

Text: John 13:23  
Title: Lean Back  
Date/Place: 12.2.18 | Reality Carpinteria

Today I want to talk about **Leaning Back**...and I want to come at that idea from the Gospel of John, chapter 13

John 13:21-29

READ | PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

What a joy to be here.

We are coming up on our 9 year birthday at Reality SF, a church you yourselves planted and birthed! And as you can imagine, ministry in SF is not easy thing.

Last year I took a Sabbatical, a lot like the one Pastor Britt is on right now,

- **And** in reflecting back on these first years of ministry in SF, I think the way I would summarize ministry in the City (for me) would be saying I tried with everything I had, all of my capacities to **Lean In**.
  - I leaned into teaching. Leaned into leadership. Leaned into the voice I believed God has given me. Leaned into leading. Leaned into the opportunities that were before me. Leaned into community and making a sustainable life in the insane City...
    - **I leaned into a lot of things.**

**AND** I think for the most part the message we get from our culture, especially in a city like SF and even in our culture today is to LEAN IN.

- To lean into our careers, to networking, to getting our 10-year plan planned and executed.
- Lean into relationships and opportunities.
- Lean into ministry and personal growth and leadership.
- Lean into trying to start a family while still leaning into all the other things we have going in our lives.

Sheryl Sandberg the COO of Facebook has a wildly popular book on women in the workplace called Lean In...and the message is to lean into your career as

women **because** as she says, men lean into their careers and women shouldn't be afraid of being ambitious.

Okay...so now we're ALL leaning in...all of us. Men, women...

- **AND**...there might be a good place for that in our futures and in careers and in women's equality in the workplace for SURE

**HOWEVER, with all of us *Leaning In*, John gives us an enduring and vivid picture for what discipleship to Jesus looks like, and that is: Leaning Back.**

TURN

In our text, it was the night of Jesus' betrayal.

- Jesus is enjoying the last supper meal with his disciples. Giving them what would be the first communion meal.
- After dinner Jesus removes his outer garment and kneels down to wash the disciples feet. (An act reserved for slaves)
  - And after that they are all lingering around the table.
- THE TABLE would have been a low three-sided table shaped like a capital U.
  - They would have been reclining on cushions around the perimeter. There were no chairs.
  - They would have been leaning on their left arm or elbow, since the right hand was used for eating or drinking.

As they sat there, reclining, Jesus starts to explain how **one** of his closest 12 friends will betray him.

- Right in the middle of this whole beautiful last supper scene Jesus starts to say someone in the room is going to deceive and betray him.
  - AND THE ROOM GETS incredibly tense.
    - *And you thought meals with your extended family were awkward...*

Judas sitting there, hatred in his heart, tired of Jesus' teachings, tired of Jesus' promises, sick of Jesus' way and even his life... **finally** he agrees to help get rid of him.

Judas is plotting to **betray** Jesus and Jesus knows it.

One mystical writer says this about Betrayal:

Betrayal is more than separation or rejection.  
To betray is to use the secrets of a person's personal life, thoughts confided to a "friend," and to turn against that person, to use their confided thought or words in order to hurt and defile them, to destroy a reputation.

-Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*

- Judas **betrayed** Jesus. He knew the secrets of Jesus, his thoughts, his location even.
  - And think about this: He knew Jesus would go quietly, he knew he wouldn't put up a fight...

And Jesus, during this meal, is no longer able to contain his emotion or his anguish and he starts to say, "Someone's going to betray me here."  
It says in verse 21:

John 13:21

Jesus was troubled in spirit [or in anguish] testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is doing to betray me."

- It's like Jesus isn't emotionally able to hold on to this information anymore.
  - Ever been there in your own humanity? Where you can't emotionally hold on to a piece of information anymore when you're around people you love?

And the disciples are **shattered** by this revelation...stunned.

- And **maybe** not so much by what Jesus *said* but by *the way* Jesus would have said it. Probably trembling, his voice quivering, his words told through tears... (\*\*JESUS IS NOT ICE COLD AT THIS MOMENT)

And finally Judas leaves the room, in the strangest exchange...Jesus is like, my betrayer is the one whom I'm going to give this dipped bread...here ya go Judas!

