

Founding & Senior Pastor Dr David Anderson

Bridgeway Community Church

Series: PRECIOUS

April 16, 2023

**PRECIOUS:
“Precious Community”**

Today I want to talk about *Human belonging within the body of Christ* and how we as believers are **all precious and valuable in God’s eyes** regardless of our differences.

- Today’s sermon is entitled, “PRECIOUS COMMUNITY”
- Next week Pastor Eli will bring the sermon “PRECIOUS CALLING”
- I will return the following week with “PRECIOUS CATCH”
- And then Pastor Eli will closed the 4 week series on May 7th with “PRECIOUS CARGO”

DISCLAIMER

Before I pray, please let me tell you up front:

- Today’s topic will be one that will create much discussion after church, in your cars, and throughout the week and, maybe, months to come.
- I give 36 sermons per year on Sundays at Bridgeway. (2/3rds of the year; I give away a 3rd to other speakers).
- If this sermon doesn’t work for you, I am hoping some of the other 35 will.
- If you feel a need to write me an email, I am open to reading whatever you write to me. (*you can find my email address at AndersonSpeaks.com*)
- I simply appeal to you to sprinkle grace over your words before you prayerfully press send.

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear God - Father, Son, and HOLY SPIRIT, please give us ears to hear and hearts to receive what you have for us today from your word and from your preacher of the hour, amen and amen.

I. INTRODUCTION

Someone asked me, “Why would you choose to preach on this topic?” And before I could answer they said, “Wait...It’s the Holy Spirit, right?” Yes, it’s the Holy Spirit.

You see, the Christian life is not just about *believing* and *behaving*, but it is truly about *belonging*. When we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior, *we are born again into God’s family with other believers* who are known as the Church; the “*called out*” ones.

The seminal passage from which Gracism was born teaches us how to embrace one another within the diversity of our human make-up by *rejecting two lies* and *embracing two truths*.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-20 (NIV84)

- 14 “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

In this passage we see that the Apostle Paul declares that the church is made up of one body with many parts. This analogy of the human body demonstrates that there are many parts of the body with multiple functions, yet we are all a part of one body.

Each part of the body is *necessary, valued, matters tremendously, and is PRECIOUS*.

Notice that once you begin reading verses 14 and following, Paul addresses head-on 2 big lies *that create disunity & perpetuate division within the body*.

II. 2 BIG LIES THAT CREATE DIVISION AND PERPETUATE DIVISION

- *You don't belong*
- *You aren't needed*

1. **You Don't Belong!** (v. 14-16)

- If the *Foot* says because *I'm not* a Hand... "*I don't belong to the body*" (v. 15 NIV84) - that doesn't make it true!
- If the *Ear* says to the *Eye* because I am not an eye... "*I don't belong to the body*" (v. 16 NIV84)
- Saying it doesn't make it so. "*It does not cease to be part of the body*" (v. 15, 16 NIV84)

A Word:

Negative self-declarations do not make them true. It's still a lie!

2. **You Aren't Needed!** (v. 21)

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Corinthians 12:21 NIV84)

- The **Eye** cannot say to the **Hand**: "*I don't need you*"
- The **Head** cannot say to the **Foot**: "*I don't need you*"

A Word:

Projected negative declarations of others on you don't make them true. They are still a lie!

Within the body of Christ we must combat the lies with the truth.

The TRUTH is that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ:

- 1. YOU DO BELONG!**
- 2. YOU ARE NEEDED!**

TRANSITION STATEMENT: Having said this and standing on the premise of these 2 truths, please allow me to address our challenges as the body of Christ.

III. OUR CHALLENGE

- **WARNING** - *I'm turning on my blinker now and I'm letting you know I'm about to turn down a challenging street of conversation. Are you ready? Buckle up!*

As a church we must wrestle with the kinds of people that are coming into the body of Christ and how we are to embrace them as a church.

With wisdom, discernment, and love, we must consider what this means for people who are of different colors, classes, and cultures.

We have done this.

As the founder of this church I am very proud of what we have accomplished and endured over 3 decades, only by the grace of God.

Many of you have been on this ride with Amber and I for so many years, and we are forever grateful.

But, as an intentionally diverse church, we must also ask ourselves this important question:

QUESTION 1:

As the world evolves, even while the Word of God doesn't, how can we embrace other brothers and sisters in Christ who hold different views *about marriage, divorce, remarriage, same-sex attraction, and same-sex marriage?*

QUESTION 2:

If it is the premise that all believers belong and are needed, then how do we as a church and as the broader body of Christ, wisely embrace people who have a fundamental difference in the way they experience romantic love, gender identification, and attraction?

My questions as a pastor and man of God who holds up & onto the bible as the divine revelation of God, I have several other questions that I invite you to ponder with me...

