

Christ Presbyterian Church
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John Crosby
Jesus Outside the Lines: Personal Faith/Corporate Faith
1 Corinthians 12:12-31

It's probably not a surprise that many of you know who Billy Graham is. He actually got his start here in Minneapolis where the Graham Association was headquartered, and he was special. For the last hundred years, he and C.S. Lewis probably affected more than just about anybody else on the planet when we think about Jesus; it was because he kept going outside the lines. This is Billy Graham at an orphanage [picture shown] in Korea at the very start of World Vision because he thought the poor, as well as the rich, needed to hear about Jesus. In the fifties and sixties, he was one of the first to insist that blacks and whites sit together to hear about Jesus.

The story I like most about Graham is that he went outside the lines of even the church. When he did a crusade, he invited all the priests and pastors in the whole town to come and help him make it happen, and one of the things that became a critical issue for him was that some of the pastors started objecting. They would say, "We love that people are being converted by the hundreds of thousands. This is great, but we don't like it when you say you need to do two things after you come to Jesus—you need to open your Bible and go back to your church and learn about Jesus." The Baptists would say, "You can't send them back to a Lutheran Church." The Lutherans would say, "You can't send them back to an Episcopalian Church." The Episcopalians said, "Well, Billy some of them are going to go back to the Catholics." Back then, Protestants and Catholics didn't think the others were Christian, but Billy refused to give in. He said, "You go back to your priest or your pastor and learn about Jesus." He went outside the lines.

Laura and I were just in San Diego. We took an Uber ride back to the airport and we started talking to the driver. He said, "Hey, did you hear about Billy Graham?" "Yeah." And the guy goes, "Hell of a guy, that Billy Graham." How great is that? And he said, "You know, I grew up Catholic, but I love Billy Graham because Billy Graham loved us." I love Billy Graham because Billy Graham loved us. It's going outside the lines.

We've been talking about what it means to follow Jesus outside the lines. We started with a couple weeks of foundation. Why would you follow Jesus unless Jesus matters to you? The first week, Petey talked about a passage in the book of Hebrews that compared going through life to running a race. He said, "Let's run with perseverance the race set out before us, avoiding the sin that tangles, and fix our eyes on Jesus." He said, "It's got to be about more than coming to church. It's got to be a personal relationship with Jesus. Until Jesus matters to you, then Jesus won't matter to people around you." Then the next week James spoke and used a story in John's gospel to ask, "What would please God? If you had to do just one thing, what would please God?" He answered the question by telling us that John said the thing that pleases God is to

believe in the One that He has sent. To believe and trust in Jesus. What I loved was that he said, “Which Jesus are you trusting? Jesus doesn’t come as a life coach. Jesus doesn’t come as a good example. Jesus comes as a Savior to follow by grace.” And I don’t know if you were here, but he had this image of Jesus that many of us have. We laugh at it because it’s Jesus on the dashboard. It’s a pocket-sized Jesus and he said, “The great thing about a pocket-sized Jesus is you keep Him in your pocket so you can pull Him out when you need him, and then when He’s done His thing, you put Him back in your pocket, and you run your life the way that you want to.” He said, “The problem with a pocket-sized Jesus is it gives you a pocket-sized God. You need a God big enough to fall into His arms for grace.”

After we built the foundation we started Lent, and last week we had a guest speaker from Nashville. Scott Sauls is the author of the book our series is based on, *Jesus Outside the Lines*. Scott did a terrific job sharing how Jesus calls us to be in the roughest conversations in a divisive world rather than retreating or saying, “You’re wrong, and you’re going to Hell.” He asked, “How do you have these conversations?” And he said, “Jesus’s followers should be the least offended people in the world and the least offensive people in challenging conversations.”

