



The Café “Now and Not Yet”

Learning Community Experiential Activity

Draft 2

The Café “Now and Not Yet”

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to help Christians and non Christians alike awaken their moral imagination and begin to think about and awaken the reign of Christ.

We are commanded to “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness” but what does that look like or is it just a vague generality.

This activity should also help people have some tools discern between good and evil and to learn how to use the 10 commandments to do that.

Short description:

In a Café like atmosphere people sit in small groups and discuss for up to an hour the economic impact of the implementation of one of the 10 commandments. There is then a general feedback to the larger group and the moderator gives something of the larger picture and describes why God calls some things good.

Location:

To do this well there needs to be a space large enough to have tables and chairs for people to sit in groups of no more than 5 people (4 is better).

We have discovered that if the surroundings are made to be as beautiful and as Café like as possible people do not mind sitting for a longer time. The more inviting the environment, the more people remember the occasion.

Time:

The exercise can be done in around two hours
It takes some time and planning to set up well

The Importance of the Café environment

The Viennese Café has historically been a place to sit at leisure and talk about life. This is the basic environment we try to create. It is amazing with just a little effort one can transform the most dreary church hall into an attractive “non-religious space”. This increases the effectiveness of the event

The exercise can be done as the desert part of a formal dinner

It is also possible to do this in small groups with people sitting in different rooms but it is important to have a space large enough for people to come back together for the feed-back session.

Alternatives include hosting an evening where one might discuss one of the commandments around the dinner table.

It can be quite effective to make the set up a surprise especially if the people are used to come into the environment (Church hall) So there is a sense of something special.

One group printed up a really special menu and printed the commandment for discussion on the menu – Really special!

Instructions:

Preparation:

Set up the room in small tables. Some church halls or hotels can easily accommodate this. Sometimes one has to bring table cloths, candles coffee, tea, juice and cakes.

The team / hosts / speakers act as waiters and come to serve the tables after the people have started their discussion.

Stage One

People are seated at tables of 4. Each table is given a different commandment. *It is best to start with the 10th commandment and assign them backwards. The second group of commandments are much easier to do. The first commandment is quite hard.* Only give one commandment per group

The table assigns one person to be a group secretary. This person has to be willing to feed back to the larger group

Verbal Introduction to the exercise. The moderator says the following or something like it.

In Matthew on the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expands the commandments and says that the narrow interpretation was made because of our hardness of heart. So in thinking about the commandments we should take the broadest possible interpretation. So the act of murder for example starts with Gossip and so on. The heart of the Pharisee wants to limit the interpretation thereby making it possible to fulfil but the Bible tells us it is impossible to fulfil the law. But that does not mean that the law is unimportant. It may not be able to take us to heaven but it describes the kingdom of God. We need to learn to interpret the law through the eyes of the law giver. I do not want to be under the law but I do want to be where the law describes the culture. (I do not want to be under the bus but I do want to be where the bus is going!)

In Psalm 119 David said “Oh how I love your law” He was talking about Exodus and Deuteronomy – What did he see that I have not seen!

In 2 Corinthians 3:7 Paul says the following of the Old Testament law and the reception of the 10 commandments:

“Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside,⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?”

The ministry that brings death is the arrival of the 10 commandments. – Paul talks about their Glory. IF we have not seen their glory how will we really see the Glory of the ministry of the Spirit. We do not at this time need to worry to much about the concept of Glory except to say that it has to do with being solid and heavy and awesome; serious stuff. Let us see if we can what is so Glorious about what the law describes and why God might think it is important.

The groups now have to discuss the question:

“What economic changes would happen if everyone everywhere agreed to keep this one commandment willingly?”

The reason for saying what economic changes would happen in society is to focus the mind on the pocket. It does not matter at all if people list social changes or attitudes or emotional changes. The point is to get a very long list of things that would change.

This part lasts from 45 – 60 minutes.

