

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Imagine Church: Living in the Tension | Luke 5:27-32

We are one week away from the launch. Last week we talked about the idea of a campaign that would mark our sixtieth anniversary, focusing on the idea of being invited and of being inviting people. We're going to do this for the next five weeks, but we're not going to make the worship services all about this campaign. At one point we will connect it, stating who we are, why this is important, and then see what God says to us. But for the next month, we would like to look at the different values we believe God has raised in our life together. Today for instance, we're talking about what it means to live in the tension. To live in a way that you are not pushing out or hitting on the head those with whom you disagree, but trying to engage with them.

Now, that tension comes in all different ways that we'll talk about, but I have to tell you, I think one of those tensions is in this Invited Campaign. Some of you are surprised by it, some of you are for it, some of you are against it, some of you aren't sure—*oh, there's a campaign?* We have tension, and that can move into a household: "I'm for it!" "Well, I'm for it, too!" "I want to give to it." "I want to give to it, too." "Here's how we'll decide." "That's not how we're going to decide." Tension. So, as Laura and I talked and thought and prayed about this, we thought it might help you, as you are looking at this campaign, to live in the tension together. What would you say?

Laura

Well, we are both absolutely for this. Very excited about what God is going to do through this campaign, but we bring differences in interest level and expertise to the process of deciding about giving. So I am, frankly, John's thorn in the side. He is responsible and smart and wise, and he actually makes a budget and sticks to it. You mention money to me and my eyes glaze over. I just don't want to know about how much there is or isn't there. It's not that I'm extravagant, in fact, I love to give, but I give emotionally. That might mean that I give and I'm not exactly sure if or where the money is coming from. (John comes in) . . . "We can't be out of money, honey, I still have checks!" (Back to Laura speaking) . . . That's right! Money is not something I like paying attention to, but I firmly believe that paying attention is really a spiritual discipline, whether it's paying attention to money, or to the gifts that God's given to us, or the emotion that may rise up in us in different situations. So, paying attention has been part of our process in deciding how we're going to approach this campaign.

John

So, as we agreed to pay attention to what God might be saying to us, as a couple we went to our corners. I went to my spreadsheet; I went to my budget. I said, "Where are

we in terms of having margin? What does it look like in terms of taking care of our aging parents and our kids who are being launched? Where are we in terms of our multi-year commitments to other ministries that we believe in?” And by now I’m hearing snoring from the other side of the table, but we eventually come to a place where we agree we can do X. This is where her gifts come in and she says, “I’m not sure we’re done. I think it’s X plus what would God want us to pay attention to?” And I said, “Well, maybe it’s the idea that all of X has come from our head and God wants to look at our heart,” and we talked about King David’s experience. David was the king and God called him to build an altar at a specific place. David went to that place and the guy who owned that place was excited: “Look, I’ll give you the land” and King David said, “No, you don’t understand. I’m not going to give something to God that isn’t a sacrifice for me” and he insisted on paying for the land. So we thought—we have our plans, where’s our sacrifice?

Laura

So, like I said, I’m not extravagant, but one extravagance that I do indulge in is that I don’t eat breakfast in the morning. Every single morning, I buy a nonfat Grande Mocha at Starbucks. I know that seems silly, but it’s kind of part of my routine and I love it. So we looked at this and said *how many times would I have to give that up?* What if every time I didn’t do that, I clicked and put that money in a special account for the campaign? And we talked about some other things that each of us could do that, when we went without, we could click and put it into the campaign. So, Thursday was my first day going without and I was crabby, and I was crabby at myself for being crabby. I know that sounds so stupid. And I thought, *I need to think about the why behind this. I am so for this.* I truly believe that we are creating an environment where kids, and students, and old people will come to know about the love of Jesus in better ways. I think we’re creating an inviting environment. We’re creating better space for the Families Moving Forward that are coming, so I’m all for it. Anyway, I thought you should know that when I go without and I’m feeling crabby, I’m going to use that as a prompt to pray for somebody who might come to know Jesus as a result of this, and maybe that will help me not be so crabby.