Well, we’re in the cab with the Uber driver and after we discussed Billy Graham, there’s a little silence and then Laura pipes up. This guy is listening to talk radio, and Laura says, “So, tell me, what do you think about President Trump?” and I just went, “[Gasps] What?!” And clearly, over the course of the conversation, this guy was in a very different place than Laura was about President Trump, but the thing that stunned me—besides the fact that she would talk about it—was that the guy felt like she was respectful and was genuinely asking his opinion. She treated him like someone whose brain counted, and by the end of the conversation he said, “Well, you know, I think there might be two sides to this.” I turned to her at the airport and I said, “Honey, I am so proud of you. Please never do that again.” And she said to me, “No, no I’m in a small group.” She’s in a small group of women and the women had been reading Sauls’ book *Jesus Outside the Lines*. They challenged each other to have a difficult conversation with somebody that they knew disagreed with them. And Laura said, “Check.” That’s what “Jesus Outside the Lines” can mean in part—having those conversations. But, if you’re like me, and most of you are, you go, “Ooh, no.” So, next Sunday night, Petey and Jake are going to sponsor what we’re calling “Conversations Outside the Lines.” It will be a little bit of a mini TED talk—you know those ten-minute talks from different perspectives—to talk about faith and how you discuss difficult things, and then we’re going to talk about that with each other and practice. We hope you’ll join us for that. Let’s pray.

Jesus, you want us to go outside our comfortable lines. You want us to follow You to these places...to the front lines of poverty and injustice. You want us to follow You into the jungles of the workplace. You insist that we go into the chaos of our schools with You. Jesus, You call us to follow you into the fears that we have as we age, and Jesus, even into the madness of middle school, You call us to follow You. Give us courage. Amen.

Do you want to know one of the toughest places Jesus calls us to outside of our comfortable lines? Well, one of the most radical things that Jesus ever did was to leave the religion of His day. He left the religious establishment of His day and He entrusted His mission to broken people just like you and me. It came about because one time He turned to His followers and asked, “Who do you think I am?” One of them, Peter, piped up and said, “I think you’re the One. You’re the One I’ve been hoping for. You are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God.” And Jesus turned to him and said, “God told you that. On you, I will build My church.” The name Peter means rock. “On this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.” Jesus doesn’t set up His church inside church, or inside the synagogue. He goes outside the lines, and for 2,000 years, regardless of what opinion polls say, or the latest tweets, or NFL football games that start at noon, the church of Jesus has been gathering and living out that Good News. But the reason that we’re talking about this as a problem is because in increasing numbers, people that used to go to church, don’t go to church. In increasing numbers, people are skeptical of church. In increasing numbers in America, church has not become a place where they feel like they will meet God. That’s why Sauls said in *Jesus Outside the Lines*, “Even real strong Christians don’t go to church.”

Donald Miller is a best-selling author who wrote a book called *Blue Like Jazz*; he’s spoken here at CPC—great with younger believers. A couple years ago he shared candidly on his blog that he doesn’t attend church very often. He says he struggles to connect with God through sermons or singing songs. Instead, Miller says he meets God at work; he feels an intimacy with God as he builds his company. Miller says, “So, do I attend church? Not often to be honest. But I also believe church is all around us. It’s not confined to a tribe. I worship God every day at work, not at church.”

Well, probably most of you don’t know Donald Miller, but most of you would have heard of Anne Rice, or if not her, all the vampire books. Hundreds of millions of copies of the vampire series. Anne Rice was an agnostic, actually atheist, Jew growing up. Then about ten years ago she became a follower of Jesus. But she said this, “I quit being a Christian today. I’m out. I remain committed to Christ like always, but not to being Christian. It’s simply impossible for me to belong to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, deservedly infamous group of the church. For ten years, I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity. Following Christ does not mean following His followers. Christ is more important than Christianity.”

I hope this is personal for you. It’s personal for me. I know a bunch of these people that I’m talking about. They believe there’s a God. They want to be good people. They don’t think the church attracts them or has the answer. All kinds of people, a lot of your kids, grandkids, brothers, sisters, friends, or coworkers have become disenchanted with this thing called the local church--maybe some of you too. You’re here because someone dragged you. You’re here because this is what you do, but you’re here in body, not heart. It’s not like the church has hurt you, that’s another sermon. It’s not like you don’t believe, you believe in something. It’s just that a lot of these people have left the church.

