

Acts 2:42-47

Intro:

- A mini-series called ***This is Reality: Theological. Missional. Relational***
- An attempt to identify and explain why we approach things the way we do as a church
 - Theological—We want to be shaped by the nature and word of God
 - God is a Triune community of love and is, therefore, a missionary God
 - Missional—We want to be involved in God's ongoing mission in the world
 - God's mission goes forth in the context and in acts of love
 - Relational—We want to make sure that we are caring for and loving others for the glory of God

Reality is relational =

- We give priority to and are intentional about loving God and loving others in a way that exposes and explains who God is
 - God is the motive, not merely love. God is love. Love is not God. (popular culture deifies love)
 - We need to have our priorities right
 - 1. Love God—get our identity and self-worth from God's love
 - 2. Love others—give ourselves away in acts of love
 - You can't be effective at the second until you nail the first
 - The more you dive into God's love and loving God, the more you find that you **need people less and love them more, and delight more in being loved without being needed**¹

Relationships are the hardest thing in the world

- Comparatively: Theology and mission are a breeze
- But truthfully: Theology **insists on** relationships, and mission is only **accomplished through** relationships
 - And relationships are tantamount (equal in importance to) to theology and mission
- So in the church, relationships are not sacrificed on the altar of theology and mission but rather they are the fruit and context of both
 - If we really get theology, we value relationships
 - If we are really gonna be on mission, we will value relationships
 - We cannot be those people that say we love the Word and Work of God but don't practically love people.
 - If we value the Bible and mission as an expression of who God is, then we will give careful attention to relationships

But, relationships are hard!

The best experiences we have as humans are relational—from love and laughter to sex and security

The worst experiences we have as humans are relational—from slander and slavery to adultery and betrayal

All brokenness is relational—all wholeness is relational

- The worst atrocities we see in human history are a result of the broken relationship with God
- The most beautiful things we see in human history are relationships done right

¹ Partly quoted from C.S. Lewis
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What we must realize is that relationships are not optional

- This is true for humanity in general
- We are created with relational longing (and relational responsibility)
 - Example: Everyone is someone's child (not optional) = longing and responsibility
 - Our penal system proves how much we need relationships (Solitary confinement)

Here is why they are not optional:

Part of what it means to be created, as people, in the image of God, is that we are made for relationship/community

- God exists as a relational community of love
 - 1. God has always been in relationship as a tri-unity
 - 2. God extended that relationship in the creation of humanity

We now, as people (image-bearers) and as the church (redeemed image-bearers) exist for relationship

- 1. Relationship with Him (greatest commandment)
- 2. Relationship with others (second greatest)

The priority has to be correct:

- God → others
- Some of us are deeply wounded and broken because we sought in people what could only be found in God
- God's love enables us to have right relational longing and exercise right relational responsibility

The more we discover and experience God the more we are transformed into a relational reality of intense other-centeredness

Relational other-centeredness is “theological”—it is based on the nature/essence of God

“The Social Trinity” Model

- The use of a social analogy to think about, explore and understand the Trinity
 - “The threeness of God reminds us not to think of God as static or as an individual. Rather, we must think of God as eternal, dynamic fellowship.”²
- The Trinity as a family (an analogy):
 - The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit enjoy a dynamic life together, glorifying and loving one another
- Like a family, living together, loving and glorifying one another: My dad is the best! My mom is the greatest! My wife is awesome! My husband is amazing! My kids are fantastic!
 - In a similar way, by way of analogy, the members of the trinity are always pointing toward each other in a loving way.

In the Gospels:

- We are told that the Father loves and glorifies the Son
- That the Son glorifies and obeys the Father
- That the Spirit glorifies the Son and is the promised and anticipated gift of the Father

² Jonathan R. Wilson, *Why Church Matters: Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 55.
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We also see in the Trinity throughout Gospels this **radical focus on the other** (other-centeredness):

- The Father tells us to look to and listen to His beloved Son
- The Son says to wait for the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit is sent to glorify Jesus
- Jesus directs us to the Father's glory
 - Gaze upon one and you are pointed to the other!