- The disciples are like, "WHAT IS HAPPENING?"

TURN

When Judas finally leaves the room John makes this comment

John 13:30

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Why does John say that it was night?

Because it was night

**But also**, because John loves to play with this light and dark metaphor.

He does this from the very beginning of his book:

John 1:4

In him was life, and that life was the *light* of all mankind. The *light* shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Light and dark

Day and night

John loves playing with these **polarities**.

And so here, when Jesus who is the **light** of the world is betrayed, John comments, "And it was **night**."

- Why?
  - Because it was night.
  - **But also**, because Judas was **turning away** from the **light** of the world and stepping into the **deepest darkness** and most *cold place* anyone has ever known.

Judas was rejecting Jesus' love.

- It *started* by Judas losing trust in Jesus
- It *progressed* to opposing Jesus (which we have several accounts of)
- It *culminated* by outright rejection of Jesus' love.
  - And from that point, NO light could come in anymore.
    - Judas was in darkness.

- And in darkness you make some of the worst decisions a human can make.

TURN

**But** during this dark scene we are given another **POLARITY**

- Another **contrast** to the darkness that Judas is in...
- And he is this UNNAMED DISCIPLE...we don't know who he is in the way this narrative is told...we are only told it's *the disciple whom Jesus loved*.

See,

As Judas is plotting betrayal there's a disciple who's literally **leaning back upon Jesus' chest**. Who is close to Christ in warm fellowship and intimacy.

- Who is there in trust and there in comfort, the text almost makes it look as if this disciple gets closer to Jesus *after* Christ confesses his agony. Because it says that he's reclining next to him, then it says that this disciple leans back against Jesus...it's almost as if this disciple *FEELS* Jesus' heart break and leans back on him in loving intimacy.

Like I said, we are not told who this disciple is next to Jesus. This person is not named...it just says, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" which I like because it can be any of us, it can be all of us.

- So here's the polarity:
  - Judas **rejects** Jesus' love.
  - The beloved disciple **absorbs** Jesus' love, draws ever near to it...literally places his body up next to Jesus' body.

Now, these are extreme but if you have ever read the writings of John, he is a black and white kind of person...and what John is saying is that: **You are either moving away from Jesus' love in more and more rejection or you are drawing ever near to Jesus in intimacy.**

That's it.

TURN

**Now, let's turn our attention to mediate on the image of this beloved disciple for a minute.**

As they are reclining around this table, remember no chairs, just cushions, this disciple leans back on Jesus.

- It says that he's on Jesus' chest or in some translations it says he's on his bosom (not a word we really use anymore).

And when you put your head upon someone else's chest, your ear is just above that person's heart so that you are able to hear their heartbeat.

- Think about that.
  - *The disciple whom Jesus loved is leaning back on Jesus, his head on his chest, his ear just above Christ's heart, able to hear it beat...*
- And with this picture we get John's **ultimate image for discipleship**.

For John:

A disciple is someone who is leaning back on Jesus, hearing his heartbeat, and **from *that perspective*, looking out into the world.**

- One of my close friends who lives in Portland has a son named Moses. Moses is 10 and Moses loves to cuddle. He loves to lean back...the first time I spent significant amount of time with Mo was in Hawaii a few years ago, he must have been 7 at the time. We get to the beach, we're playing in the waves and then he looks at me seriously and says, Dave, when we're done playing can we go back on the beach and cuddle?
  - I was like...uh...I mean we can ask your parents...

THAT, that right there is the enduring picture we get from John on what discipleship to Jesus looks like!

- That we would see our chaotic world from the place and from the perspective of leaning back on Jesus.

Being attuned to his heartbeat...and I would even say being attuned to his blood pressure!

- I need this. There are so many things I see in our world that makes my blood pressure rise, my heart palpate...
  - I went to the doctor for this at the beginning of my Sabbatical last summer. My doc said I have to calm down, manage my stress...I

said there has to be a pill for that. He said no, I'm not giving you a pill for that.

