

## Opportunity Riding The Dangerous Wind

On Sunday, we took a break from our sermon series on Genesis to remind ourselves of our calling as a church and talk about a big challenge and opportunity we face.

1. Jeff began Sunday's sermon by talking about how God and life have a way of constantly interrupting our well-laid plans.
  - a. Have you recently had any of your plans interrupted in ways large or small?
  - b. Jesus said, "The Spirit blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." John 3:8. The Greek word for "Spirit" is the same word for "wind." So Jesus' statement is a play on words. What point do you think Jesus is trying to make?
  - c. Val Farmer tells us that the Chinese word for "crisis" is formed by combining two Chinese characters – one meaning "dangerous wind" and the other meaning "opportunity." So the Chinese word for "crisis" literally means "opportunity riding on the dangerous wind." When in your life has a crisis turned into an opportunity? Or how might a current crisis be turned into an opportunity?
2. At the outset of the book of Revelation, John sees Jesus in heaven standing amidst golden candlesticks representing various churches. Jeff imagined Jesus gazing at each candlestick, praying for each church with all its challenges and potential, weaknesses and strengths. Jeff invited us to consider what Jesus thinks when he gazes at the LifeJourney candlestick and why, with all the churches already in existence, Jesus decided he needed a church like ours. Borrowing from a concept developed by the Center for Ethical Leadership, Jeff suggested that Jesus raised us up to be a church that specializes in creating "Gracious Space." For an example of what that looks like, read Luke 7:36-50.
  - a. In this passage, Jesus is invited to a gathering of religious people at the home of a Pharisee. Given the norms of the time, this dinner would have consisted entirely of "men of God" who all looked, thought, and acted alike. As these religious men gathered for dinner, how do you imagine they felt about themselves?
  - b. In verse 37, someone who is "other" invades the religious gathering. The "intruder" is a woman, and not just any woman. She is labeled a "sinner." What seems to have motivated this woman to "invade" the dinner?
  - c. When the Pharisees reacted as they did, how do you think the woman felt? In your experiences of church, have you ever felt like she did? What happened?
  - d. When Jesus defied the attitude of these "grumpy old men," and defended and welcomed the woman, how do you think she felt?

- e. When Jesus welcomed the woman, the other religious people at the dinner started to turn on him. What are we supposed to learn from that?
3. In our Gospel story, Jesus welcomes, defends, encourages, and includes the despised woman. That’s what it looks like to create Gracious Space! According to the Center for Ethical Leadership, the primary characteristics of Gracious Space are:

Welcome	Humility and Curiosity	Deep Listening
Compassion	Inclusion of the Stranger	Humor

- a. Discuss why each of these characteristics is important to creating Gracious Space.
  - b. Why do so many churches find it so hard to be Gracious Space?
  - c. At last week’s Newcomers Welcome, someone said, “I’ve never been a church person, but when I walk into this place, I feel something that causes me to tear up. I feel something wonderful here and I want to explore what that is.” What do you think she’s feeling? Do you feel that at LifeJourney? Where does it come from?
4. We come to LifeJourney to absorb the grace we find there, so we can go out into the world to share that grace. We should be like “mobile hotspots” carrying the power of grace with us wherever we go, offering grace to all who are in our presence. As you look back over this past week, when did you have a chance to be a mobile hotspot creating Gracious Space? Did you rise to the challenge? What happened?
5. To sum up, at LifeJourney we have a high calling to create Gracious Space for many who wouldn’t find God without a church like ours. To fulfill that calling, one of the basic things we need is a physical gathering place. Our building doesn’t have to be fancy, but it does need to be clean, functional, and well-kept. Right now we’ve got three big issues: (a) dilapidated siding that’s warping and rotting, (b) a main parking lot riddled with alligator cracks, potholes, and weeds, and (c) really cramped restrooms that create lines during peak capacity. But collectively these projects would cost \$300,000! We don’t have that kind of money! But God has made way. A bank is willing to renew our existing mortgage loan, while adding \$200,000 to \$300,000 for capital repairs, on terms that will allow us to avoid increased mortgage payments! To get this loan, we have to meet two conditions set by the bank. We have to increase our weekly giving by \$650, and we have to average at least 281 in worship attendance through year end, which means we need a bunch of 300+ Sundays. Take a look at the pictures on the next page.
- a. How do you feel about this opportunity for our church? Do you feel called to participate in some way?
  - b. Why do you think the bank cares about our Sunday attendance? Will this opportunity affect your attendance pattern over the next couple months?
  - c. If you have a friend you intend to invite to worship with you, tell us a bit about that friend – and let’s remember those invitations in our prayers together tonight.

