Living The Dream

This past week was our Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday. So the sermon focused on our life together as a church.

1. Warm-up Question: How long have you been in our church and what first brought you to us?

2. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Mt. 16:18. The Bible says Jesus "loved the church [so much he] gave himself for it." Eph. 5:25. And we are told, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." Heb. 10:25. All of this raises questions about why Jesus thought the church was so important that he died for it and commanded us to be part of it. Read Mark 12:28-34.

    a. Essentially, the scribe was asking Jesus, "What's the most important thing in life?" There are a million different ways to answer that question. Someone might say "be true to yourself" or "live generously" or "find a great cause and throw yourself into it." But of all the possible options, Jesus said the most important thing is to love God passionately. Why? Why is that <u>the</u> most important thing?

    b. The second most important thing is "to love your neighbor as yourself." Why? Why can't I live a really wonderful life without loving the people around me?

3. Jeff suggested that church is vital because it helps us live into the two greatest commandments. Church is a place where we learn what it looks like to: ***Love God, Love one another, and Love the world***. Let's start with "love God."

    a. At church we're constantly reminded of the great stories of the Bible again and again until they filter into the fiber of our being and come alive within us. Jeff used the example of Martin Buber's Grandfather, who recovered from his lameness when he lost himself in the story of how his rabbi used to hop and dance as he prayed. He also told us about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose path to martyrdom under the Nazis was influenced by a favorite childhood book about ordinary people making extraordinary sacrifices. Give us an example of a Bible story that has come alive in you and had a big formative impact on you.

    b. Is it important to hear Bible stories over and over again? Why or why not?

    c. We also learn what it looks like to love God through the examples of people around us in spiritual community. Who is someone in our church – or a church of your past – whose example has had a huge impact on your spiritual development?

    d. Bill Plotkin says that most people are satisfied to live life as a "survival dance," and never get around to life as "sacred dance." What does life as "survival dance" look like? What does life as "sacred dance" look like?

4. The more we dance with God, the more we find ourselves loving one another well. Jeff shared the story of someone in our church who, at church one Sunday, heard God saying, "Silence is deadly. You've gotta share what you're going through." So she told a friend at church that she was struggling with suicidal thoughts. Her friend confessed the exact same struggle, so they agreed to support one another in their struggle to get back to serenity.

    a. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." What do you think that means?

    b. What's one of the most loving things anyone has ever done for you in church community (past or present)? How did that affect you?

    c. When have you had the opportunity to do something loving for someone in church community? What did you feel called to do? How did that affect the other person?

    d. How do we manage to love people at church well while still keeping healthy boundaries – and avoiding enabling? Have you ever had to use tough love with someone at church? What happened?

5. Loving others isn't just about the people in our church family. "For God so loved the world." John 3:16. Cornell West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public."

    a. What do you think West means? Is it possible to be a loving church without being a "justice seeking" church?

    b. Our congregation's current justice efforts include supporting 33 children through Child Fund International; missions trips and projects in Guatemala, Navajo Nation, and South Sudan; providing breakfast on Saturdays at Dayspring Center for homeless families; our Lenten pants drive for the homeless; and give-away days at the Immigrant Welcome Center. We're also looking for a meaningful way to support the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood. Suppose our church didn't engage in justice work. Would you still be part of us? Why or why not?

6. Jeff said, "It's impossible to live in community without disappointing and being disappointed. I am a flawed pastor, but all pastors are. We are a flawed church, but all churches are. If you're looking for perfect pastors in a perfect church, you'll never put down roots anywhere." So how should we respond when we are disappointed?

7. We are blessed with a church that is living into the words of Ephesians 2:14-15: "Christ himself has . . . broken down the dividing wall of hostility that separates us, creating in himself one new people." Jeff used the example of the friendship between Winnie Wainscott and Gary Walker – a real odd couple! Who's someone unlike you that you've bonded with in our church family? How has that enriched you?

8. How would your life be different without our church?