



INTRO:

Let's pray!

*“Father God, on this Memorial Day weekend, we gratefully remember our fallen soldiers and first responders of every age and generation, but perhaps especially those who, in just the last few days, weeks and months have stepped up to stop evil and assist victims in places like Buffalo, Texas and the like... Additionally, we remember and pray for those who have been hurt and even abused at the hands of the leaders and institutions that were entrusted with loving and protecting them. And that includes those in the church! God, we thank you that, in Christ, you’ve shown your heart FOR your church - that despite us being broken, sinful and at times, downright wicked, falling prey to wanting to maintain or increase power and control at the expense of others’ **safety**, YOU are nonetheless committed to us! AND not in the sense of church being your hobby, but as the Scriptures say, we being your bride! And so we begin this morning by acknowledging that AS your bride, we are on the one hand, incredibly humbled, for we know how ugly of a bride we can be. But on the other, we are exceedingly encouraged, for we know the extent of your love for us, even in our ugliness... And so we ask: help us in these next moments together, to hear from you. And in hearing from you, trust you more. And in trusting you more, become what you desire for us to be: a place that’s **safe** for all, as we ALL seek to trust and rest in Jesus for every area of life. We thank you Father, and pray ALL this in the name of your Son/our Savior, Jesus Christ...Amen!*

A few years ago, I sat down at a coffee shop, with some folks, who’d been a part of Hub for, at that time, probably 3-4 years, which if you know anything about our history; 3-4 years means: You’re a “lifer!” But I met with this couple... cuz they wanted to inform me that they were... leaving the church. And not cuz they were unhappy with me or anything WE’D done. They didn’t seem to disagree with any of our theological convictions or way we go about things. They even spoke glowingly about having grown in their faith and feeling loved and supported. Rather, they were leaving because of our COOPERATIVE affiliation with the SBC/Southern Baptist Convention, which at the time, was RIGHTLY facing backlash over a few denominational leaders having been credibly accused of promoting a culture of abuse.

And I say “cooperative affiliation,” because unlike in other denominations, in which the denomination empowers it’s churches through hierarchical structures, the SBC ONLY exists at the behest of local cooperating churches like ours, which MEANS, while we humbly hold to a common set of theological convictions and pool our money with other partner churches in order to better aid in starting new churches; we are NOT/never have been/and cannot be told what WE, as a church, have to do OR how we have to do it. Without getting into all the nitty-gritty; it’s one of the reasons why in a world of imperfect organizations, I still believe our church’s network is the best vehicle for driving mission. And by the way that’s coming from a guy, who was baptized Catholic, confirmed Presbyterian, saved Non-Denominational, trained Baptist, and educated Secular. I’m like a spiritual stray dog/got all kinds of stuff in me!

BUT for this particular couple/even though they understood that EVERY organization - be it a denomination, civic group, company, country, or the like - somewhere in it’s history has

unsavory elements, AND that THEY personally had never felt, seen, experienced, or even caught a whiff of abuse at Hub, they still intended to leave...And they did!

This week, you might know, that a report on the SBC, beginning with those accusations some years ago, was, at the request of churches like ours - we signed a petition for their to be full-transparency, since **safety**, and in this case reconciliation is never achieved apart from transparency - that report was concluded and released to the public. And I won't go through it/ you can read it for yourself. But I will say: it SADLY only compounds what we've seen in recent years within almost every arena of life, from Catholic and Protestant circles, to Hollywood, Corporate America and Politics; namely, abuse of those entrusted to care.

Now here's why I mention all this: **Safety** is, rightly so, becoming for people, what Tim Keller, called years ago, a "defeater belief;" meaning something that "defeats," in people's minds, the ability to believe the church/or even God on anything else! If people can't trust church to be **safe**, it defeats, in their minds, their ability to trust it on anything else! **Safety!**

As we continue our "**What Church Can Be**" series, I wanna do two things today: **One**, I wanna thank our very own Jennie Fournier, who you might know, has a wonderful ministry, here in the city, helping folks/particularly women, who've experienced a lack of **safety** in some form - thank her for the feedback and counsel she gave to me in preparation for this message. **Could we thank Jennie?** (CLAP)...And then **Two**, maybe in more a spirit of teaching rather than preaching today, I wanna show you that, a church being **safe** is, by definition, a Gospel-issue - something part-n-parcel with believing the Gospel! If you are trusting in the finished work of Jesus on your behalf, then YOU/and by extension US as a church are to BE a **safe** place for any and all. **Church Can Be Safe!**...SO if you would, let's follow-along, as we hear the reading of God's word, and what it says about **Church...Being Safe...** (PAUSE RECORD) **Lise Ann** reads...