John

Fortunately I was out of town, but she was texting me, “I’m crabby! This is the stupidest idea you’ve ever had!” No, we’re in this together, because when I think of the fact that we want to add another \$5,000 to our gift over three years, so that’s just X dollars a month and mine would come from the books that are like my grandchildren, *I want that book. I don’t care that it’s in the library. I want it now!* Every time I don’t buy the book and go to the library instead, I get to punch the cost of the book into that, or a lunch where I go home instead of eating out. And that sacrifice is a first-world sacrifice, folks. We’re not turning our lives upside down. We’re trying to be joy-filled-focused-on-what-this-means people. Our prayer is that will happen for you, too. That you would be wildly generous, but it will produce a chance to pay attention to what God is doing here and in

you and that it will bring you joy. That it will bring you great joy in the journey, and you can pray for Laura on Thursdays. Let me pray now.

Lord Jesus I thank You for the baby steps that You've encouraged Laura and me to take. To hear your voice more clearly and to share Your goodness that others might be invited to Your love. Bless now the words that we speak as we live in the tension. In Your name, Amen.

Living in the tension has grand, global things, but it starts at home, right? On this video you are going to see, one person says, "If you're married, baby, you're living in the tension." If you're in a home you live in tension, but our thought is that we ought to be living differently than folks who don't have the community of love that God's people offer. Why don't you listen for three minutes to the perspectives of some people who will share with you what we think?

[Link to Living in the Tension Video] <https://vimeo.com/153798240>

I love that. I saw many of you nodding your head. This is the one value we had that people think *oh, that's so different than that other church that I was in. Everybody thought the same, voted the same, acted the same. It was clear who was in and who was out.* I love this. Can I tell you, it's a mess and it's the hardest of the values to live out? It's real life, and the reason is because there is emotional attachment to these issues. There is pain attached. It's an academic issue for her, for him it's his life, and there's a challenge there. Nobody cares in a life or death way whether we go with wind energy or solar, it's a great academic exercise, but there are other things that matter a lot. How will we talk about those things without kicking each other out of the room?

I got an exercise in this last week. I had a little break from the election nonsense, and I went to World Vision's board meeting. My committee reported on hot spots in the world that will be trouble that we don't know about, yet. The first one was in Haiti. People are disappearing off the streets of Haiti. All of a sudden, they're just not there because the Haitians are about to have an election and this is one of the ways they handle voter registration. They kill people. They kidnap them and the government is a big part of the problem. And then we said if the country director of Haiti is having his kids flee, whoa, we have to get in there.

Burundi. I bet not 2% of you know where Burundi is. I need a map to help, but Burundi is a country where the president has decided that he doesn't care what the constitution that he helped write says, he's going to run for a third term. So, Burundi is in grave danger of turning into Rwanda, its next-door neighbor. Many of the same people who were in Rwanda are now in Burundi, and they're in danger of another genocide because of an election. I have to tell you, it gives perspective. And lest we think that we're so lucky those people think about Ferguson, think about the Miracle Mile, think about the North side here. Can I just make one point quickly? The problem is not the protests; the protests are God's gifts to us as a free society. We ought to rejoice that people don't have to worry about that. We need to listen one another. The problem comes not with

the protest, but with our inability to hear the other side. We're so convinced that we're right and we need to win, that we have made the other person not an opponent, but an enemy. How do we live in the tension?

It happens in the church. Andy Stanley is a pastor in Atlanta and he says some issues are just problems you need to resolve; there is a way to fix this problem and either you kill it or it kills you. He says there are many other issues in our lives that are not problems to solve, they are tensions to learn to live in. For instance, you go to some churches and they're all about worship. Worship is the thing that draws us closer to God and it draws God to us. They're about worship. And there are other churches here in the cities that are all about justice. The justice people don't have time to worship and the worship people don't want to get all messy with justice, but it is a tension because our God desires both justice and worship. How do we do that together?

