

Sermon Transcript from July 17th, 2016
Intro: A Creative Minority
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Tonight, we're starting a new series from the book of Daniel, which I think we get to in a week, that we are calling "Life in Exile: On Becoming a Creative Minority." And I had intended to get into Daniel 1 tonight, but my intro was so long I decided it had to be its own teaching. So, all I want to do tonight is set up the idea behind what is a creative minority and what exactly do we mean by that and what does it look like for you and me here at Bridgetown Church?

So, to start, let's say it's a Sunday morning. You get up early or earlyish and you go out for a cup of coffee at 7 or 8 a.m. Whatever. It's a beautiful, warm summer day. You have hours of free time hopefully spread out in front of you. You're in line at your coffee shop of choice and you get up to the counter, you order your drink and the barista asks you the inevitable question if there's time and it's not crazy in the cafe: "What are you doing today?"

How many of you – maybe this is just me – immediately feel a tension in the back of your heart? Because, if you say, "I'm going to the beach" or "I'm going out for a mimosa with my girlfriends" or "to do yoga down by the river" or pretty much anything, great. But, if you say, "Well, it's a Sunday and so I'm going to church because every single Sunday night I gather with followers of Jesus from all over the urban core of the city and we come together and we declare that Jesus is Lord over our city and over our world... soy milk, please, by the way."

If you say that, what happens? Nine times out of ten, there is this instantaneous tension in the air and it is thick. I mean, cut it with a butter knife palpable. Right? A wall goes up in the baristas eyes and, if you're anything like me, you project into the baristas consciousness what he or she is thinking: "You're one of those people. You're crazy. You're weird. My guess is you're an uneducated bigot. You're probably from suburbia. I mean, who knows what's wrong with you."

And you just this instant sense of tension. Now, this is a recent development, at least in the U.S. That was not the case 50 years ago or even 25 years ago when I was a kid growing up. Over the last 2 or 3 hundred years, in particular over the last 2 or 3 decades, there has been a tectonic shift in Western culture. The ground underneath our feet has moved and we're not in Kansas anymore. We have evolved from what usually in sociology is called a Christian culture to a post-Christian culture. Now, to clarify, when I say "Christian," I don't mean that America was a Christian nation. My take on that, at least personally, was that America never was a Christian nation, for the most part because there is no such thing. Christian is a noun, it's not an adjective. People are Christians, not nations.

But, what I mean by that is there was a time when America was Christianized; when our culture, at least for a very long time, was a mix of a lot of Christian ideas. Of course mixed with pagan ideas and then, after that, secular ideas. But, most of America was shaped by the Judeo-Christian worldview. Most people on the street believed in God, Jesus, at least bits and pieces of the Bible, kind of the basic ethics system that we ascribe to. The word that historians use for this time period in the West in Christendom. It officially started in 331 A.D. with the Edict of Milan when emperor Constantine, if you know the story, made violence against followers of Jesus illegal in the Roman empire. He did that, most people think, as a political move. Because, for the first time, Christians, which started out as this dinky minority – I mean, 120 people in the upper room – had, by that time in 300 years, become 53% of the empire.

So, he's a politician and he's well aware that that's not a minority anymore; that's a majority. So, for the first time in the at least the history of the Church, followers of Jesus became not a persecuted minority, but a political majority. A few years after that, as a political move, most people think, whether or not Constantine's conversion was authentic is up to Jesus; I highly doubt it. But, most people argue at that point he made Christianity into a religion. He then made it the default religion of the Roman empire; the civil religion of the day. A lot of thinkers, myself included, think that was one of the worst things to ever happen to the church in the West.

This kind of hybrid culture of what, at that time, was Christianity – which is not a word ever used by Jesus or the New Testament writers. But, this idea of Christianity as a religion and its mixture with culture, Christendom, that became kind of the de facto setting for

well over a thousand years. Even after Europe in countries like the U.S. and Canada where we have no state religion; there's no Anglican communion or whatever. There's no state church. Even here, Christianity was still the civil religion of the day. This slowly began to change, as most of you know, in the 17th and 18th centuries with the Age of Enlightenment, which started to question key assumptions of Christendom. And it didn't break down rapidly, though, not really until the last two or three decades. Now, at this point, there's absolutely no doubt that while the way of Jesus is exploding around the world, in particular in the global south.

