

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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Crossing Culture – Won't You Be My Neighbor
Marion Mason

Welcome again to National Community Church and welcome to all of our campuses and those that are on podcast and are viewing this in other places. So excited to be here with you today. You know, this topic that we're tackling today, we're talking about neighboring and particularly crossing culture. Crossing culture is challenging and if we're honest with ourselves, many of us have probably navigated this culture talk a lot lately.

You know, as I was growing up my family spent time in North Carolina and as a member of the military, my dad often moved around to different places in drug us with him. You know when we were in Fayetteville, North Carolina we attended a church called Lewis Chapel Baptist church, and one of the things that Pastor Reverend Dr. John D. Fuller did was had this event called homecoming. Homecoming, a little different than what we probably celebrated, some of us celebrated in high school, homecoming was an opportunity to engage with others that may have come from a different culture. Maybe it was a different geographical region, maybe it was a different country altogether, maybe it was just a different background. And what we would do is have tents all around the parking lot and individuals would bring foods and clothing and music from their culture. It gave us an opportunity to engage with one another in that special place called home.

You know sometimes when we're engaging culture, much like those events, some things you may not have liked. I didn't really care too much for frog legs, but I did like fried chicken. And not all black folks like fried chicken, but I am one of them. But we had that opportunity to engage in each other's stories and for us it's being able to appreciate what people bring to the table but not just allowing them to bring it to the table allowing them to sit at the table. And so as we dive into this word today, I want to encourage us a little bit because for some of us, we've had to go back and forth in cultures our whole entire lives. Some may call it code switching or some may call it just being where you need to be in order to not offend other people. While some of us have grown up into homogeneous communities, homogeneous neighborhoods, whatever it may be, and you found yourself longing for culture, wanting to engage. And as we think about this church and the big church sea what were found with is an opportunity to engage with people from various backgrounds, various cultures, and the way that we look at culture. Oftentimes we see it as maybe just someone's race or ethnicity. You know, our country has an interesting history as it relates to race and a lot of countries don't see it the way that we do here in America. That because the color of someone's skin is a certain color, then you have to interact with them a certain way, or maybe there's a heaviness that you may bring with yourself because of your background. You know the reality is when we think about race, it is an element of culture, but that's not culture within itself. That's just not crossing culture. Yes, we don't forget that. We know that our colors are different and our lived experiences here in America are somewhat different. To say that we're colorblind it's just not truthful. You see, because each morning when I get up in the morning, I look in the mirror, I see a black dude looking at me. And I say, good morning black dude. He says, good morning, right back. At the same time though, right? The

reality is that is some of the experience that some of us have and it's tough. It's tough to dig through that, but culture is so much more. The clothes we wear, our experiences, where we're from, our likes and our dislikes.

You know, when I first moved to northern Virginia from Fayetteville, one of the things that was in North Carolina was cross colors and starter coats. I heard a few eighties and nineties children laugh with me, but when I got to northern Virginia; it was silver tab Levi jeans and Reebok classics and so didn't necessarily fit in. That's the simple example, but for many of us as we look at our lives, we can probably look back on a time where we didn't necessarily feel like we belonged. Maybe it was an interaction with people in college or maybe it was moving into a new community. Whatever it is for you, recognizing that culture is something that oftentimes we have to crossover. It's not easy for us. You see for a lot of us, we have different things that may hinder us different barriers. Maybe it's the fear of offending someone, maybe it's a hurt from the past, maybe it's our own pride, maybe it's our own unconscious or implicit bias. We just don't know. Maybe it's something that we do intentionally because we've heard so many sound bites or we've seen so many images, or we've experienced something and so therefore we exclude others. You see, the reality is in order to overcome some of these barriers or the things that hinder us from engaging culture we turn to scripture. Yes, there are a lot of sociological ways that we can engage in and a lot of people are doing great work, but for many of us here today, we are already doing that work and for that God is proud of you. God is proud of you when you've engaged with people that are different than you. God is proud of you when you engage with another culture, when you read something or you eat a different food or you go a different place, God is proud of you.

It's easy for us to jump into a message like this and get beat down. That's not the intention today. The intention is recognizing God's value for each person in this room, each person on the podcast, each person in this country, each person in the world, because scripture reminds us that Christ died for each one of us. It also reminds us that for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And so today, for us, we, what do we do with this? How do we engage with culture? The wonderful thing is that scripture gives us an example. In Acts chapter 15, we read about the Jerusalem Council were Jews and these groups of people, they were really engaging with how do we deal with Gentiles, individuals that that may not be of our background, may not have the clothes that we have, may not have the same lived experience that we have. What do we do with them?