I think I could talk to 100 of you and all 100 of you would agree that any nation needs secure borders so that bad people don't get in, and so that you have a sense of who should pay taxes. I think all 100 of you would also say that while we need secure borders, we also need an ability to welcome strangers. It's a tension we live in. It's not a problem that we can solve once for all, it's a tension we have to learn to live in. I believe God made our bodies to be healthy, and exercise and diet are part of that plan. I believe that Jesus came to bring us chocolate. That's a tension in which we have to live.

How do we live in the tension? The early church faced those same tensions, and the apostle Paul talked to a group of early followers of Jesus in the capital of the world, Rome. And to the Roman Christians, Jesus says this in chapter 12:

¹⁷ Don't repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

Not just the people who love you

¹⁸If it is possible,

and it's not possible

as far as it depends on you

and it does depend on you a lot

live at peace with everyone. [Romans 12:17-18]

Not evil for evil. Do right in the sight of all, if possible as far as it depends on you, be at peace. Well, we've already talked about one of those little examples of living in the tension with the campaign. Laura and I are trying to live at peace with each other and trying to do what is right together, but what does it mean as far as it depends on us to live at peace when race is the issue? What does it mean if the problem isn't race, but

it's gender? How do we live at peace? In a world where there are the uber-rich and the uber-poor, how do we address income and equality? In a country with 300 million handguns, how do we address that issue? And in a world that has become less safe because of terrorism, how do we decide who the terrorists are? Are they the people that blew up the buildings, or the people screaming as they run away toward us? How do we live in those tensions? As I said, this is often painful and personal because the other person is not thinking about it as if it's a classroom activity; it's their life. It's your life.

Conflict is hard and it is often made harder by the way that we treat one another while we're living in the tension. So, we don't live in the tension. We don't talk about that. We make it quite clear, even if it's subtle, that that issue is not welcome here. We have these people and not those people around us. How do we live in the tension?

Can I give you five keys, and my hope is that you won't write them all down, but you'll write one of them down? That one of them will be something that God wants for you? Five keys to living in the tension in this community come out of what I'd like to do as a charge at the end. A charge is where I'm saying the difference between a lecture and a sermon is you're supposed to do something about it. Here's my charge for you: that as you leave this place, God would bring to your mind one issue. No, that's wrong. I don't believe that God wants us to live in tension with issues; I believe God wants to live in tension with human beings who are just like us. I charge you to think of a person—a type of person or a specific person—think of a person who has this issue that you violently disagree with and ask, *what does Jesus want me to do to be a peacemaker? To live in this tension better?* That's the charge.

Okay, here are the five keys if you want to *do* something and not just talk about it. The first key is just one word. It's **humility**. I believe humility leads to a different way to live in the tension. My wife, Laura, went to seminary in her forties and her New Testament professor opened the Bible to her in brand new ways. The best way he did it was on the first day of class when he said, "We are at a school that believes the Bible is God's spoken word to you. God has spoken through the Bible, and that Bible is therefore inspired and infallible when it comes to faith." That's statement number one. Number two was this, "The Bible is inspired and infallible. Your professor is none of the above. I'm not sure when I am inspired and when it's just my opinion." And he finished by saying, "While the Bible may be without error, I am filled with error. Let's learn together." That humility from a New Testament scholar freed her up to engage rather than say, *well, he must be right, even though he's crazy*. Your attitude will either be humble or arrogant, you will either deal with people with gentleness or a stiff arm, and you will either treat them with respect as a child of God or as an opponent to be beaten.