In the West, in particular in Europe, but even more and more here in the U.S., it's in decline. We are now officially, full on, living in a post-Christian world. Three cultural shifts have changed the topography of the West. This is a framework from my friend, John Tyson, in New York. First, if you're taking notes, go ahead and write this down: we've shifted from a majority to a minority. For the first time ever in American history, obviously not Church history, Protestant Christians – so, not even counting Catholic – are no longer a majority in the U.S. In fact, that fastest growing religious segment of society on the official ballot is called the "nones," which is basically Portland. A "none" is the essential kind of spiritual, but not religious. You're not a Christian or a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim, you're a "none." You're a "spiritual, but not religious."

This is especially true in a city like Portland. Unfortunately, we don't have any good stats for how many followers of Jesus there are, at least not in the urban core of our city. A study a few years ago of questionable reliability put the number at 4-5% of Portland in church on any given Sunday, but that was church in the most broad, generic, any kind of faith or creed sense. My best guess is that about 2-3% of our city, at least in the urban core, is following Jesus. So, you're at the office party. If there's 100 people there, the odds are, statistically, that 2, 3 or, max, 4 people there are practicing the way of Jesus.

To follow Jesus in a city like Portland is to be an endangered species. Am I right? Yes. I'm right. That was a rhetorical question. I was on vacation. I'm right. Trust me. So, first, from a majority to a minority. Secondly, from the center to the fringe. There was a time – this is really hard to believe – when Christians were at the center of cultural influence. Most government leaders, if you know anything about our nations origin, were Christian or at least deist with a Judeo-Christian worldview. All the best higher learning, all the really good education in America was all Christian. Harvard, Yale, Princeton, all of it. Most writers and philosophers across the West were followers of Jesus. Pastors – this is crazy for me – were actually people of high standing. Now it's like, "What do you do for a living?"

"I work for a non-profit," or something like that. Because, to say you're a pastor is to say you're nerdy, stupid, sitcom idiot or whatever. You're naive or you're all of that. Followers of Jesus, though, have moved out of the halls of power, at least where culture is made, to the fringe, and we're thought of as weird and odd and out of place. The separation of church and state, which, contrary to what most people think, is actually not in our constitution, it's in a letter from one of the founding fathers. But, the original intention behind that was to keep the state out of the church. It's this early America coming out of England where there's a state church also in Germany and pretty much all of the European countries. The founding fathers did not want that. So, the idea was, "Let's keep the state, let's keep the government out of the church and let the church be the church."

But, over a few hundred years, and particularly over the last half century, that's turned on its head and now most people think the whole point of that is to keep the church out of the state. Our culture wants nothing to do with faith in the public square. People don't really care what you believe. Like, you want to believe in the flying spaghetti monster, or Jedi Knight, or Jesus of Nazareth, great, as long as you keep it to yourself. Or maybe show up with those other weirdos at church on Sunday night. But, you keep it to yourself. We don't want it in the public square at all.

Lee Beach writes this:

"In the post-Christian revolution, it is fair to say that the Church is one of those former power brokers who once enjoyed a place of influence at the cultural table, but has been chased away from its place of privilege and is now seeking to find where it belongs amid the ever changing dynamics of contemporary culture."

So, as a general rule, we're not seen as having any kind of spiritual or moral authority or even credibility in the public square. So, from the center to the fringe. Then, finally, from well respected to disrespected. There was a time – this is also hard for me to believe –

when, for the most part, Christians were well respected. Even as late as the 90s, the word "Christian" had overwhelmingly positive connotations for the vast majority of American citizens. Over time it changed and we became thought of as weird. We're kind of like the oddity. Like, "Oh, you're the weird people that don't have sex before you get married and you give money away and you're kind of weird. And you go to the developing world and you do this weird stuff."

But, even five years ago, I feel like, at least in my circle of friends that don't follow Jesus, it was like that. People would find out a neighbor or a barista or somebody would find out that I follow Jesus and it was always like, "Really?" It was like discovering a unicorn or an urban myth or something. People weren't angry. They're like, "You still exist? You're a thing? That's a thing in Portland? You live here? Really?"

It was just this oddity. You know? But now, law has changed particularly in the last few years and now, a lot of people, if not most people, have negative connotations. We're thought of not only as weird and odd, but as dangerous. People are so illiterate when it comes to faith and spirituality – and I don't mean that as a slam, it just is – that often, followers of Jesus are lumped in with ISIS and Orlando and the abortion shooting and whatever craziness.