TEXT:

Church Can Be Safe/Ya see in our focal verse today that, Paul, having last week, shared with us his guiding passion of knowing God and making Him known because of as he said, "*being controlled by the love of Christ,*" continues here by saying that, the REASON he's so overwhelmed to the point of being constrained by Jesus' love, is because, as he says, he's "*concluded*" - literally become convinced¹ - "*that (Jesus) has died for all, (and) therefore all have died.*" And commentators'll tell you that's a kind of shorthand for the Gospel - Jesus dying in your place! - That's the centerpiece of the message of Christ!...Paul, having become convinced of that, has therefore determined to live his life IN-LINE with that; meaning not only live for the glory of God, but ALSO the good of others, which at least IN-PART entails being a **safe** person FOR others! So if you're taking notes **2 Ways, the Gospel**, AS articulated here, **INFORMS this issue of safety!**

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 419.

Number 1: By the Gospel, We See That: **Church Should Be The SAFEST Place:** *Church Should Be The Safest Place!* The reality is: You can't go anywhere or be associated with anything that does not, at least in part, have a checkered past. As I mentioned earlier, there is no organization, company, community, or even country that has not, somewhere in it's history, fallen short of caring well for people. And that's of course BECAUSE every one of those things and more is made UP of people, who by nature, are sinful and broken. Karl Barth described us as "turned in on ourselves" - we're like hedgehogs, who when anything threatens or just frustrates us, we ball up and expose our "prickly spikes" to others. No community, so long as it's made of people, will ever operate in perfect **safety** for all. And if you're thinking, "*that's why I don't live in community,*" understand: you're more at risk than anyone. I mean if COVID has taught us nothing, hasn't it taught us the perils of living isolated from people? Of course! We NEED community/are CREATED for community, apart from which our lives shrink in on themselves.

BUT because no community is perfectly **safe**, the question we need to ask then is: Which community is **SAFEST**? And **Church really should be the SAFEST** BECAUSE the very organizing principle OF church; namely the Gospel, is something that eliminates the superiority and inferiority complexes that aid abuse and un-safety. Cuz see, when Paul speaks here about the Gospel that is Jesus dying, he does so in terms of it being a *conclusion right*? Something he's *concluded* BASED ON it having already happened. You understand, that's one of the biggest points of distinction with Christianity and every other religion. Every other religion has a founder, who in some form or fashion says, "*I've come to help you find the way to God if you just DO these spiritual things*" - pray 5 times a day if you're Muslim; meditate if your Buddhist; visit temples and holy sites if your Hindu; go on mission if you're Mormon; partake in sacraments if your Catholic; vote Republican if you're from the South, the list goes on-and-on. - Only Christianity though has a founder who says, NOT, "*I've come to help you find the way to God if you just DO these things,*" but rather, "*I AM God, come in the flesh to find YOU, BY having DONE everything you never could.*" In other words, the whole organizing principle/ultimate "*conclusion*" OF church is something that's already finished - Christ crucified - or as Paul said earlier in **1 Corinthians 15:3**, "*Christ dying for our sins is the thing of first importance.*"... You understand, what that means is there's, then, NO possible way you can legitimately feel better or worse than someone else. BOTH the superiority AND inferiority complexes that aid abuse and unsafely, become COMPLETELY out-of-bounds.

Let me explain: Maybe you're a person, who for one reason or another, comes across as a bit more direct, abrasive, even manipulative and unsafe for people. That's probably because, at least in-part, there's a pride in you that says, "you can"/something in you that leads you to believe/and you wouldn't say it out-loud, but that you're just a little better than others; maybe more educated, accomplished, better looking, what-have-you. Here's the thing though: If you really take in Jesus' finished death; it eviscerates that pride. Cuz you look at it and see that Jesus HAD to die for YOU! So you can't in good conscience see Jesus dying for YOU and THEN turn around and feel better than someone else. Kills superiority complexes... Similarly and on the other hand, maybe you're a person who for one reason or another, doesn't feel better than others, but WORSE. Maybe, sadly, you've experienced abuse and even come to believe that you deserve

that and aren't as valuable or worthy as others...Here's the thing for you: If you really take in Jesus' finished death; it TOO eviscerates that kind of inferiority complex! **Why?** Cuz you look at it and see, not only that He HAD to die for you, but that He WOULD die for you! The God of the universe loving you enough to be WILLING die FOR you!

So ya see? Church should be the SAFEST place BECAUSE the very organizing principle OF it - the finished death of Jesus Christ - when really taken-in eliminates BOTH the superiority and inferiority complexes that allow abuse and UNSafety to fester!