Jesus says, “On this rock, I’ll build My church, and the gates of Hell won’t stop me.” But what happens when people don’t feel like they need to stay on the rock anymore?

The church has always been in danger of forgetting that it is the rock and that’s why the Bible is honest here. Most of the New Testament is letters that Paul sends to local churches that are forgetting they are supposed to be the church. When they get off course, Paul tells them what it means to be the rock. One of those churches is in a town called Corinth in Greece. And anybody, whether they read the Bible or not, would know first Corinthians 13. “In the end, faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.” The love chapter, right? But the chapter just before that is why Paul wrote this letter, because they are yelling and screaming and fighting each other so much that people are saying, “Really? That’s Jesus?” This is what he says to them.

¹² Just as a body, even though it’s one, has many parts so it is with Christ. ¹³ We’re all baptized by one spirit to form one body. No Jews, no gentiles, no slaves, no free, and we’re all given the one spirit to drink.” ¹⁴ So, the body isn’t made of one part, but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I’m not a hand, I don’t belong to the body.” It wouldn’t stop being part of the body, would it? ¹⁸ God has placed each of the parts of the body, every one of them just the way he wants them to be ¹⁹ and if it were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there’s many parts, but one body. [1 Corinthians 12:12-18; 18-20]

One of the challenges is that the body is starting to lose a lot of little fingers and toes and maybe even a kidney. If people aren’t hearing the part of the body that they’re missing, then the body is incomplete. The other side is true too. If you say, “I’m part of the body, but I don’t feel like I belong.” Where is this church supposed to be?

A couple of weeks ago, Petey talked about the danger of what he called “Godfather Christianity.” I loved it. Godfather Christianity comes from the Francis Ford Coppola Godfather series and it tells the story of how these mafia guys go out and kill people and do terrible things and on Sunday, they go to church. Then they go back, and they set up gangs and they kill people and they break laws...and then they go to church and have their kids baptized...and they do terrible things...and then they go to church and get married...and do terrible things. Godfather Christians, Petey reminded us, are the people who go to church religiously and still feel like they can live like gangsters. You don’t live like gangsters, but a lot of us live religiously and we leave Jesus at the door. I think there’s another side to that coin.

On the one side is Godfather Christians. On the other side is the realization that you can’t get the fullness of a relationship with Jesus without the body. It’s a lot more than coming to church. It’s a relationship, and you can’t get the fullest of that relationship without other relationships. According to Jesus, the rock—the church—is God’s Plan A and He doesn’t have a Plan B. But what does that do to your kids, friends, relatives, those of you who are struggling to be a part of the church? I think it’s got to start by saying to skeptical people, “You’re right, the church is even worse than you think.” Unless we admit that we are a big part of the problem, we’ll never solve the problem.

So, let's say you go to a party, you're Presbyterian so you don't go to a lot of parties, but you go to a party and you bump into somebody. You're getting to know them and over the course of the conversation they say, "Do you know . . . ?" "Oh yeah, I know him from church" "Oh, you go to church?" "Yeah, we go to this Presbyterian Church" "Oh" and the person will say to you, "You know, we used to go to church. When I was a kid . . ." or "I was in the church youth group, I went on mission trips." Or "You know, we used to take the kids to church all the time, but we don't go much anymore. We don't find that church is meaningful." and they'll say, "But it doesn't mean that I don't believe in God." They say, "I'm not religious, I'm . . .(congregation replies) *spiritual*."