How do we embrace those who struggle as LGBTQ+ people, and those who are LGBTQ+ and don't struggle with it at all?

- *Should we?*
- *Can we?*

- *If we don't, then what?*
- *If we do, then what?*

What about the parents and friends of Gay people?

Where do they go to address their concerns, fears, questions?

What about children and teens and young adults who feel certain instincts and leanings?

Do we shut it down, shame them, or help them understand what it is they are feeling as we guide them toward a vibrant relationship with God's and His word?

Do we stay silent and hope they figure it all out on your own?

If someone is gay at Bridgeway, how can we love them even though they are *not in a theological environment that can honestly & openly affirm what or who they are?*

Bridgeway, there is a diverse spectrum of those in the LGBTQ community.

Many do NOT want to go to Gay Affirming churches that are out there.

I have offered.

They want to be here at Bridgeway!

We said in 2012 that we wanted to be “*Welcoming*” and “*Engaging*” but that we could not be “*Celebrating*” or “*Affirming*.”

We can celebrate the person, but SOME BEHAVIORS in good conscience, unless we just throw out the bible and ***make Bridgeway a religious social club.***

- Unfortunately, that is what some churches have become—**Religious social clubs** that throw out any portion of the scriptures that make them feel uncomfortable.
- If the bible challenges their sexual behaviors, their marital status, their racial bigotry, or their financial stewardship, they simply ignore those scriptures and keep socializing.

That is NOT Bridgeway, friends.

We are a biblically based community of believers that live under grace and gracism, but we do not call what is right, wrong, and what is wrong, right.

But, sometimes, *we don't always know how to effectively & lovingly address what is wrong in us, with us, or about us.*

- In fact, some churches go the opposite extreme.
- They're **not religious social clubs**, they're **religious political cults**

Hence, allow me to draw this picture on the board to help guide us.

[BOARD DRAWING - The Ideal vs. the Real]

IDEAL - *God's design & desire for romantic love & marriage (1 man, 1 woman, 1 lifetime, united as 1)*

REAL - *Divorce, adoption, fostering, premarital cohabitation, widowing, broken homes, pre-marital hookups, extramarital unfaithfulness, baby-mama-drama, etc.*

- *Other Ideals:*
 - Ideal **weight** (*gluttony*)
 - Ideal **morality** (*porn*)
 - Ideal **financial stewardship** (*robbing God of his tithe*)
 - Ideal **relationally** (*conflict with others harboring unforgiveness*)
 - Etc.

I want to talk for a minute about DISSONANCE.

We all live in some kind of dissonance or tension in our lives.

DISSONANCE DEFINED (Oxford Dictionary):

- *"A lack of harmony among musical notes.*

- *A tension or clash resulting from the combination of two disharmonious or unsuitable elements.”*
- **E.G.** *“Dissonance between campaign rhetoric and personal behavior.”*

QUESTION:

Does anybody know what it’s like to live in “dissonance”?

Listen, we all want harmony and want everything to make sense, but some things on this side of heaven DON’T & WON’T make sense.

We will have to live in dissonance & allow GRACE to cover the tension.

Today’s topic is one of those places of tension and struggle that we as straight Christians and LGBTQ Christians are going to have to live in, if we want to live together.

In trying to do this, here are some **Attitudes & Applications &** notes of **AWARENESS** that I will give to help us as we live in the tension.

IV. 8 POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Here are **8 Positive Attitudes** we should have as a church towards the LGBTQ Community. We should be: *(TAKE A PIC OF THE SCREEN OR WRITE DOWN)*

- **Welcoming**
- **Engaging**
- **Loving**
- **Considerate**
- **Open**
- **Ministry-minded**
- **Evolving in our understanding toward the LGBTQ community**
- **Dedicated to their discipleship towards God’s ideal for them**
 - **NEWSFLASH:** The ideal for Gay people is not converting them to becoming straight, but to become holy before God like us all.
 - *Instead of trying to make Gay people straight,* let’s help all people **GET STRAIGHT WITH GOD!**

As you can see, this spells out the word W.E.L.C.O.M.E.D.

V. 5 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Now I want to share **5 Practical Applications** for the Church to respond to the LGBTQ Community (*TAKE A PIC OF THE SCREEN OR WRITE DOWN*)

L - LOVE *people like Jesus*

G - GIVE *grace a chance to work*

B - BUILD *relationships with people who are different than you*

T - TRUST *God to transform people with his truth*

Q - QUIT *judging & start journeying with others*

I spoke with a dear friend yesterday who happens to be an LGBTQ clergy woman and she said that she still has these 5 applications on her refrigerator today.