I have a friend here in town. A good guy, a good friend. He's a pastor who is smart as a whip. He has his PhD. He's humble. He's kind. He's gracious. A few weeks ago, on the tragic morning of the Orlando shooting, he woke up that morning and was just rocked by it and immediately thought to pick up the phone and call his gay neighbors and just say, "I love you guys. I just want you to know that we're standing with you and you have our prayers. We're so sorry for what you and your community have been through."

He immediately got this email from one of his gay neighbors that was this angry tirade against my friend and essentially said, "You and people like you are the problem, not the solution. If it was not for people like you and the stuff that you believe, none of this would have ever happened."

So, we're now lumped in with all of that no matter what you believe about sexuality. If it's at all like Jesus and the writings of the New Testament, you're a bigot, you're this, that and the other. Sexuality is a great example because we now have – this is so fascinating to me – the moral low ground. So, 20 years ago, even when I was growing up, most people who were not followers of Jesus knew kind of what we thought about sexuality based on the teachings of Jesus, the writings of the Old and the New Testament, and most people thought it was weird or behind the times or not progressive or whatever, but people still looked up to it. It was like, "Wow. You're amazing. You're more moral than we are."

But, all of that has changed. Now, if you refuse to go with the redefinition of sexuality and marriage from the LGBT community and whatever and if you stand at all with Jesus and the writers of the New Testament for that ancient vision of sexuality, of marriage, even if you separate the political conversation from the disciple of Jesus conversation, if at any point you even dare to suggest that there is such a thing as universal morality, you immediately have the moral low ground. You are thought of as a bigot, as angry, as intolerant in a culture where tolerance has become the highest virtue there is. You now have the moral low ground. You are thought of as immoral.

In a shocking twist, we are now the James Dean. We are now the Danny Zuko. We are now the immoral rebel on the fringe of society. Like, "You don't sleep around? You're dangerous. You stand for a man and a woman together for life no matter what? You're dangerous. You're on the fringe. You're the rebel."

So, our culture has moved from a positive to a negative view of followers of Jesus. So much has changed so fast. There's a political theory called the "Overton window" that I think does a good job of explaining this. The basic idea – and this is a gross oversimplification – is that a new idea comes into play, whatever that is, and it starts out as unthinkable, then it becomes radical, then it becomes acceptable, then it becomes sensible, then it becomes popular and it's basically over at that point. It's in Urban Outfitters and it's just a disaster. Then, finally, it becomes policy.

And this is a great example. There are so many things that even when I was growing up – I'm not even that old – there are things that were unthinkable that now are the status quo. Whatever your example is. No prayer. Prayer as illegal in public schools. Gay marriage as legal. Glamorous woman of the year as Caitlyn Jenner, still with male parts. I mean, whatever your example is. Things that were unthinkable not that long ago – 10 or 20 years ago – are now the new normal.

So, how did we get here? Lee Beach, again, has a great book out on this. He identifies three things that changed the game. The first is secularization. The famous sociologist, if you've ever read him, Charles Taylor, in his seminal book, *A Secular Age*, points out that 500 years ago, it was unthinkable to not believe in God in the West. And not just in God, but in the God that Jesus had come to make visible. Now, even the most devote follower of Jesus, if you were like a hardcore, passionate apprentice of Jesus, you're a pastor at a church, you're a leader of a missional community or whatever, all of us are racked by doubt because we live in this age of uncertainty and skepticism and secularism and everything is called into question.

Because we've moved from what he identifies as enchantment to disenchantment. Enchantment meaning there was a time when people thought the world was charged with spiritual life; God, Satan, angels, demons, Heaven, Hell, providence, the divine hand in human history. But, that's not the world we live in anymore. From enchantment to disenchantment. The basic worldview we live in now is, "Hey, all of that was a myth from pre-modern, pre-scientific man. Now we know better. Now we know all of that was superstitious nonsense. Now we know about physics and gravity as so on and so forth. It's not God; it's natural laws. All that is real is material. All that is real is what you can stick under a microscope in a laboratory."

And this change towards secularization has had all sorts of ramifications on society at a moral and a spiritual level. A pollster, by the name of Michael Adams, writes this. He writes about a winding journey in Western European history:

"From the death of God and the traditional notions of family and community to a highly individualistic population focused on personal control and autonomy to a new, embryonic but fast-growing sense of human interconnectedness with technology and nature."

This is the shift that we're living in the middle of; that a lot of us grew up right in the thick of, and it is disorienting in particular if you're a little bit older, but for all of us. It's confusing. It's hard. So, first is secularism. Second is affluence. Not to do more history, but the post-World War II economic boom that brought with it the rise of suburbia, the growing middle class – which was, unfortunately it looks like, short lived – all of this had a massive affect on faith and spirituality in America. It gave people money; it gave people more options. And, among those options were what the New Testament would call "worldly pleasures." It gave people less of, at least, a felt need for God. People were just a lot less desperate when you have a really great bottle of wine and you're out to dinner at Tasty and Alder or whatever.

