

Bring Your Mess

On Sunday, we heard from Samantha Hasty-Zander, our pastoral intern who is currently in seminary. Samantha invited us to think about how God can use even the messes in our life.

1. Warm up question: Some of us are neat freaks; some of us are free spirits who can tolerate chaos. Which are you? On a typical day, what does your home (or work area) look like?
2. To have messes in our house (or work station) is one thing; to have messes in our life is quite another. But the truth is, as Samantha said, “We’re all a mess.” She used the example of the Apostle Paul (also known as Saul) as an example. Read Acts 9:1-9.
 - a. What do you suppose was going on inside Saul that caused him to become chief persecutor of the early Christians?
 - b. What do you suppose was going on inside Saul in the first few days and months after he experienced this blinding vision of Jesus?
 - c. Samantha told about a time when her spiritual life was a mess. When has your spiritual life been messiest? What happened?
3. Read I Corinthians 1:26-31.
 - a. Verse 26 indicates that most early Christians came from the lower levels of culture. Why do you suppose that was? Why weren’t more upper-class people drawn to Jesus in those early days?
 - b. According to verses 27-28, God chose to build the Jesus movement on people drawn from the lower levels of culture. Why? What’s so great about “weak” people? What’s the advantage of being “weak”?
 - c. Samantha said, “God just needs us to show up and bring our mess with us.” Do you agree or disagree?
 - d. What’s an area of your life that you consider a weakness that makes you less effective for God? How do you think God wants you to think about (and respond to) that area of your life?
 - e. Read I Corinthians 12:14-20. How did God manage to create a mighty movement out of people who seemingly had so little to offer?
4. Though God invites us to bring whole selves into spiritual community, just as we are, mess and all, Samantha reminded us that we should “not inflict our mess” on others. We’ve all heard the saying, “Hurting people hurt.”

- a. When in your life have you seen this principle at work?
 - b. What's an area of woundedness or hurt in your life which, if you're not careful, could cause you to lash out or act in unhealthy ways?
 - c. What's the best way to avoid "inflicting our mess on someone else"?
 - d. II Corinthians 1:3b-4 (Message Bible) says, "God of all healing counsel! God comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, God brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us." Put this verse in your own words. What's it saying?
5. Speaking of our church community, Samantha said, "One of my favorite things I have witnessed here at LifeJourney is the bringing of our mess. . . I am lucky to be a part of this congregation where we love together, grieve together, and grow together. We are our whole and authentic human selves here."
- a. One of the biggest challenges any church faces is to create an environment where people can be real about their challenges and struggles, instead of feeling like they have to pretend to be "better" than they are. How well (or not) do you think we're doing at that in our church?
 - b. How well (or not) do you think we're doing in this Oasis Group?
 - c. How could we do better, as a church and as an Oasis?
6. To illustrate how God can use even the most seemingly lowly to do great things, Samantha shared a story from the life of a renowned theologian and professor, Henri Nouwen. Henri went to a psychiatric hospital to visit a friend who was a patient. Trevor had severe mental and emotional challenges. When the leaders of the hospital heard that Henri was coming to their hospital, they asked if they could hold a luncheon in his honor and invite doctors and spiritual leaders from the community. When Henri arrived, they escorted him to the Golden Room for lunch, but Trevor had been excluded. Henri refused to proceed unless Trevor was invited. So they brought him in. Later in the lunch, Trevor stood up and led an "inappropriate" toast. He sang a children's song, "If You're Happy And You Know It." At first it was awkward, but then everyone joined in, and before long a spirit of great joy overtook the luncheon.
- a. When in your life have you seen God use an "unlikely" person to do something great?
 - b. Tell us about a time when you felt like God used you in a way that surprised you.
 - c. The essence of what we've been talking about is summed up in I Corinthians 1:30-31. Re-read those verses. What do you think they mean?