VI. 3 BRIDGE-BUILDING NOTES OF AWARENESS

Finally, I want to share **3 Bridge-building Notes of Awareness** to LGBTQI+ individuals and Allies...

1. **Be aware of the pain and the loss that many heterosexual Christians parents, friends, and church members have to manage in themselves as they hear and interact with your stories, struggles and revelations about who you are or what you feel.**
 - They have their own struggles to deal with, and often suffer in silence because they are ashamed to discuss such matters with others.
 - This bridge building is not in one direction only.
 - If you want to live in community and in unity **with non-gay affirming people**, you can't have an attitude like, "*This is my truth, take it or leave it. Deal with it, whether you like it or not*" while waving your rainbow flag in their faces.
 - That's not bridge building either

Ready for number 2? Buckle up!

2. Be aware that equating LGBTQ struggles to the Historical Civil Rights Movement of Black Americans is offensive and inaccurate.

- This is offensive to many black people whose ancestors have endured horrendous injustices through slavery, segregation, Jim Crow and more.
- While there may be links and lessons, do not equivocate the two, because they are in no way equal in scale, scope, or horror to the heinous history & heritage of Black American slavery.
- Please tread lightly here.

3. Be aware that Bridgeway will be engaging in this topic with grace & gracism to build bridges across this deep divide in some way.

- **FYI - I have assigned 3 clergy - Minister Lisa Bryson, Pastor Dave Heiliger, and Pastor Will Eastham** - to formulate a plan whereby we can create a place and a space for those who identify as LGBTQI+, parents, and allies to talk, connect, ask their questions, and process how we can make you all feel precious within our community, even though you know our theological stance.
 - They will be working on this and presenting something to me in the weeks to come with the hopes that we can offer you something that will be *redemptive and real* while still upholding what we believe is *God's ideal*.
 - This may mean Listening Meetings or Conversation Circles or something. Stay tuned!

VI. CONCLUSION

Allow me to read once again the key scripture that I built today's message on...

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-20 (NIV84)

- *14 “Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”*

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you have accepted him as your lord and savior, then **we reject the 2 Big Lies** that (1) *You don't belong* and that (2) *You're not needed*.

The truth is:

- 1. You DO belong in the Body of Christ**
- 2. You ARE needed in the Body of Christ**

Let me reiterate...

- *While we are not a **Gay-Affirming church** (and there are some out there for you to attend), **we ARE and I AM a pastor who wants to affirm you as a precious and beloved person!** –even if we fundamentally disagree on this topic.*
- *I realize that this isn't just about the LGBTQ community out in the secular world, this is about LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS right here in our precious community!*
- *So far as **who you love & how you identify**, I am surrendering to the Leadership of the Holy Spirit to guide you and us, along with the word of God, as to what His good and perfect will is!*
- *If you are a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, **DON'T let the world define you by their terminology, by their alphabets, or by any labels.***
- ***YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD! PERIOD!***
- ***YOU ARE PRECIOUS TO GOD.***
- ***YOU ARE PRECIOUS TO ME.***

Therefore:

- I invite you on the journey with me
- I invite you into the tension with me, as we try to figure this all out
- I invite you to sit in the tension with me, in case we never figure it out

Prolific author and Christian civil rights leader, **Dr. John Perkins** said on a recent call that:

- *“Grace is God’s exaggerated love.”*
- God’s love is so exaggerated that one day we will all have to be changed in order to get into heaven with him.

Like **Minister Lisa Bryson** said to me the other day that, *“Her sin [and mine] won’t be able to get into heaven, because we must all be changed to get in.”*

- One day, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible and from mortal to immortality.
- None of our sin will get into heaven.

But in the meantime, *let’s struggle together at the foot of the cross* and ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help us live together in this PRECIOUS COMMUNITY.

VII. ALTAR CALL

Due to the sensitivity of this topic, I will not ask you to come up front, but I will ask you to make your seat an altar. Ask the Lord to meet you right there, where you are, as you are.

Maybe you need to say to God...

- I need help
- I need grace
- I need clarity
- I need to know how to repair a relationship that has broken over this issue

- I need to repent over how I have lived promiscuously (Gay & Straight)
- I have been mean, insensitive, and non-empathetic to the struggles and realities of LGBTQ people
- Maybe your heart is broken over your own sin, your own relationship with God, with the church, etc.

Make this altar a place to receive God's grace and healing.

Let's pray...

Dear God, we bow before you at the altar of our seats right now. We repent over all of our sins that have fallen short of your standard. Please forgive us and cleanse us from behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes that are not of you.

God, we need your help. We need your wisdom. We need your grace.

Help us, Lord.

Heal us, Lord.

Hold us, Lord.

Free us, Lord.

***We pray this in the matchless name of Jesus, and with full surrender to your Holy Spirit,
Amen & Amen.***