And all the consumerism and unending material possessions has effectively killed a spiritual hunger and thirst in our culture. So, secularism, affluence and then, finally, multiculturalism. And I say this – obviously, I know, the racial tension is so thick right now. So, please, this is not a political statement whatsoever, but a historical one. There was a huge change in immigration before and after World War II. So, prior to World War II, most immigrants to America were from Western Europe. So, most immigrants were Irish or Greek or Italian. Think of old urban centers like Boston or New York or whatever. After the war that changed and most of the immigrants were increasingly from southeast Asia, the Middle East, India, South America. 1965 marked the passing of the Immigration and Nationalities Services Act, which undid the 1882 ban on immigration from China and places like that. And, as all sorts of new ethnic groups started to flood America – which is a great thing, I'm all for that – they brought with them more than new food or new music or new fashion; the brought new ideas, new faith, new spirituality, new morality, new ways of doing sexuality, new ways of doing marriage, new ways of doing all sorts of things.

And, for the first time, at least in American history, odds are that a Hindu or a Buddhist or a Muslim or a Sikh or whatever was not a character in a book that you read about somebody's adventures on the other side of the world, it was your neighbor or your nephew or your niece or your husband or your wife or your boss or your employee or whatever. That really changed the world. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not at all saying that's a bad thing. Honestly, I hope I can say this, one of my least favorite things about our city – I like our city, but one of the things that drives me nuts is how Anglo it is. Particularly since I have a Ugandan daughter. It's something I really feel heavy on my heart on a regular basis. All I'm saying is that this new multicultural context changed the spiritual topography of America.

So, to recap, and I'm moving fast because I have two teachings tonight and I really don't want to go long. So, I'm just going to talk faster. This afternoon I was like, "Should I edit this down?" I'm like, "Nope. Just talk really fast."

If I sound stressed out, I'm actually back from vacation and I'm feeling great. I feel so at peace tonight. I just have a lot I want to say. So, to recap, three shifts: from the majority to the minority, from the center to the fringe, from well respected to disrespected. Brought about, at least in part, by secularization, affluence and multiculturalism. All that to say, here's what I'm driving to: it used to be that if you were a follower of Jesus in the West – this is especially true if you are white – then you were one, in the majority, two, in power, and three, well thought of.

Now, everything is upside down. Now you are a minority, you are on the fringe and the odds are that you are thought of, at best, as weird and, at worst, as dangerous. We live in a very different world than grandma and grandpa. All of that leads me to our new series. There is a metaphor that cuts all the way through the Bible that I think does a great job of capturing the cultural moment that we now call home, and that is the metaphor of exile. So, to start off, let's read here in Daniel 1:1.

He writes this: "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of god in Babylonia and put them in the treasure house of his god.

"Then the king ordered Asphenaz, chief of his court officials, the bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect," – ladies, listen to this. This just your man right here – "handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace."

Just put that on your online dating for what you want right there. It's Bible; it's Scripture. Just be a woman of the Bible, you know?

"He was to teach them the language and literature..." – and stay single for the rest of your life.

"He was to teach them the language the literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

"Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah."

And the story goes on. We'll get into all of this next week as we work through Daniel 1. Tonight is intro. For tonight, all I want you to do is take a moment and I want you to imagine that you are a young Jewish boy or girl, if that's easier. You're, we guess, 13-15 years old. You're smart. You're from a good family. You're from the nobility. You're maybe eighth in line for the throne or whatever in Jerusalem. And all of a sudden, you, for all sorts of reasons, are ripped out of your upbringing; you are dragged away from your parents, from your family, from your home, from the temple, God's dwelling place there in Jerusalem, and you are dragged off to, of all places, Babylon. Which, if you're a good Jewish boy or girl, you grew up in the Torah and what we call the Old Testament. You are well aware that Babylon is an archetype all through the Bible of society in hostile, open rebellion against the creator God. It is a totally alien and hostile culture to you and your faith. It's pagan to the core, literally. Sexually immorality is rife. Injustice and oppression are the norm. Opulent wealth is all over the place.