Chapter 15, verse 4, it says,

⁴ *"When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them."*

Now what was happening, the Apostle Paul and Barnabas were going around. That they were charged with going to Jerusalem to really challenge the things that were being taught. Gentiles were being taught or the Jews were being reminded and taught that, hey, we need to circumcise these Gentiles that they can't be a part in that they can't be saved if they don't align with the things that we're already doing. You know, verse 3 goes on to say that

³ *"...This news made all the believers very glad."*

And so as Paul and Barnabas were going through different regions, they were hearing stories of Gentiles that were being saved. Gentiles that had wonderful things that God was doing in their life. And so when we get to verses 3 and 4, we see Paul and Barnabas being welcomed by the church. That the church is excited that they're there, that these individuals that have given up their lives to follow after Christ, to cross over culture, to risk everything. They were encouraged by seeing others give their lives over to the Lord as well.

It goes on to say in verse 5,

⁵ *"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.'"*

You know, one interesting thing about these Pharisees, you know, they have this sense of wanting to be righteous. Now my wife and I, we have three daughters. Our oldest daughter has a sense of righteousness, she's the little mama. Recently, we went on vacation and you know, as we went up and down the East Coast, Dad in my infinite wisdom, you know, I kinda, you know, looked for suites that we could live in and stay in over the course of a couple of days. And the thing about, for those that have children and those that aspire have children one day, when your children get a little older, you know they need their own space and mom and dad need their own space too. If my wife had booked the room, she probably would've found the cheapest room possible to save money. But what Dad did, I found a suite with a door that closed and locked. That was very strategic. My daughter with the heart of justice and a heart of fairness. "Mom, Dad, why can't we have this room? It's three of us, can we have this room?" "No, you cannot have this room." She goes on instances like this over and over again, of fairness and justice to the extent where she often tells her younger sisters, you don't deserve this. You don't deserve this because I did more before you even came, right? Without saying it. Maybe this is a little Farah cystic type of personality kind of come in through, but a lot of us, do we rest there as well, sometimes. Maybe we see someone enter into the picture, maybe we feel like they haven't put in the work, or why are they getting this promotion or why are they getting this opportunity and I'm not. These Pharisees, this is where they sat, their own pride, their own biases hindered them from engaging with the Gentiles, hindered them from welcoming them in. Notice what happened in verse 3, that people were very glad the rest of the individuals were happy. These Pharisees stepped back with this sense of self righteousness. You don't deserve it because you don't have the experiences that we have.

National Community Church, how often do we do this, maybe consciously or unconsciously? As we see people that look a little different, people that worship a little different or people that may have never stepped into a church, it's easy for us to get self righteous, easy for us to step back and judge someone else's walk, someone else's life without even recognizing the life that they have had to live. NCC Crossing Culture demands and it requires us to take a step back and try to enter into someone's story, to engage with them, to learn about them, to spend time with them.

Verse 6 goes on to say,

⁶ *"The apostles and elders met to consider this question."*

Now, should they have to keep the Law of Moses?

⁷ *"After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe."*

So they were doing all this arguing, all this back and forth, and Peter was just chilling. Peter sat back and said, hey, hey man. God called me to give the Gospel to them. God called me to share it with them. I'm that same guy that denied Christ. I'm that same guy that tried to step away and God used me to share this message with people that are different from each one of us. What gives us the right? It goes on to say, to try to hold this yoke over them.

You know I love what happens towards the end of that section of scripture in verse 10, it does say

¹⁰ *"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?"* ¹¹ *No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*

You know this whole portion of scripture, everything that's going on here, Peter's proclaiming the very life that he's lived, the very things that he's done as he's sharing the Gospel with those that are a little different than he.

Verse 12 goes on to say

¹² *"The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul"*

The whole Assembly became silent.

You know some time ago I went out on a long walk, had the wonderful opportunity just to walk for about two hours. Towards the end of my walk I was coming down the sidewalk and I heard this jingling behind me. "jingle, jingle, jingle, jingle". And I just assumed it was a dog and so being the person I am, I started to look around to find the closest tree that I could climb if I need it to, but I saw this other dog coming up and this dog was much bigger than the chain that was behind me that I heard, this dog was a big pit bull with a big round neck and a big head. And the dog began to creep a little bit and kind of get low and so what I decided to do, I felt like I needed to give this dog and his own or some room to get by on the sidewalk. So I went ahead and stepped on over. Said, hey, if you want to go, you can go ahead. But the owner did something that was really neat. She pulled the dog to the side and she said, 'sit and be still'. The dog went to the side, sat and he was still and the other little puppy ran on by. How many times in our lives are we posturing ourselves to be aggressive towards someone else, posturing ourselves to attack someone for the lifestyle that they live, posturing ourselves to attack someone for being different, for being from a different culture. Sometimes we just need to be silent and listen.