- There is no **pill** for that, but there is a **posture**: Lean Back

**A disciple is one who sees the world with the sound of Jesus' heart in their ear.**

This is what God has ultimately taught me after years of hard ministry leaning *into* everything that starting an endeavor entails.

- I learned that I have to see the world like this disciple did, from a place where I'm close enough to Jesus to hear his heart.
- You know I'll tell you, I think somewhere in the midst of pastoring my church the last 8 years I lost sight of that. **YOU CAN LOSE SIGHT OF THIS EVEN IN MINISTRY EVERYONE, I MEAN JUDAS WAS A CLOSE FOLLOWER OF JESUS!**
  - For me, I had my eyes and ears pressed up against my church and their needs, this city and its complexity and what I thought it needed and what I thought everyone needed and wanted.
  - See, when you walk in close intimacy with Jesus you come to realize that what a city needs are Pastors who are at least close enough to Jesus to hear his heart so that they can lead them there if when the church is not there themselves.
    - (Me pressed up against his chest, **LEANING BACK**, and saying to my church come here, this is where you'll gain perspective on life, this is where there is comfort, peace, love.)

TURN

See, this disciple's location is probably intended to tell us something **about** him: He is reclining near Jesus' chest.

Now, this is such a big deal.

This is where knowing GREEK is fun (I don't but I read people that do).

Where the disciple was in relation to Jesus is EXACTLY where Jesus was in his relation to God according to John's Prologue (1:18).

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

This is actually best captured in the OLD KING JAMES VERSION (anyone have that bad boy?)

SHOW BOTH OF THESE ON ONE SLIDE PLEASE

John 1:18

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the **bosom of the Father**, he hath declared him.

John 13:23

Now there was **leaning on Jesus' bosom** one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Same word, meaning that the Disciple is as intimate with Jesus as Jesus is with the Father (or if that's too strong for you)...

- John is at least saying that this disciple relates to Jesus as Jesus relates to the Father.

And the implications of that for me as a Pastor and for you as followers of Jesus called to make Jesus known is: Jesus being that close to the Father was able to reveal God (declare God) (make him known)

- For the beloved disciple it means the same, he's close enough to Jesus to be able to make him known.

Intimacy with Jesus has revelational relevance.

Meaning we can make Christ known as we know Christ.

TURN

Let me get real practical, what does leaning back **require**? What does it require of us?

What does Leaning Back require?

**You have to show up**

"There is no bad way to pray and there is no one starting point for prayer. All the great spiritual masters offer only one non-negotiable rule: You have to show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly."

-Ronald Rolheiser, *Prayer, Our Deepest Longing*

There is no bad way to pray: you can pray sitting down, standing up, on your knees, out loud or in your head, with worship music playing or in silence, on a walk or in your bed...there is only one non-negotiable rule: You have to show up and you have to show up regularly.

- I have clinically off the charts ADD, I'm distracted by so many things very easily. I'm distracted by the thought of being distracted and what I would do if I am distracted...it's bad everyone.
  - During my time away I journaled that my single biggest weakness in prayer is regularity.
    - So when I say this I'll say that this comes harder for me than most: you have to show up at Jesus' chest regularly. Daily at least.

#### Movie 50 First Dates with Adam Sandler and Drew Berrymore

- Drew has short-term memory loss and can't remember one day to the next, all the new people she meets and even falling in love with Adam Sandler's character.
- By the end of the movie in order to progress and move on in life she is given a video she watches every morning when she wakes up. That details her life, what happened to her, how she fell in love with Adam Sandler's character and the life she now lives. And every morning she goes through the emotional roller-coaster of realizing who she is.

I realized that sadly my life a lot like that.

- It's like no matter how good my day was with God, I go to sleep and forget when I wake up in the morning. Maybe it will be different when I'm 50, maybe it will be worse...I don't know.
- But I have to wake up and spend time praying, reminding my soul who I am "in Christ", what Christ has done for me by redeeming me, and what it looks like to walk in fellowship with God and obedience to him today.