Then you, as a teenage kid, are put into a three-year cultural immersion program designed – it's social engineering – to erase your faith in Yahweh as the God and to erase any and all traces or Jewishness. You are literally renamed. How in the world do you even survive that, much less stay faithful to the God who created you? As the poet said, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

This is the experience of exile. Exile is a theme that actually starts well before Daniel 1. It starts with Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden if you know that story in Genesis 3. It runs all the way through to the exilic literature in the Old Testament; Daniel and Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you're about to read tomorrow, Chronicles. All sorts of stuff written about and during the exile. Then it goes all the way into the New Testament to Jesus. Here's a great example from the New Testament: Peter opens his letter with this line:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus the Messiah, to God's elect," – and then what does he say?

– "exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia," and all over the place.

Then, in 1 Peter 1:17 he writes: "Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."

Then in 1 Peter 2:11 he writes that we, as followers of Jesus, are foreigners and exiles. What he's saying is that regardless of your ethnicity or whether you're an immigrant to this country or you were born here or whatever, if you are a follower of Jesus, your felt experience is that of exile. It's very similar to being like a refugee. I'm so proud of all of you that are working with Refugee Care Collective and Megan, if you're here tonight, all the amazing work that you and your team do to welcome refugees to our city. In particular, if you are a refugee or you are an immigrant to our country or you are an ethnic minority. First off, we're just so happy that you're here. We really hope that you feel welcome. Secondly, we have a lot that we need to learn from you, because our world is increasingly becoming like yours.

In the post-Christian world, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be in exile. Lee Beach defines exile this way:

"The experience of knowing that one is an alien and, perhaps, even in a hostile environment where the dominant values run counter to ones own."

Does that sound familiar for you? No? It does for me. Let's keep going. Let's just act like you're here.

"This sense of exile is experienced by anyone who feels alienated, cast adrift or marginalized by their inability or unwillingness to conform to the tyranny of majority opinion."

I love that closing line. There's so much social and emotional pressure on you and me to conform to the tyranny of public majority opinion; to just act like everybody acts, vote like everybody votes, think like everybody thinks, talk like everybody talks, just be like everybody else. Don't be weird, don't be a foreigner, don't be a refugee, don't be in exile. So much pressure. The novelist, Paul Tabori, if you've ever read his stuff, he defines exile as "being an outcast within one's own country."

Meaning you can be an American or have a visa or a green card, but still feel like you are on the outside looking in because you're a follower of Jesus. This is our new normal. The question is how do we live in this kind of a cultural moment? How in the world do we make it through? Similar to Daniel, how in the world? Well, first off, just for a minute or two, I want to chat about how not to live. There are two postures that we want to avoid in exile. The first is that of separation. It's one I know well from my upbringing in essentially a kind of nice, fundamentalist tradition.

This is the kind of turtle posture, you know? You just tuck your head into the shell, close your eyes and just wait until the big, bad world all goes away. The classic example is the Amish, which I think is so funny. We've romanticized them in the digital age. There is a luddite kind of beauty to the Amish way of life, but the Amish, as followers of Jesus, who are amazing, have separated – complete, absolute, total – from our culture. And, as amazing as that community is, they have little or no influence on culture at large.

But, this posture is not always so extreme. It's fundamentalism all over America, in particular in the south. It's the coffee shop and bookstore and daycare and indoor park in the suburban megachurch campus where you get sucked in and your entire life is in the orbit of that community, all of your friends are Christians, your dentist is a Christian, your auto mechanic is a Christian, your coffee shop is a Christian and has a Scripture that the brew is named after. Just your whole world. It's the homeschool co-op, and I don't say that – I was homeschooled. That's why I'm still in therapy. So, I don't necessarily mean that as a slam, but it's just there's a whole thing there. It's the anti-Harry Potter tribe. Do you remember that back in the early 2000s? Harry Potter was the incarnation of Satan, you know?

I have three kids who are in California tonight with my wife. But, my wife is reading – Jude's already read them all – Harry Potter to our two youngest right now, who are both seven. They just finished book four on vacation. Moses, in particular, is just freaking out. I mean, everything right now is just Harry Potter on vacation. We're all taking an online personality test to chart which house you're in. Like Hufflepuff or I'm Ravenclaw, by the way. Naturally. So, I cannot tell you how much – it's getting scary in our house. I think my kids might start to like Harry Potter more than Luke Skywalker. If that happens, it's like... yeah. I'm a failure as a father.