After Peter proclaimed this, it says in verse 12,

¹² *"The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among and the Gentiles through them."*

Sometimes we just need to stop and listen, that can be challenging for us at times, maybe it's a sense of self righteousness, maybe it's a sense of justice that we all have, maybe it's our own fear or inhibitions, maybe it's feeling like we need to help someone, we need to coach someone along, we need to teach someone. You know, the wonderful thing about the word of God is that not only do we have this, this chapter in Acts here, that that really kind of digs into a different culture and how do we engage with different cultures, but we see that back and forth, that push and pull. We see those individuals that were trying and worshipping and wanting to engage with a different culture. We see these individuals that want to step back and push back and say, hey, you can't engage in this type of way. You see if we look back over the course of our history as a country. And, you know, I like to give the example of a ham sandwich, it was one of my favorite sandwiches growing up and not just a ham sandwich, a country ham sandwich, country ham sandwich with mayonnaise and mustard. You know, it's almost like you take this ham sandwich and we take away the mayonnaise and we try to take away the mustard and we pull off the ham and we slap peanut butter and jelly on and we bite into the sandwich, we're still going to taste that mayonnaise and mustard. Friends, there's still a residue of some of the evils in our country here today and we're going to taste it, but the church, what we are is light carriers and hope bearers. That we can walk in such a way that we engage with people, that people are welcomed into the Church of Jesus Christ, that their desire is to grow closer to the father because they see the way that we live our lives by crossing culture. Might not necessarily like the same music or might not necessarily like the same movies, but we can worship together and we can share stories and we can engage. You know the message of hope is hard to hear sometimes. For many of us, we may be feeling a little overwhelmed when we think about crossing culture. We might be a little disenfranchised or disillusioned, but those of us that have had to cross culture our entire lives, code switching or whatever it may be, it may get a little draining when we're not able to be our full selves.

So the reality is for myself as an African American male, it's an interesting life to live lately. Grew up, most of the classes that I attended; I was the only person of color for dark color, at least. For many of those experiences I felt that weight, that heaviness of not being able to be my full self, of not being able to engage in a way that felt that I should. For some of us here today, it may not necessarily be the color of your skin, it may be your gender, it may be decisions that you've made a long time ago, it may be where you're from, it may be your preferences. I'll tell you in the Church of Jesus, Jesus made us special, He made us unique, He gave each one of us are purpose. And as we walk, when we're our full selves, when we're who we are, we allow others to also crossover culture. You see crossing culture isn't just going to share your story and engaging with someone else, but it's being your full self. Why these individuals were so excited is that these Gentiles now were converted. It says in verse three, this news made all the believers very glad there were excited about engaging with people that were a little different.

National Community Church has a charge for us today, are charge for us to go engage with people in a way that pleases God, to continue to do what you're doing, to continue to walk the

way that you're walking. Scripture teaches us two things. It encourages us and also equips us. When we look back into the Old Testament and we see all of these Biblical narratives, I think about the story of Esther is she transcended culture and saved her people. I think about the woman at the well when Jesus interacted with her and she went back and an entire village was saved. Friends, it encourages us to see God shout out to Joshua, never will I leave you nor forsake you.

A lot of us have fears and anxieties about engaging in crossing culture. That same promise that God gave to Joshua is real for us today. Scripture also equips us. Not only are we encouraged by these Biblical narratives, but we have the ability and we have the filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives to walk out with confidence, to walk out with boldness. You see the same Holy Spirit that we're talking about here in Acts 15 is that same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead; it's the same Holy Spirit that is within us today that allows us to walk with confidence that allows us to walk with boldness. Crossing culture can be challenging. Crossing culture can be scary. Crossing culture sometimes make us lose friends. Why are you hanging out with these people? Why are you trying to be like this person?

National Community Church, God has given us a wonderful opportunity to let our light so shine before men, that they will see our good works and glorify our father in heaven. We got to be these hope carriers and light bearers. That's the charge for us today. See, the reality is even during this time, as we look at the condition of our country, we look at the things that are going on and sometimes it can wear us down a little bit, but we don't find comfort, we don't find rest in things that are going on in society. We find all of our purpose in who God created us to be. The Greek word for it is Ekklesia, a group of called out believers. That it's in this place that we find encouragement together, that is in this place that we're equipped together, that is in this place that we rally up and we can go out and storm our spheres of influence and witness to people the things that God is doing in our very lives in such a way that people are glad, that people are happy when they see us coming, that they want to engage with us, they want to hear our stories.

National Community, church, as we leave out of this place, leave out differently today. Leave out confident in who you are. Leave out knowing that God has placed you in this time and place for a purpose and for a reason, that for those of you that are slaving over legislation right now, that God placed you there for a reason. For those of you that may be looking for jobs right now, use this opportunity to engage with God to understand more about how he's leading and guiding you. For those of you that are going on vacation and you have kids make sure you get a suite. The reality is we have awesome opportunities to love with the love that Christ gave us and at the foundation of crossing cultures is the love of God. That the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom mindset, it transcends culture. Whether it be the style of clothes that we wear, the food that we eat, the way that we engage with other people, our preferences, our likes or dislikes, that Jesus is over it all. That God loves each one of us intently and he gave each one of us a purpose. And National Community Church we have such a great opportunity to be light bearers and hope carriers.

God, we're so grateful for this time today. May you get glory from our life. Where crossing culture is so big, so much there, so many different ways for us even looking at culture. But God our desire is to submit our entire lives to you, to place ourselves in a posture, Lord that you may

get glory for my life and be able to use us. May we be empty jars of clay. May you fill us with your wisdom, with your discernment, with your direction. Lord, we love you, and we thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.