Number 2: By the Gospel, We See That: **Church Should Be The Safest Place...FOR ALL:** One of the things that inevitably contributes to UNSafety is whenever people are marginalized or just in some way - racially, economically, socially, politically - considered "other" and as "outsiders." Whenever people are marginalized there becomes the possibility for **Un-safety**.

Here's why people should NEVER be marginalized in church, not just because it's hurtful, but because look at what Paul about Jesus dying. **Who does he tell us Jesus died FOR?**...Everyone right? "*One has died for ALL, therefore ALL have died*" he says! Now, that does't mean all are saved - We're not Universalists! But it does mean, BY Jesus' death ALL are given the opportunity to BE welcomed into God's family. THAT'S the opposite of marginalization! Theologians call it "penal substitutionary atonement." Say that with me: Penal... Substitutionary...Atonement. That's what Paul's describing here. That Jesus, as the "one" because of course He's both fully God and fully man, and therefore the only "one" able to represent God to you AND you to God - BECAUSE He "*died*"/took the PENALTY of death - and did so "*for all,*" meaning as a perfect SUBSTITUTION for all us sinners - "ALL" now have opportunity to be ATONED FOR, which is to say, by Jesus' death, the sin that formerly kept us from God, has now also died. It was placed on Him - your debt to God cancelled. "*One has died for ALL, therefore ALL have died.*" Penal Substitutionary Atonement.

Now let me pause and ask you:...**Do you see how unique that is?** That every person - no matter race, background, gender, education-level, lot in life - as long as they are a part of the "all" that is the human race, are included in Jesus' death and given the opportunity to receive the benefits OF that death. I mean that's unheard of! Cuz just think about every other organization/community, certainly in the West. They all tend to operate on some form of meritocracy right? Take colleges and universities. We obviously live in a city in which those drive much of our way of life. But with colleges and universities, the baseline assumption is: those who deserve to get-in, WILL get-in right? Be that because of academic performance or even demographic quotas. But regardless of the metrics used, the operating assumption is still the same: those who DESERVE to get in, whatever constitutes "deserve," get in! That's true of almost every community and organization...EXCEPT church! Because in church, we gather around the truth of Jesus' substitutionary atonement, in which which ALL are given opportunity to be welcomed-in and those who GET in AREN'T/**listen** those who deserve it, but those who DON'T and know it!

In other words, the Gospel eliminates the possibility of marginalization. Cuz of course, when you see that Jesus Christ died for “all”; there’s no possible way you can call someone an outsider OR YOU yourself be considered an outsider. And EVEN MORE, when you see that Jesus didn’t set the example of community by hanging out with marginalized people, but died by HIMSELF BECAME marginalized; ya know poor for you, powerless for you, a victim of injustice for you, ALL in order to pay the penalty for your sins, there’s NO way you can look at yourself or other people as anything BUT EQUALLY needing Christ! It just levels any posturing, pretense, or projecting that would lead some to be considered “in” and others “out.” And in so-doing makes for, not just, a welcoming environment, but an incredibly **safe** one too!

So you see? How the Gospel really does animate and motivate everything? Such that whenever you have things like abuse or UN-safety - of any kind - it’s because there’s, in some way, been a departure from belief IN the Gospel! A falling OUT-OF-LINE with it, which is WHY Richard Lovelace famously said that, *“most people’s problems are just a failure to be oriented to the gospel - a failure to grasp and believe it through and through!”*

CONCLUSION:

So let me close with this: A very simple practical-encouragement... which is, you gotta see the sufficiency of the Gospel! Cuz Friends, the reality is we never get beyond it to something more “advanced.” The message of Jesus dying for all, is not a first “step” in a “stairway” of truths. Rather, it is more like the “hub” in a “wheel” of truth. As Tim Keller said, *“the gospel’s not just the A-B-C’s but the A to Z of Christianity.”* Whether with issues of safety or otherwise, it’s the way we make any progress, BECAUSE it’s as **Romans 1:16** says, *“the power of God for salvation!”* So it’s not an exaggeration to say then that, all our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Our main problem, is that we’ve not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, which is to say, we haven’t “used” it IN and ON all parts of our life... So my very practical encouragement is for you is to commit to continually re-discovering the gospel, as you look for new implications or applications of it TOWARD things like issues of safety. ***Is that how you understand the message of Christ? As something to continually believe and appropriate OR simply one truth among many?***... Cuz Friends, the reality is: A church that sees everyone and everything through the lens of Jesus having died for all, is not only a church that CAN be **safe**, it WILL be the **safest**, warmest, most inviting of all communities. TRULY be a place where simple hospitality and surprising grace collide for the encouragement of all! May it be!... ***Let’s Pray...***