Anyway, I never really got the anti-Harry Potter fear. What's the fear? What are people

scared of? That Moses is going to grow up and go to Hogwarts or speak parseltongue? Like, what's the fear? It's make-believe. It's not a thing. It's not like violence. I just never really got that. Like, "I'm scared he's going to become a wizard?" There's no such thing. I hate to break that to you. But, some of you are like, "Really? There's not? I've been to Florida. It was there."

But, no. So, I laugh, but I grew up in this kind of a church tradition. Essentially nice fundamentalism. I'm so grateful – if you know my parents, my parents are amazing. They did an amazing job with me. But, I was literally homeschooled in suburban California. My whole life was sucked into the church and it just was so jarring to actually enter life. And here I am, now in particular as a father, raising three kids in a public school in downtown Portland. None of my kid's friend's are followers of Jesus for the most part, because there really aren't any at the school. I think there's about 3 or 4 other followers of Jesus that we know are kids and they all go to Bridgetown at the school. Which is great and we're really happy you're here, just have more kids or something. Alright?

"What's your secret for evangelism?"

"Sex. That's all."

So, anyway. All that to say – I've been on vacation. I'm sorry. You know? That's just not the way forward. In fact, it's easy to be a critic in particular in hindsight and in particular of your parent's generation, but I do think that the church's retreat from culture through the Jesus movement in the 70s and before that with the birth of evangelicalism out of fundamentalism if you know that story. I do think it's one of the many reasons that America has, rather than become more like the Kingdom of God, has become less and less; more and more secular. So, separatism is just not the way forward. Usually, it leads to legalism, which is just death. People who grew up in that kind of a church environment usually get lost and throw the baby out with the bathwater and want nothing to do with Jesus or church or any of that because it's all kind of messed up with this political, moralistic, nasty stuff.

The reality is, it's easy to throw stones at that because that's like two of you here. On the other hand is the danger of syncretism. This is a way bigger deal. This is the chameleon posture. Just blend in, go with the flow, disappear. That's exactly what happens. You disappear from the church, from the Kingdom of God, from a life with Jesus. This is Germany if you know anything about theological history. The birthplace of theological liberalism, now a church graveyard. Little or nothing left. It's all the mainline denominations, all these beautiful church buildings up and down the west end of downtown that are, for the most part, absolutely empty on Sunday mornings. It's writers and bloggers like Rob Bell and Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Vines and many others, the vast majority of whom used to be a part of a church and now just have spiritual friends or whatever it is.

And usually, this leads to liberalism. And please don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that in the political sense of the word. If you know me at all, I'm, for the most part, pretty apolitical and I don't think either party does an even remotely good job of capturing the heart of Jesus. Yeah. Whatever. I'm essentially Anabaptist in my political view. I mean that in the theological and moral sense of the word as disloyalty to Jesus and the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament. Syncretism is a far greater problem in our city. Let's be honest. There are like two of you that are here tonight and you're legalistic and you just moved here from the South. Welcome. Give it about three weeks and you'll have another problem on your hands.

For the vast majority of you – and that wasn't even exaggeration right there. I think that's a good, prophetic insight into our community. For the vast majority of you, separation, legalism, that's not the problem for you. It's syncretism and it's liberalism, once again in the theological and moral sense of that word. In a few weeks, we'll talk about the difference between hard power and soft power. But, Portland is soft power. It doesn't beat you up or bludgeon you or persecute you or threaten you. It just says, "Hey, do you want another drink?"

"Hey, why should you go to church tonight? Just go out for this. Hey, come on, man. Just express your sexuality. Be true to your identity. Be true to who you are. Find yourself."

"Where?"

"Inside yourself."

Like, it's just so seductive. It's soft power. So, this is the world that we live in. Is there a better response than separatism or syncretism? Yes. It is become a creative minority. Now, what do I mean – as we start to near the end here – by a creative minority? That term, creative minority, was coined by the historian Arnold Toynbee and then made popular by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks from the U.K. in a phenomenal essay on the first things website. If you want to read it, it's so worth 10 minutes of your time. Just Google search "Jonathan Sacks creative minority."

Toynbee said that you can chart the rise and fall of civilizations like a bell curve. And he, contrary to what a number of other historians argue, said that a civilization doesn't have to rise and then fall. It doesn't have to decline and then eventually die. It can be at least elongated by what he called a "creative minority." A small group of people who adapt, innovate, stick together and then bless the host culture at large. The Jews are the example par excellence in the West of a creative minority.

