

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides (April 10th-17th)

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. When you were younger and attended art class, what kind of projects did you enjoy?
2. Do you enjoy art? If so, then what kind of art do you enjoy?

Bible Study Questions

1. How would you define the gospel message? How would you explain it to someone who didn't know it?
2. Read Luke 4:14-21.
 - What do these verses say about the mission of Jesus?
 - How do these verses align with or enhance your view of the gospel?
3. As a young man, Van Gogh found himself desperately searching for the "more" of life. Where have you invested your life in the search of "more"? How is that search fulfilled through the work of Jesus?
4. Van Gogh became very disillusioned with the church and the works focused aspect of religion. How have you experienced that in your church experience? What difference does it make to know that salvation is something that has been given to you instead of something that you earned?
5. Writer Jim Belcher has suggested that even though Van Gogh wanted God's love, he would not acknowledge the death of Jesus on the cross. Why does that matter?
 - What is lost in the Christian faith without the cross?

April 10th
The Art of the Gospel

This week will be a very different kind of message. We will be looking at the gospel message through the backdrop of art and the life of Vincent Van Gogh.

I. The gospel fulfills our craving for “more”:

Vincent Van Gogh’s father was a minister and he initially wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps. He became disillusioned with the church and turned to art. Early in his career, he sought fulfillment through pleasure, only to be left empty. He began to sense, and would include this in his paintings, a sense that there was “more” to life that he was missing.

The Bible teaches that God made man to live with him in Paradise. But when man sinned, that world was broken. History tells the story of people trying to reclaim Eden through their own efforts and failing. Yet the early Christians believed that the “more” had been found through Jesus. God had come to earth and created a way for us to be restored to him. In that restoration, was the promise of fullness with a taste of it to be experienced in the presence.

II. The gospel reveals the failure or moral religion:

Vincent Van Gogh began to have a new interest in the Christian faith. He drew several scenes from the life of Jesus and would describe his images of light as being symbols of God’s love. A notable work of art was “*Starry Night*” in which he depicted a city at night. Light was meant to represent God’s love and the moon/sun in the corner was to represent Jesus/God. Every house has the lights on, meaning that they were touched by God’s love. The one building with darkness was the church.

Van Gogh had experienced the church as a place of moral rules trying to impress God. It was the place where people reinforced their own superiority and sought to earn God’s approval. Yet God was not impressed. Jesus confronted this same issue with the religious leaders of his time. They thought they were impressing God, but Jesus exposed their spiritual bankruptcy. He instead spent time with sinners showing them his mercy and grace. The gospel taught that salvation was something that could be earned, but something that was given by God.

III. The gospel provides the answer to our brokenness.

Van Gogh later slipped into depression and died of a gun shot wound, one that he claimed to inflict on himself. His suicide has puzzled many scholars. One scholar has made an interesting observation on his life. While he painted many scenes from the life of Jesus, he never painted the

resurrection. He once attempted to do a scene from the Garden of Gethsemane, but gave up and through the painting away. During his life, he routinely got into fights with people because he would never admit that he was wrong. Could it be that he wanted God’s love but rejected the humiliation of the cross? Without the cross, the gospel is empty. The cross is where Jesus dealt with our brokenness by taking the punishment that we deserved. Our broken life apart from God dies with him so that we can experience new life through Jesus.

Conclusion

The gospel is a beautiful thing. It fulfills our cravings for more, it is something that God does for us, and it heals our brokenness. We can’t change Van Gogh’s story, but we can make our own decision to embrace God’s gift to us.