



John 14: 15-21

Acts 17: 22-31

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“Holy Saturation”

I have been blessed to lead three pilgrimage trips to Scotland and Ireland. Beyond the power of the land and sea, here is something that got my attention. It's a dumb thing. But I can share it with you.

I noticed that in salads and as appetizers and in all manner of dishes, what was on the menu was “goat’s cheese”. Not goat cheese, as my American ears were used to hearing it described, but goat’s cheese. As in, the cheese is the product of a goat, thank you very much. There is a possessive quality to the naming that caught my ear and heart and tickled my fancy – and taste buds!

And it got me to thinking, now that I am here in Rochester, about the name of this church. We call this place “Christ Church”. When really, what we are describing is a product of the Christ; a possessive quality of that which is possible because of Jesus Christ. We ought to call this church “Christ’s Church”. Because it is exactly that. It isn’t OUR church. This is Christ’s church.

An apostrophe has great power.

So too does a turning of phrase.

In a recent meeting of the Leadership Board I shared a mash-up of some wisdom from church nerds – people like me (and I am sure, you) who are passionate about the power of being a community serving as outpost of grace and healing in this sometimes-swirling world. Anyway, I shared some insight from the team of Rusaw and Mavis. They talk about the power of a church deciding to go from being a neighborhood church to being a neighboring church - from a noun church to a verb church.

Crucial to that pivot are these considerations:

The church has to make the transition from asking “How do we become the best church in the community” to: “How do we become the best church *for* the community”.

When the church makes that paradigm shift, the questions when considering programs and ministry are:

How is (or can) this help people love their neighbors better?

How can we take what we are doing and flow it into people’s homes and neighborhoods?

How and when are we teaching and modeling that we are loving neighbor as self?

And, this sometimes-convicting question: Do the people in our ministry area of influence have the margin in their lives to love their neighbors, or are we keeping them too busy at the church?

Jesus told his disciples: Love the Lord your God with all your passion and creativity and heart and soul. And love your neighbors as yourselves.

Living the love of Jesus is our reason for being. Living love is how people will know you are not just Christ people but Christ's people. Living love is how people will know that this is Christ's church.

We love because Jesus has promised to love through us always. The Holy Spirit is moving and breathing and touching and living through love always. We just have to agree to live church and faith as verb. As action. As the best good news we could ever imagine sharing.

Because it is.

Last week Pastor Katy shared with us the reality that we all worship something, so we ought to be mindful of what it is we idolize.

Paul said the same to the early Christians when he was in Athens.

You and I get to choose what we will worship with our time, our talents, our gifts, our service and our witness. The new members joining today are going to agree that in this place we will remind each other that we worship the living God through whom all things are possible.

Listen. Christ's church is at a crucial time in our ministry life because we are asking a powerful question: How can we be the best church FOR the neighborhood?

We asked that question after our Missional Church Consultation Initiative weekend came back with the news that if we must ask that question of how is it we can be the best church for the neighborhood. Without that question and a prayerful and courageously Spirit-led response, we worship the idol of our past and squander our future. And this church is too soulful and beautiful and fine and courageous to squander God's abundance.

So, after many meetings and prayers and conversations with city and county and church folk, we believe God is calling us to reach into the lives of children and families in this city.

We want to open THRIVE!: A Family Resource and Child Care Center. We want to scholarship tuition in order that people of all means can bring their children here to this outpost of grace.

Jesus said: if you love me, you will do what I have taught you to do: love each other.

We want to be witnesses to that love. That's why we are here! We are the compassion of Jesus as we prepare meals for Saturday Noon Meals, we are the compassion of Jesus when we listen to each other, as taught yesterday at the Caring Ministries seminar held here, and we are the compassion

of Jesus when we pay attention to the way we can change the lives of children and families in this city.

Marianne Williamson has this to say, (in a piece called Healing America, Illuminata) "It is a national immorality when we collectively say no to compassion. Compassion need not, indeed should not, be considered synonymous with profligate financial expenditure. It means simply a mental commitment to accept the possibility of options we had theretofore not considered.

Faith does not cost money.

Love does not cost money.

Throwing money at a problem, it is true, is not always the answer.

But throwing love at a problem always is."

In the next ten days, we will be moving toward a momentous all-church vote.

Will we use our whole building for ministry?

Will we use the abundance created by the people who built this church and will we once again welcome hundreds of children and families into the way of love here?

Will we decide that living love is the best legacy we can leave for our children?

Will each of us look honestly at our financial giving and determine that we can give more to the church so that our budget does not rely on rental income?

Opening THRIVE! means we open our hearts and financial resources because no ministry of this church pays rent. We don't believe THRIVE! ought to, either.

Saying "yes" to THRIVE means we are also saying "yes" to our commitment to being the best church for the neighborhood.

The other decision we will vote on May 31st is this: Will you and will I commit to a Capital Campaign in order that this stunning building be made, as the ASP slogan goes, safer, drier and warmer - and able to reach the love of Jesus from this place to a world sore in need of good news? People don't drive cars that are fifty years old and expect that they won't need updating. The same is true for ministry plants.

So. These are big decisions. Maybe we could look at our answer to these questions in this way: What do we want Archer and Altan (baptized today) and their families to know about their faith? I'm hoping that what they learn here is that faith is a verb and that this? This is Christ's church.

Amen