After two and a half millennia, literally 26 centuries, of displacement, oppression, racism, the holocaust, not only are they still a people, still an ethnic group – which is absolutely mind boggling. There are no Assyrians left. No Babylonians left. No Hittites left. No Philistines left. Everybody is gone. The Jews are still a people. But, not only that, their fingerprints are all over the Western world. Go read *The Gift of the Jews* if you don't believe me. It's a great little read.

Here in America, for example, Jews make up, last I read, 1.4% of the population. That's nothing. But, their influence on American culture is staggering. From Wall Street to the fashion industry to the legal system and the political system to Hollywood. Seriously, I did this a few days ago. Google search "Jews in Hollywood." It's basically every white person you know in Hollywood. It's bizarre. Seriously, well over 50% of directors, actors, actresses. It is absolutely mind blowing. From 1.4% of the population.

So, even though they are a minority – and a dinky one at that – they are a creative minority, not a destructive minority like ISIS or whatever. And not only have they been not sucked into the culture, but here's the thing, here's the caveat: they've played the role of influence over culture at large. This is what it means to be a creative minority.

My friend John Tyson in New York defines a creative minority this way:

"A Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships knotted together in a living network of persons in a complex and challenging culture setting..." – that is very much our city – "...who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world."

Notice that a creative minority is not an idea or an ideology, it is a people empowered by the Spirit to work for good in the world. But, here's the problem: to live in the middle, to straddle that knife's edge between separatism and syncretism, to live in that prophetic tension it's just not easy. Again, Jonathan Sacks writes this:

"To become a creative minority is not easy because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith. Seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning, but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part. This is, as Jews can testify, a demanding and risk-laden choice."

And honestly, the Church's track record on living this knife's edge is not really all that good because it's hard. It's hard to stay true to the way of Jesus without getting sucked into orbit around all things Portland or without moving to eastern Oregon and starting a commune or whatever where you churn your own butter and listen to Chris Tomlin all night long or whatever. Like, it's really hard to do. How do you be, in the language of pop culture, in the world but not of it? This is what Daniel is all about.

The point of the book of Daniel is to explore what it means to be a minority in a majority culture that is hostile to your way of life, how to not only survive and keep your identity intact, but how to actually thrive in exile. So, over the summer, from now until September or October, Daniel will serve as our mentor, as our guide to kind of help navigate the terrain of exile. Our kind of modern day Babylon. There are so many parallels between Daniel and exile and Babylon and you and me here that we'll get into.

Before we end tonight, I just want to show you really quickly one passage of Scripture that more than likely generated Daniel's entire posture and gave him that map for exile. So, really fast, turn to Jeremiah 29. It's just a few pages to the left. If you're reading through the Bible with our community, you read this just a week or two ago. If you made it through Jeremiah and then Ezekiel, holy cow. You are amazing. If not, welcome to the club. No, I made it through. Barely. There was some fast reading involved.

Jeremiah 29. This is by far my favorite part of his book. This is a letter written by the Prophet Jeremiah from Jerusalem to the first wave of exiles in Babylon – listen – of which Daniel and his three friends were a part. So, Daniel and his friends were on the receiving end of this letter. I just want you to read it. We'll read part of it.

Jeremiah 29:4: **"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.'"**

So, that's all about "keep your identity intact, your community, have a lot of sex, make a lot of babies, increase, don't decrease." Think this is a refugee community. So, imagine if you're a refugee right now in Turkey and you're from Syria or Iraq or Kurdistan or whatever and you're thinking, "How long will I be here? A month or a year or a decade? Will I spend the rest of my life here? Should I keep going and immigrate to Europe? Should I wait and go back? Should I live in a tent? Should I get a job? Should I not? Should I start a business?"

It's a refugee community. So he's saying, "No. Settle down. Build houses. Plant gardens. Get married. You're going to live here. This is your new normal. You're not going back. Your grandkids might go back, but you're not going back."

So, it's all about the community. But then, notice he shifts gears. Look at Jeremiah 29:7.

"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

"Wait. This is the city that dragged you away into slavery and oppression. This is the pagan, immoral, oppressor, this is the empire."

"Yeah, pray for it. Seek the peace and prosperity of that city. If it does well, you will too. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says."

And the letter goes on. We're running out of time, so we'll just end there. This sixth century letter right here in front of you is the womb that gave birth to the idea of a creative minority. It gave the Jews a paradigm for how to live in exile. And we know this letter shaped Daniel's worldview in Daniel 9. I think we have a slide of Daniel 9. He writes this:

"In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord..." – listen to this – **"...given to Jeremiah the prophet,"** – so, just a few decades old. Daniel was clearly aware of this letter and thinks of it as Scripture – **"that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."**

We didn't get time to read that part.