For me, here's how I know I've leaned back, or attained intimacy with Jesus. I ask myself these questions: 2 questions with one bonus question:

- Was my heart warmed?
  - Was it calmed, set to the pace and the pressure of Jesus'?
- Was my identity recalled?
  - Who God is and who I am in God's world
- Bonus: Was my life directed?
  - Do I know how to enter into the day today?

### **You must put away distraction**

- Imagine this disciple leaning back against Jesus and then his phone starts blowing up...in his cloak...notifications buzzing in his pocket... Jesus looks down, "you gonna get that? Because now I'm distracted."

One of my favorite sayings while on Sabbatical was "Let's just not know."

- I got a new phone number when I was gone, deleted all social media and email from my phone and disabled safari...so my phone was just like a phone
  - And you know when you're in good conversation with someone and something random needs to be fact checked and then someone grabs their phone and is then distracted for 8 minutes?
    - I would say, let's just not know.
      - Like, why haven't you ever seen a baby pigeon? And the people we were with I would always bring up that question because I was genuinely curious. And the person would be like, "what the!" and then grab their phone and I would say, "no...let's just not know." You will respect pigeons a lot more now...like they know how to keep a secret.
- Our culture is a powerful narcotic, for good and for bad. The good is that a narcotic soothes and protects against raw pain. Our culture has within it every kind of thing (from medicine to entertainment) to shield us from suffering. That can sometimes be good, but a narcotic can also be bad, especially when it becomes a way of escaping reality.

- Our cultural narcotics shield us from having to face the deeper issues of life: faith, forgiveness, morality, even mortality.
- Things like our phones and entertainment can be set against the interior life by keeping us so preoccupied and so distracted that we lose focus on the deeper things.
- What has been created in the tech industry has made our lives wonderfully efficient, **and** it has also conspired against depth.
  - We have become so attentive to so many things that we aren't attentive to anything, particularly to what is deepest inside of us.

If you are to show up to God, Leaning Back, you have to put away distraction.

### **You need to let go.**

- There are a lot of visionary leaders in here. Many of you who can see a future life or a future world and order your world to make it happen.
- There are many in here who know how to take objects, numbers, code, materials, relationships, opportunities, or even whole companies and bring them under the agenda you have for shaping the world according to your own desires and purposes. Some of those purposes and desires might even be good, right and godly.
- **AND, when you go to God, in the same way you attempt to order your world, you attempt to use God to produce your own transformation or try and manipulate God to bring about the changes you have decided you need.**

What you really need is to release control of your relationship with God to God.

- This takes being alone.
  - I'm not an introvert. Whenever I hear introverts talking about solitude and silence I think, "You just like being alone."
  - I'm an extrovert. I love being around people. I love being around people so much my favorite thing to do is to be alone *together* with a bunch of strangers at a coffee shop.

When I am really really alone, I like listening to people through music, or pictures or something to remind me life is out there!

- But I really learned this in a profound way, through silence and being alone that I must stop trying to control my life with God. I must let go.

The practice of silence is the radical reversal of our cultural tendencies. Silence is bringing ourselves to a point of relinquishing to God our control of our relationship with God. Silence is a reversal of the whole possessing, controlling, grasping dynamic of trying to maintain control of our own existence. Silence is the inner act of letting it go.

-Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*

Then I read this in a book on Leadership...

Without the regular experience of being received and loved by God in solitude and silence, we are vulnerable to a kind of leadership that is driven by profound emptiness that we are seeking to fill through performance and achievement.

-Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*

Maybe Judas was following Jesus to try and control Jesus...maybe Judas was driven by such a profound emptiness that when he started to realize Jesus wouldn't bend to his will so he decided to get rid of him.

But the enduring picture of discipleship is leaning back on Jesus, showing up, without distraction, letting go of control of whatever happens to Jesus.

I know our world has been insane the last couple years, but I'll tell you, the only way to get true perspective of what's going on and have the real capacity to do something about it is from this place, lean back.