

Church The Way It Is ***Versus*** Church The Way It Was Meant To Be

On Anniversary Sunday, we took some time to think about what it means to “be church,” as opposed to just “consuming church.”

1. Warm up question. Jeff showed a video called “Church Hunters” that imitates “House Hunters.” In it, two people explore whether a church is a good fit for them from a very consumer-oriented perspective. If you were looking for a church from a superficial perspective, what would be some of your superficial preferences?
2. When here on earth, Jesus gave his all. He held back nothing. He even laid down his life. When all that was said and done, the one enduring thing that resulted from all his efforts was a movement of disciples that we call the “church.”
 - a. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it.” Why do you think the church was/is so important to Jesus?
 - b. The Greek word for church is “ekklesia” [eck-kle-SIA], which means “assembly.” An assembly is when people come together for a common purpose. As you see it, what should our common purposes be?
3. God raised up LifeJourney to be a congregation that specializes in ministering in the margins of society, as Jesus did. Jesus was notorious for welcoming those who were considered ‘less than’ – sick people, poor people, women, children, ethnically different people (Samaritans), lepers, and tax collectors.
 - a. Why do you suppose Jesus invested so much energy ministering to people living on the margins of society?
 - b. Before institutionalization set in, many of the earliest churches reflected Jesus radical commitment to lifting up marginalized people. Some had female apostles (Romans 16:7), some welcomed eunuchs (even though Jews banned them from their temple), and many welcomed slaves as equal partners in ministry. If you had been a first century person wandering into a church that granted equality to women, eunuchs, and slaves, how do you think you would have reacted?
 - c. Read I Corinthians 1:18-31. Verse 18 refers to the “message of the cross.” As best you understand, what was/is the message of the cross? And why do you suppose that message sounded like foolishness to so many first century people?
 - d. Verse 26 makes clear that not many powerful or privileged people chose to be part of the early church. Why do you suppose that was?
 - e. Hebrews 13:12 says, “Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.” What does it mean to be a church that locates itself “outside the city gate”? And why is that so important?

4. LifeJourney began 26 years ago as an assembly of despised and persecuted people – as sanctuary for LGBT people at a time when there was no sanctuary.
 - a. Jeff shared the story of Jim Nelms – how Jim felt so spiritually and socially beaten down, he attempted suicide. His soul finally found peace when he found our church. Now Jim regularly leads us in worship. Jeff said, “If you want an authentic worship experience, worship in a place where worship leaders have known what it’s like to suffer outside the gates of the city, like Jesus.” What’s so special about being led in worship by someone like Jim?
 - b. In the days of most intense LGBT persecution, at LifeJourney we learned to put aside petty differences that might divide us as a church just to survive. We now have an opportunity to carry those lessons forward to live even more fully into the vision of Galatians 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Moving forward, what are some of things that could divide us that we need to transcend through the love of Christ?
5. Jesus came to “break down the dividing wall [of] hostility between us.” Ephesians 2:14. Jeff asked us to imagine a table in a high school cafeteria where misfit kids, smart kids, black kids, white kids, brown kids, rich kids, poor kids, cheerleaders, and jocks all come together, forge deep friendships, and love one another. That’s the miracle Jesus envisioned occurring in his churches. That’s the vision we’re striving for at LifeJourney. But if our light is going to shine as bright as it can, there are two key things Jesus needs from each of us. ***First, for our church to thrive, we need as many of us as possible to offer the gift of our regular Sunday worship presence.***
 - a. Jeff invited us each to consider making a 6-month experimental pledge to be present in Sunday worship every week, with rare exception. What are some reasons why weekly Sunday worship presence matters so much – for us as individuals and for our church?
 - b. What are some factors that tend to get in the way of weekly Sunday worship? Do you think we need to resist those factors or accept them as part of modern life?
 - c. Are you in a place where you feel led to make the weekly worship pledge? Why or why not? (This is not meant to be a question that puts people on the spot, but an honest conversation about where each of us is and the challenges we face.)
6. ***Second, for our church to thrive, we need as many of us as possible to extend the gift of invitation to friends and acquaintances who could benefit from our church.***
 - a. On Sunday Joeann Rohlman shared what LifeJourney has come to mean to her. How ‘bout you? What does our church mean to you? How has it helped you?
 - b. Is there someone you have pledged to invite? If so, tell us who and how to pray for them. If you don’t know someone to invite, did you pledge to pray that God will lead you to someone over the next 30 days? If so, we’ll pray with you.