"So I turned to God..."

And he goes on. Point being, not only had Daniel read this letter in Jeremiah 29, but more than likely, this letter is what generated his entire approach to life in exile. So, to end – and thank you for your patience with rapid fire talking. This week, all I wanted to do tonight was intro to the idea of creative minority. I know it's a lot of information. I know that I don't have practice for you in the coming weeks. Stay tuned next week. We'll get into all of that. We'll hit the ground. There's some really poignant stuff in Daniel 2 for our community.

For tonight, I just want the reality of our cultural moment to sink in. Some of you, already,

are well aware of it. For others of you, you're just starting to figure it out. We need to face the reality that the West has changed and we're on the outside now. And that's okay. We now live in a moment when it is not cool to follow Jesus – hopefully you know that – in a city that is obsessed with cool. Right? L.A.: Get famous. New York: Power; money. San Francisco: Start the next business to change the world. Portland: Be cool and drink IPA.

Like, our city's obsessed with cool, and it's just not at all cool to follow Jesus. We need to own that. We need to own our identity as followers of Jesus. So, next time the barista or your mom or your dad or your roommate or your nephew or the flirtatious guy at the end of the bar asks you, man, you don't explain it away. You don't excuse like, "Well, I'm a Christian, but not like all the weird ones out there. I'm not like the unicorn. I'm actually cool and normal and look at me."

I'm like, "No, you're not. You're weird. You're weird. You believe that Jesus is back from the dead and that a whole new world is here and it's coming and that it's changed everything."

That's not normal. You're not normal. You're not cool. Own it. I'm a follower of Jesus. I believe that His teachings offer the best vision of the good life there is. I've devoted my life to practicing the way of Jesus. Not alone. For that, I'm a part of a community. We do life together, we seek the healing and the renewal of our city and the world that we call home. Just own that. You might not get invited out on the date or to the party. You might not even get the promotion or make the sale, and that's okay. It is a dinky price to pay for the joy of life with Jesus of Nazareth, especially compared to all of our brothers and sisters around the world, in particular in the Middle East, who are literally dying for their faith right now.

And know this: historically, exile is where followers of Jesus have been at their best. I am essentially a pacifist, so I never liked the language of the culture wars at all. But, just to clarify, the culture wars are over and we lost. I just want to make sure you all know that. Some of you are still living for the dream. You lost. You lost royally. You were destroyed. Just here to encourage you tonight, you know? And, if you need to grieve that, great. There's a lot of sadness there. A lot that was wrong on both sides. But, it is what it is. We can't play the victim card or the anger card. There's so much anger in the world right now. The last place that anger should come from is the community of Jesus followers. There's no place for anger in the heart of a disciple of Jesus.

We're in a new cultural moment and we need to fight the battles of the future and not of the past and live into what God has for us. Exile can actually be a beautiful moment for the church. So many good things can come out of exile. Things like creativity. To make it through exile, you have to innovate and adapt and change while staying true to your core. Church has to change. How we do church has to change just to make it through.

Purity. Only the strong survive. The lazy, the apathetic, those who fall into the category – how many of you who grew up in the church, you had friends in the category of "Christian, but not an apprentice of Jesus," who over the last five or ten years have fallen off the map? Because people like that just don't make it through exile. You're in or you're out. You're a sheep or you're a goat, in the language of Jesus. You're for me or you're against me. You're following, you're a disciple, or you're in the crowd. It's so unpopular to say that kind of stuff, and it is all over the teachings of Jesus.

A time of purity and a time of community. We have to stick together to make it through exile. We have to be closer than ever as a church with your missional community and with the tribe that is Bridgetown that you're a part of. My point is, in closing that what can emerge from exile is a tight knit community practicing the way of Jesus together, holy – and by that I mean "set apart, but not separated from the culture," – marked by a creative, innovative, new approach to life and church and humanity that, in turn, spreads healing and renewal to our city and our world.

This moment can be kind of a renaissance for the church in the West, for the church in America, for the church in Portland and for our community here at Bridgetown. I really feel like this is the next moment. I feel all of the cultural shifts. I feel the ground underneath my feet. It's moved and we're in a whole new reality. And at first, it was terrifying and it was sad and it was discouraging. And now, I can't wait to see what comes out of this next season of our life together at Bridgetown. I can't wait to see what comes out of our time in exile. So, hopefully you're up for that, because it's a thing whether you're up for it or not. And hopefully we're in it together. So, let's pray.