Number two—the second key to living in the tension for those who follow Jesus is that they will **engage**. That is, it says in the text, *if it is possible far as it depends on you*. Not always possible, but it usually is. As far as it depends on you means you have to be engaged in the process and not wait around for the solution to come to you. And what I mean when you are engaged in living in the tension as far as possible means not diatribe, but dialogue. You need to find a talk-with way rather than a talk-to way.

Can I tell you what I think is one of the signs of sickness in our society that we have bequeathed to our children? We are giving them a culture where they never have to spend time talking to somebody they disagree with. They only listen to confirming voices. Many of you only listen to MSNBC. Many of you only watch Fox TV. Many of you have Twitter feeds that are filled with your friends, well of course! You look at their tweets, they'll look at your tweets, and you agree with each other, so when you're ranting and raving about this issue, you're getting these *oh yeah, yeah, yeah, that's so good, that's so good*. You fill your Facebook pages with these videos and these articles and they're all about things that you believe and never do you get much pushback because these are your friends. It's a closed loop and most people who think like you do will not challenge you. Engaging means finding people that don't agree with you. Tough part of the pool.

I found this in World Vision. World Vision is a Christian organization that helps poor people around the world. There are people in the organization who are great at helping poor children; this is their life, their profession, their passion. There are other people in World Vision whose life is to know Jesus and to love Him and to let other people know about Him. Sometimes the Christian people say, *how come you caregivers never talk about Jesus?* And the caregivers say, *how come you're not giving us extra money, you just want to talk about Jesus?* This sounds weird, but this is a tension we live in. Then you compound it with going to Syria, which is two percent Christian and saying, *how do we talk about Jesus as we're giving poor children clean water?* In our world, the way that we do it is by not turning it into "us and them". I hold what is called the Founder's Chair. My charge, sitting on the board, is to hold together a passion for Jesus and a passion for poor children. To ensure we talk about these at all times together, so we don't create enemies.

Number three. You have humility, you engage, and then you learn to **speak the truth**, in love. It's Galatians. Speak the truth, in love. We often find that the people we are with, I'm not going to ask you to turn and look at that person, but if I asked, several of you would know that that person is much better at speaking the truth than they are at love. Others of you would say, *oh, no, no, he is great at being a loving, hugging teddy bear because he avoids conflict like the plague*. Truth in love. Some of you would say, *I'm sorry, I'm with somebody here from Minnesota, and they don't do either one. They don't tell the truth and they've never told somebody they love them, ya know?* When we avoid telling the truth, when we avoid loving, we live in Minnesota. No! Which side are you on in that? Most of us have a strong hand and a weak hand, but may I just say that truth without love is brutality and love without truth is emotional manipulation. Truth without love is brutality and love without truth is emotional manipulation. Truth, spoken in love.

The fourth one is that I think that Jesus followers handle living in the tension differently because they are learning how to **bless their opponents**. The Church ought not to be the one that says, "You're going to hell at 3, 2, 1 . . ." The Church ought to be the one that says, "Let's talk about this." The Church ought to be the one that says, "Hey, I love you anyway." The Church ought to be the one that says, "Come on back next week." I

loved Margo's thing where she says, "I believe there is absolute right and wrong, but I have come to believe that I don't have to be right, but I *do* have to be loving." As John Ortberg said last week, that means we need to bless our opponents. We need to bless people we disagree with, maybe even more than we bless our allies. We need to be like the people that Jesus says—not just to turn the other cheek—but offer them water, go the second mile, show respect, listen to them, freak them out, listen to them. Find other good things that they are doing and applaud them. Look for ways that you can speak well of them and look for ways that you can stop gossip about them. Okay, I know . . . I've quit preaching and I've started meddling. You cannot bless your opponent and gossip about them. I recognize much of this is rooted in pain for one or both of you, but do you know what the Christian, the person that follows Jesus, is called to? Paul was talking to the church at Corinth, and two of the biggest church leaders were at odds with each other, and to settle the fight they're going to court. Paul is pulling out his hair and he says *don't go to court, that's what the Pagans do!* In other words, you've got to bless each other; bless your opponent. He says *why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather suffer wrong so that the cause of Jesus is seen to be the most important? Holy cow no, I'm an American. I win.* Blessing our opponents is a way that the gospel of Christ helps us to live in the tension.