Sometimes people need help to get beyond the “religious categories” It may help to give some examples:

The keys in your pocket would not be needed. You would be able to leave your bicycle outside the house and it would be there when you came back. How many keys are there in your town – what would happen to the lock smiths – (Unemployment but then gainful employment) If now one bore false witness then we would not need notary publics or even passports. Imagine the savings? If you always new people where going to tell you the truth what would happen when the builder came and told you he was going to fix your roof next Wednesday! What would happen to the divorce rate if people did not commit adultery? The Sabbath commandment is far bigger than keeping Sunday special. It is good to have a free day BUT resting in God moment by moment for your significance rather than relentlessly working for it will save health and relationships. To take God’s name in Vain means far more than not swearing but to take upon myself the name of God to call my self by his name is to take the family image – To be a name barer. What would change if we were all committed to being made in the family likeness of Christ?

Stage Two

Each table reports back to the larger group. This can get long winded so it can be good to limit each group to 5 minutes maximum. The more groups you have the less time to give them. (10 groups would be 50 minutes!)

Take a maximum of 30 minutes for this part even if you have to ask people to stop talking. (The lists can be rather long)

The following points are often realized by people in the groups.

1. Each commandment is connected to the other commandments (You will often get people asking if they can or should include another commandment in their discussions)

Stage Three

The Moderator summaries the session.

The following lessons and ideas can be made::

1. God does not ask us not to do things because he is a spoil sport but because he wants our best. Goodness is in our best interest.
2. God calls on us to love good and hate what is evil. We have to learn to hate in a Godly way without condemnation as this is not our business but the work of the Holy Spirit.

3. The temptation is to lower the standard so we can keep the commandments and be righteous without Christ – Self-righteous. But this is to miss the point. To raise the standard is to see the Glory of the goodness of God and our future hope
4. I can afford to see the sin that this exposes in me because Christ's death is sufficient and the resurrection proves it.
5. How much sin would I allow into God's Kingdom? 10%, 1% Not at all the higher the standard the better the future.

On the Commandments:

6. The introduction to the commandments is a call to freedom. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Slavery. In other words I want you to be free. (It was for freedom that Christ set you free)
7. Goodness is the form in which freedom is maximized. If you want to lower taxes go out and do good.
8. The first commandment is a call to intimacy with God. "Let there be nothing in between us" Let there be nothing in between in infinite Creator and his finite creation.
9. The offer is to come close (To know God is Eternal life John 17:3)
10. The Trinity is the absolute intimate. The law is God's agreement among himself about what is good. There is no argument within the Godhead about good and evil.
11. God's problem with being God is that he cannot stop being God and he cannot stop being absolutely good (and nor would we want him to!) It is out of this abundance of goodness that God's offer of restoration comes. It is always an offer toward the good.
12. Do not worship the images but the real
13. Do not take the name in vain – Do call yourself a follower of Christ unless you are committed to the family likeness
14. Rest in Christ for the issues and questions raised by your existence your belonging your meaning, significance and identity,
15. Honour your mother and father by letting God be God and your parents be human. Do not demand that your parents are gods to you. Release them from their failures and

On the Kingdom of heaven's

16. God says You will be done on earth as it is now being done in the heavens. How should we live and what should we love in the light of what we have said. This is not a call to moralism. The Law does not give us the power to live well. We must go to the Holy Spirit on a moment by moment basis claiming the atoning work of Christ for the power. We must not fear the conviction of Sin because the Holy Spirit will not convict us with out presenting us with Christ as solution but we must move into the City from the CityGate and live the kingdom until he comes.
17. What image of heaven do we have: Most of us have a underdeveloped sense of the kingdom coming, the kingdom that is growing within us as the Spirit works. We are rather on a magical mystery tour hoping for something nice at the end. But Consider Christ who "for the joy before him endured the cross" Is the joy big enough so that we can endure the crosses that Christ calls us to base. Every decision is in economic. "Is this worth that" Is the joy worth the cross. The more we meditate on the joys of the reign of Christ in terms of the moral impact and the release from the bondage or depravity management to more we will be able to make meaningful sacrifices in our present times.

Summary:

The exercise should aim to help people hope well and to be more joyful. It might be worth while to close on this positive note and to remind people that David meditated “Day and Night” on the law because he was a king and needed to know how to run a kingdom.