The Social Trinity idea becomes our model for relationship in the church, And it teaches us to be:

- (1) A community of love (we do not exist w/o each other)
- (2) Radically other-centered (we value others above ourselves)

Relational other-centeredness is “theological”—it is based on the Bible

“...Be at peace with each other” (Mark 9:50)
 “...Wash one another's feet” (John 13:14)
 “...Love one another...” (John 13:34-35; John 15:12, 17)
 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...” (Romans 12:10)
 “Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10)
 “Live in harmony with one another...” (Romans 12:16)
 “...Stop passing judgment on one another” (Romans 14:13)
 “Accept one another as Christ accepted you...” (Romans 15:7)
 “...instruct one another” (Romans 15:4)
 “Greet one another with a holy kiss...” (Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Cor 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26)
 “...Have equal concern for each other” (I Corinthians 12:25)
 “...Serve one another in love” (II Corinthians 13:12)
 “Carry each other's burdens...” (Galatians 6:2)
 “...Be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2)
 “Be kind and compassionate to one another...” (Ephesians 4:32)
 “...forgive each other...” (Ephesians 4:32)
 “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19)
 “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21)
 “...in humility consider others more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3)
 “Bear with each other...” (Colossians 3:13)
 “...Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another” (Colossians 3:13)
 “...make your love increase and overflow for each other” (I Thessalonians 3:12)
 “Encourage one another” (I Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11; Hebrews 10:25)
 “...Build each other up...” (I Thessalonians 5:11)
 “Spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24)
 “...Do not slander one another” (James 4:11)
 “Don't grumble against each other” (James 5:9)
 “Confess your sins to each other...” (James 5:16)
 “...Pray for each other” (James 5:16)
 “...Love one another deeply, from the heart” (I Peter 1:22, 4:8)
 “...Live in harmony with one another...” (I Peter 3:8)
 “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (I Peter 4:9)
 “Serve one another” (I Peter 4:10)
 “...Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...” (I Peter 5:15)
 “Love one another” (I John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11, 12; II John 5)

Here is what becomes very clear from the NT:

Relationships in the church are:

- Mandatory
- Costly
- Messy
- Fruitful

Relationships are Mandatory

- The Body metaphor
 - Interconnectivity
 - The Gospel challenges our autonomous individualism (it is relational)
 - Moves us from independence to interdependence

Relationships are Costly

- The Bride metaphor
 - The cost of intimacy
 - Sacrifice—the giving up of self (Greater love has no man than this)
 - Everybody wants community but few are willing to count the cost
 - Sacrifice is the prerequisite for community
 - The difference between friendship and community
 - You have a few friends and many to serve
 - The key to Christian relationships is that you look to give (Cf. Jn 3:16)
 - From consumerism to servanthood

Relationships are Messy

- The Family metaphor (Brothers and sisters in Christ)
 - You do not get to choose who is in the church
 - No longer identified by differences
 - We are committed , not consumers
 - We do not pick and choose—we become family with people we would not normally be in the room with!
 - We will be dissed and dissatisfied—But to leave is a wrecking of what is meant to be
 - God (in the church) brings us into a love relationship with people we don't like—they become a tool that God uses to change us

Relationships are Fruitful

- The Building metaphor
 - We are being built together by God
 - We are part of something bigger
 - We achieve something bigger

Mandatory, Costly, Messy, Fruitful (this is just the way it is)

Because such relationships are mandated by the nature and word of God, as a church we try to nurture them at every corner (intentionality not passivity)

Examples (so that we can be on the same page):

We practice shared leadership (from plurality of elders to the general staff)

- We see each other as family based on the Trinity
 - Full equality, mutual submission and deference, intimacy
- There is no one closer to me (that is my mission—what about yours) (who have you brought close?)

We seek to know the people that we serve with on any level

- From Sunday school to missionaries (To know and be known)
 - Missionary partners
- We want to be like a garden, not a factory
- The **Mark 3** paradigm (Jesus called them to be with Him before they could serve Him)

The Reality Family of Churches

- Relationships—Pulled into, sent, and kept in relationship
- We would die for one another

Home groups

- Everybody that calls this church home (responsibility—call to serve and love)
- Every Christian's responsibility to cultivate relationships and to act sacrificially in them
- Someone said to a young John Wesley, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."³

Church discipline

- Like any other family
- The goal is always restoration and fruitful relationships

Intercessory prayer

- We pray with and for one another

Reconciliation

- Natural enemies brought together
- The evidence of grace
- Racial reconciliation (me and G)
- Healing (Wounded people wound people)
 - People get healed here—people also get wounded here
 - Perfection is not required—progress is (evidence of grace is how we deal with others failures)

Transparency

- Reality (Authenticity and accountability)
- We should expect love and service and pain and sacrifice
- We go deep into Christ and we go deep into Christ's body

In all these ways we try to be intentional about reflecting the character of God and going forth in mission

- How are you in your personal relationships doing that?

A praise report:

- I hear all the time that when people come here they sense the presence of Jesus
- We need to keep pursuing that = Centered, His church/His mission, relational in a radically other-centered way.

³ Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God*, 44.
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