

Past, Present, and Future

On Sunday, we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the birth of our church – and reminded ourselves why God called us into being.

1. Warm up question: Share a favorite memory from your time at LifeJourney.
2. Read Luke 15:1-2. The term “tax collectors” refers to Jews who were collecting taxes on behalf of the occupying Roman government. The term “sinner” was used broadly to describe a wide array of people – anybody who did not meticulously observe a long list of detailed religious regulations.
 - a. In Jesus’ culture, religious people would share meals only with those considered religiously “with it.” Jesus flagrantly violated that custom. Why do you suppose he did so?
 - b. Why do you think that made the Pharisees so angry?
3. Read Luke 15:3-6. Jesus tells this parable to explain why he welcomed “sinners” and ate with them. The shepherd in the parable represents Jesus, and the sheep in the flock represent spiritual community. One of the sheep gets lost, but we’re not told how. Normally we assume the lost sheep represents someone who left voluntarily to sow his/her wild oats. It’s just as plausible, though, that the sheep represents those who are forced out of community because they are different or non-conforming.
 - a. Jeff told about a little girl in his grade school who was considered “ugly” because of how she dressed and wore her hair. Kids teased her and excluded her. When in your life have you seen someone treated that way?
 - b. Have you ever felt excluded or pushed out of a church for being different or nonconforming? What happened?
 - c. What’s different about LifeJourney that makes it a better fit for you than other churches of your past?
4. Jesus’ parable gives us a glimpse of how he feels when we are spiritually isolated, wandering alone in the wilderness. The parable teaches that Jesus feels the same way a good shepherd does when one of his sheep get lost. Historians tell us that good shepherds developed deep emotional bonds with their sheep, naming them, learning their personalities, feeding them, loving them.
 - a. Have you ever had a beloved pet get lost? How did you feel? What happened? Do you think Jesus feels the same way when we are spiritually isolated and alone?
 - b. Jeff shared the story of a differently-abled boy named Will and his parents, who live in Indy and have struggled to find a church that will welcome their son.

We're going to reach out to them to see if our church might be a good fit. How do you feel about welcoming differently abled people to our church? What challenges might that present? Do you think we're ready to meet those challenges?

- c. Howard Hill is organizing a "Pollyanna goes to church" Sunday, where Pollyanna (Howard's drag personality) will invite his online followers to attend LifeJourney with him on September 11. How do you feel about that?
5. The implicit assumption of Jesus' parable in Luke 15 is that every sheep needs a flock. In other words, Jesus believed we all need to be part of a good spiritual community. That raises the question, "Why?" Jeff suggested three reasons. First, something mystically healing happens when people of faith worship together.
 - a. Do you buy that? Do you regularly experience the feeling of being lifted and renewed when we worship together at LifeJourney?
 - b. What lifts your spirits most in worship? What best helps you enter a spirit of worship?
 6. A second reason we need to be part of a spiritual community is so we can be lifelong spiritual learners. Do you think it's possible to learn as much about spiritual life – and stay as spiritually sharp – when you're isolated from spiritual community? Why or why not?
 7. Read John 14:12. A third reason we need to be part of a spiritual community is so we can be Jesus in the world. By pooling our spiritual resources, we are most likely to do the kind of great things Jesus did. Jeff gave the example of what is happening right now in Uganda. How did it make you feel to hear the impact our congregation is having on Uganda?
 8. Although life in spiritual community has great benefits, it's not easy. Where there are people, there will be conflict and disappointment. John Weborg puts it this way:

The search for the perfect church is an illusion. . . . Some form of satisfaction doesn't even stand a chance unless one settles down at a place and serves. The church is a feast, not a taste, a meal, not a nibble. One sits and serves with the same people week after week, receiving and being received, disappointing and being disappointed, hurting and being hurt, caring and being cared for. Church people are in it for the long haul, not the short term. The ordinary is more crucial than the extraordinary. The glory of the church is the routine, not the exceptional.

 - a. What do you think of that quote? What thoughts, questions, or insights does it evoke in you?
 - b. What, if anything, do you think could separate you from your church family?