Last one. I believe that if we have humility, and engage people, and speak the truth in love, and if we bless our opponents, the way that we will show them that we mean business is if we meet them on **common ground**. That we don't insist they come onto our turf, but we meet them on common ground. By that I mean that we will meet them at the foot of the cross. I learned in school that the ground is level only at the foot of the cross. There is no right or wrong at the foot of the cross, there are only broken people who are saved by Jesus Christ, people who treat each other as beloved children of God, who find common ground at the foot of the cross.

You know, in the early church they were tempted to be driven apart from each other all the time, so they decided they would only have two non-negotiables; only two things were non-negotiable. The first is that they would end every argument by saying *Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Jesus is Lord.* If you can say Jesus is Lord and mean it, then we are together. Nobody gets thrown out. Jesus is Lord. The second is that when they met one another—whether they agreed about slavery, whether they agreed about Rome, whether they agreed about circumcision—they would greet one another and the only way to tell who was in and who was out was if they said to you, "Christ is risen", you would say, "He is risen indeed!" I would say to you, "Christ is risen" and you would say, "He is risen indeed!" Everything else is just details. We live in the tension because He is risen indeed. And he calls us to the cross and he calls us to this table.

You know, there are some communities of faith where you can or cannot have Communion unless you're a member of that church and it's sort of to show who's in and who's out. It's a boundary marker. In Australia, I learned about boundary markers. They have Texas-size ranches in Australia. Twenty or thirty miles on a side and there are only two ways you can identify whose property you're on. Many of the ranches have hundreds of miles of barbed wire fence around them constantly being thrown up,

constantly being repaired, constantly being cut down, constantly the source of fights. More and more Australian farms are going away from having fences around their huge ranches and instead are marking their wells. They say *we dig these ten wells and the cattle that come to these wells are ours*. I want to be a well-digging church and not a fence building church, because when you dig wells, people come to the wells from all different places and they get the living water and the other stuff starts to matter less.

For this community, the key is not how well we love the people that are here. The key is how we treat the people that we're in tension with, and how we keep the people with whom we disagree from becoming our enemies. We treat them differently. So again, my charge is this: think of the person, not the issue. Think of a person with whom you are in tension and how Jesus might be calling you to be an agent of reconciliation, as much as possible, living in peace. Not changing your convictions, but not walking away—not ignoring, not demonizing, but engaging. Can I give you a little help? Somebody gave us 30-40 of these Starbucks cards, five dollar gift cards. I think the Holy Spirit is saying, "Put those cards on that round table out there." If God put somebody in your mind, grab one of those cards and take them to Starbucks. Let this be a place where the Holy Spirit says *don't just think about this, don't just agree with this, for the sake of heaven, do something with this*.

Who does Jesus want around His table? He wants Rednecks and pinkos. He wants black, and brown, and red, and golden, and white. He wants poor and rich. He wants straight and gay. He wants conservative and liberal. He craves socialists, and capitalists, and communists, and Jesus comes to everyone who comes to this table and says *I'm so glad you're here! Why are you alone? I'm so glad you're here!* Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You have put on our hearts as a community to live in the tension with folks who disagree with us. That You have given us the instruction not to win, but to love. To cling to You and them rather than clinging to being right. I love how You reminded the people that You taught how to forgive, and how to love, and how to live. You taught them and then You showed them. When You broke the bread You said, "This is My body broken for you." And You picked up the cup and You blessed it and You poured in wine and said, "This is the blood that washes your sins away. When you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim My coming and My death until I come again." We ask you, Lord Jesus, to make the table big. Big enough to fit all our big egos and our petty differences. Bring us together at Your table. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.