

## The Gift

On Sunday we celebrated our church's 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In the sermon, we explored why God has called such a diverse group of people together at LifeJourney.

1. Warm-up Question: At the outset of Sunday's sermon, we saw a brief skit by Christian comedian Tim Hawkins about hand-raising in church. He gave several examples of hand-raising styles, including the Elbow Flap, the Carry-the-TV, the Hold-My-Baby, the Goal Posts, the Mufasa, the Give-the-Lord-a-High-Five, and the Wash-the-Window. Are you a hand raiser in worship? If so, which is your preferred style?
2. To understand the importance of the miracle that is our church, we first have to remind ourselves of the power of hate in the world. From the beginning, there was hate. Adam and Eve begat Cain and Abel, and before long they were at each other's throats. Cain was a farmer who raised crops. Abel was a nomadic herdsman who raised livestock. In the ancient world, farmers and herdsman often in conflict because the herds would often trample farmer's crops.
  - a. Read Genesis 4:1-11. What can we learn from this story about human nature, hate, and conflict?
  - b. We can also gain important insights into human nature from the Primate Committee Thinking Experiment. In this experiment, five apes are repeatedly punished with cold water whenever any of them climbs steps to a suspended banana. Over time, as new apes are introduced, even after the banana itself is removed, the new apes attack anyone who approaches the steps without even knowing why. They're simply doing what they were taught. What can we learn from this experiment about human nature, hate, and conflict?
  - c. Jeff grew up in Acton, Indiana, when it was deeply segregated. Without ever being told why, he learned to fear people of different races. At age 8, when he saw a realtor driving a family of color through his neighborhood, he felt shocked and afraid. On Sunday, he asked forgiveness that he and his family were once that way. Growing up, how did you learn to feel and think about people who are different from you?
  - d. Why are we humans so apt to fear and hate those who are different?
3. The first century Jewish temple was itself a reminder of discrimination and exclusion. A huge wall separated the outer court of the temple from the inner courts. Signs on the wall proclaimed, "NO FOREIGNER IS TO GO BEYOND. . . . WHOEVER IS CAUGHT DOING SO WILL HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR HIS DEATH WHICH WILL FOLLOW." The way most 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews saw it, God was for them and them alone. If you wanted access to God, you had to become exactly like them in your thoughts, actions, and culture. They referred to all non-Jews as "Gentiles" and often called them "Gentile dogs." How does all this make you feel? How do you

think it made Jesus feel? Have you ever experienced religious people being hateful and exclusionary?

4. Jesus came into the world to challenge the status quo. He healed both Jews and Gentiles. He told parables where the hero of the story was someone from a different tribe of people hated by the Jews – the Samaritans. Jesus brought together both conservative and liberal disciples in the same small group (e.g., Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector). He included female disciples when that was considered passé (Luke 8:1-3). All this gave rise to a radically inclusive movement we call “the early church.” In the early church, anyone could prophesy/preach, including slaves, women, and Gentiles.
  - a. Read Galatians 3:27-28. What do these words of Paul tell us about the culture found in many of the early churches? How does this verse make you feel?
  - b. Read Ephesians 2:11-16. In the early churches, both Jews and Gentiles mixed together, each bringing their very different cultures and ways of being. Churches today have moved in the opposite direction, rebuilding walls Jesus tore down. As Dr. King said, “The most segregated hour in America is 11 o’clock on Sunday morning.” Why is it so easy for us to revert to the pre-Jesus way of doing things?
5. Jeff said he believes Jesus’ Spirit is stirring in the world today, seeking to raise up radically-diverse churches like ours where love breaks down the walls of hostility that divide us. The diversity of LifeJourney echoes that of the early churches.
  - a. Why is it important for us, individually, to be in a diverse church?
  - b. Why is it important for seekers and unbelievers to see diverse churches like ours?
  - c. When you first found our church, what feelings did you experience?
  - d. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” If Christ loved the church and gave himself to it, we who follow him should do the same. On Sunday, Jeff invited us each to consider whether we’re deeply committed to the work of Christ through our church. He shared a menu of options and asked if any of us might feel called to a deeper commitment in any of these areas. Take a look at the menu on p. 3. Are you feeling called to a deeper commitment in any of these areas?
6. Church is not just about what we give; it’s also about what we get. Jesus said, “Give and it will be given unto you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.” Luke 6:38. As eternal spiritual beings with mission critical assignments here on earth, each of us needs a lot of “spiritual rocket fuel” to live into our full significance. Church is where we come to fuel up. Do you feel the difference when you’re connected or disconnected from church? What is it about church that most fuels your soul?

***Thank you for being an integral part of such a cutting-edge church!***

## Excerpt from Sunday's Bulletin

### **Deepening My Commitment**

I feel called to deepen my commitment to the work Jesus is doing through LifeJourney in one or more of the following ways:

- I'm going to attend worship more regularly, offering the gift of my presence.
- I know someone who needs this church that I'm going to invite.
- I'd like talk to someone who can help me find the right service commitment at church.
- I want to become a regular giver, please send me info about electronic giving options.
- I'm going to get more connected by participating in an Oasis Group or Discipleship Course.

Postscript: If you would like more info about any of these items, just send an email to [PastorJeff@LifeJourney.church](mailto:PastorJeff@LifeJourney.church) and he'll get you in touch with the right person.