live under Roman rule: in fact, you would prefer Stalin to the Romans. They were vicious, terrible, mean, and abusive: the worst. When Paul says to be subject to the governing authorities, this was hard to hear. Paul wants us to understand that these people in authority are not defined by authority but are put there by the One who defines authority.

Authorities

Romans 13:1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

*In our time, we have no right to dismantle or speak ill of authorities. Our only call is to **pray** for them and **defend their honor and dignity**. We can **vote** and **disagree** BUT our job when it comes to Kamala Harris and*

Donald Trump, for example, is to be people who defend them as **image bearers**. We have no right to dismantle human beings. We can say we don't think they are leading us in a godly direction: but we **cannot** participate in ways that **attack** them. In fact, we should **defend their honor and care for them** (kindness, compassion, and forgiveness). We honor the people who lead us and pray for them, even if we disagree.

If they call us to move against the gospel, we take the consequences which might mean martyrdom (like the early church). But we care for the people placed there by God and they are image bearers. This is counter cultural: our culture is living in extremes (especially in American politics 2024) and destroying one another. We are invited to defend the honor of people as image bearers and pray for them.

There is also a conversation about reality and it's usually the **wrong** conversation:

Reality

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Ephesians 4:17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

You must not live like the other people in Tucson live. Typically, we say **our** experience of things is real and true, yet every two people have different experiences and neither is living in reality. We believe our experience is the way things are but Jesus says he is the way, the truth, and the life (the everything!). The only one who gets to define what is real is Jesus. **As ambassadors, we seek to define things not by our experience but by what Jesus is inviting us into.**

These three things show up in families, even in those that follow Jesus. The enemy loves when we get caught up in things that don't anchor us in the truth. We have to be counter cultural and model it in front of others.

Practical Applications

What does it look like to be an ambassador practically? We read Jer 29:1-9 this morning. This was when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon and God invites them to do some simple things:

Jeremiah 29:1-9

Settle down

- Build house
- Plant garden

Focus on the Family

- Get Married
- Encourage your children to marry





1. First, he wants to make **hospitable spaces**. We plant gardens to feed people around us. We practice this here at the Village as we walk through liturgies that we invite you to offer other people in your home.


2. **Focus on a family**: get married and encourage your children to get married. Part of the way embassies grow is through families as they learn to practice forgiveness.


3. **Seek the welfare of a city**: the peace and prosperity of a city. My actions should reflect this. Maybe you put speed bumps in your neighborhood or you support schools around you to reach children who don't have an ambassador. If there is peace and prosperity in Tucson, we also benefit. We pray for these things in our cities; we are aware of crime and we pray against it, for example .
4. We cannot listen to those who tell us not to anchor and settle in Tucson. These people are liars! We need to develop hospitality and care for the community that we are placed in now, even if we move the following year. For now, we are called to this.

Your Space in the City

 Neighborhood/Neighbors

 Work/Co-workers

 Home/Housemates

 3rd Space/Friends

 Church/Fellow Ambassadors

Do you know your **neighbors**? Their names, their stories, their struggles, their jobs, their children and grandchildren? Ambassadors can do this!

In your **work** space, you have co-workers. What does power look like? What do people say about truth and reality? Politics? Where can I bring the gospel to my work space?

Every one of us has a **home** we live in with people or animals: as ambassadors, even animals connect us with people in public spaces. You are practicing kindness, compassion, and forgiveness in your home.

3rd spaces: you play a sport, you meet with friends.

Church: All the people here are your fellow ambassadors. We are to irritate (spur) one another on to love and good deeds.

As you have been digesting these, what comes to mind?