Exactly. It's a huge movement. "I'm not religious, I'm spiritual." And then they go on and say, "Besides, so often church feels . . ." Turn to the person next to you and finish the sentence. But if somebody you're talking to you doesn't like church, what do they think church feels like? Church feels like . . . turn to them, say something. What does it feel like? If you don't like church, what does church feel like? Okay, give me a little help here. If you don't like church, church feels like . . . what? Church feels like it is fake. Yeah, what else? If you're going to church and you don't like church, church feels like you're being judged. Church feels boring. What else? Church feels like they just want your money. Right, what else? If you don't go to church what does church feel like? Stuff? Like a bunch of old people getting together! Now you're getting personal. I wrote down "If you don't go to church often, church will feel political, it'll feel hypocritical, it'll feel boring, it'll feel like it's about money, it'll feel very narrow, and the most damning of all is it will feel irrelevant. It'll feel irrelevant to my Tuesday afternoon." And I have to tell you, I think the more that people have that view of the church, the more cynical they become about the church. And the more cynical people become about the church, the harder it is for them not to become cynical about Jesus.

I had an encouraging note this week while I was gone. Somebody sent me an email that said, "John, I don't mean to put undue pressure on whoever is preaching next, but the first three weeks of this Lenten series have been brilliant. Can't wait to see where it goes from here. Your friend." I won't say Nate's name because that wouldn't be good.

I saw Nate at the 9:30 service, I mocked him and he goes, "Yeah, at my firm, we always say P.S. Don't mess up." And he was trying to say this has been great for him, but while he, while you, were hearing all these great sermons, Laura and I were in 8% Christian Vietnam looking at the poor that World Vision works for. One of the things that struck me when I went there was that we were going four or five hours to one of these projects and the leader was saying, "Okay, 8% Christian, 12% Buddhist, 80% animist . . ." but that means that only 20% of World Vision staff are Christians, Christ followers. He said, "But these people, you wouldn't believe their faith. They keep drawing other people to faith because the Buddhists and the animists will ask, 'Why do you do this for us, you don't know us?' and these Christians will say, 'Well, it's because Jesus loves us and Jesus loves you.'" They are just constantly living this out. He said, "Matter of fact, there was this one World Vision staff person who was a Buddhist, became a Christian, and as a young Christian was excited and was sharing that they don't talk about their faith unless somebody asks. But somebody said, 'Why do you do this, young Buddhist?'"

“Well, it’s because of Jesus.” “Tell me about Jesus.” She told her about Jesus and then said, “Why don’t you to come to church with me?” That was on a Tuesday, and Wednesday morning, a representative of the communist government in Vietnam was at her door saying, “We understand you are proselytizing. You need to leave the area immediately.” She had to leave and go from Hanoi in the north all the way to Saigon in the south. That’s how important her church was to her.

Why do you think people don’t stick inside the body? Why do they slip off the rock? I think it’s because doubts are not welcome in churches. I think we draw the line so tight that people feel judged. I feel like they get embarrassed by the politics. I think some people believe, but they don’t feel like coming to church changes anything for them. I think many people leave church because they haven’t formed life-changing friends. They have people they’re friendly with, but not life-changing friends. We can talk all day about the ways the church mucks up. I’d like to give to you two minutes on how the church might draw somebody from the outside back to the inside. His name is Dale.

Video link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ydjg5i1epk5c9k9/CPC%20Dale%20Video.mp4?dl=0>

You might not recognize Dale without the hair that comes down to here, but Jesus has changed his life by putting him in a group of people who loved him and showed him a Jesus that loved him. Christians stay together because they’ve all been loved by Jesus. The church is a band of natural enemies who love one another because Jesus loves them. If the foot said to the hand, “Because I’m not a hand, am I part of the body?” I wonder what they’re missing if they go off from the body, and I wonder what we’re missing because they are far from the body? Where do you start?

Groucho Marx once said that he’d never join any club that would let him in. What if we started there? What if we started with the recognition that nobody, starting with us, nobody deserves a seat at the King’s table? And what if we became the kind of church that allowed people with doubts to sit here, that drew people in who think differently than we do, that says it doesn’t matter if you feel it or not, we love you and we want you to stay? What if we became the kind of church that follows Jesus outside the lines and invites others back?

Lord Jesus, I thank You, frankly, for this whack on the side of the head for me. That some of my friends who don’t go to church desperately need to feel loved and not judged. I pray You will draw us outside the lines so that our children, our grandchildren, our friends who believe there’s a God, but don’t believe in the church will be grafted onto the body. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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.