

I. Five Points, Point 2: Presence      Gee Sprague, Lead Pastor      April 26, 2009

- A. As my daughter Hannah is preparing to start college in the fall, I will be telling her what I have told a lot of students that I have pastored and mentored since I was in college and seminary. It also applies as a part of a work ethic that many people have used to be effective and successful.
- B. It is very simple advice: "Show Up!"
- C. There are always the exceptions. I had a few friends who could cut classes and wing it through presentations and research products. For the most part, however, people will pretty much confirm that the more they showed up for class, the greater the chance for actual learning to occur.
- D. I have one friend who had trouble reading and told me once that he never read a single book while in college, but he never missed a class and he was able to get his degree in Industrial Engineering. After the service I will be glad to tell you which SEC University he attended. It wasn't in Florida.
- E. There is something in showing up!
- F. I mentioned last week that Prayer is often referred to as a discipline, or a habit, that we form.
- G. They say it takes 7-9 weeks to form a new habit, but in less than 1 week you can get out of it.
1. I can attest. Every time I run the River Run, in the next several weeks to follow I have a hard time getting motivated just to put my running shoes on.
  2. I told you we pray on Monday mornings, but we take off when Monday is a National Holiday, or Mondays after a big celebration like Easter.
  3. As we sat down to pray this week, I looked around the table and commented it seems like it has been a long time since we had done this, when in fact we had just missed one week.
- H. That is why Presence is sort of an important part of one of the 5 Points of our Membership Vows to support CrossRoad through your Prayers, Presence, Giving, Service, and Witness.

II. Why **Show Up**?

- A. Having said that, I think you need to know why it is so important to Show Up.
- B. Let's look at the model of the New Testament Church that was birthed in Jerusalem within a few days of the Resurrection of Jesus.
- C. *(Acts 2:41-47 NRSV) So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. {42} They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. {43} Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. {44} All who believed were together and had all things in common; {45} they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. {46} Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, {47} praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*
- D. *Waking the Dead John Eldredge p. 192: "Church is not a building. Church is not an event that takes place on Sundays. I know, it's how we've come to think of it. 'I go to First Baptist.' 'We are members of St. Luke's.' 'Is it time to go to church?' Much to our surprise, that is not how the Bible uses the term. Not at all. Certainly, the body of Christ is a vast throng, millions of people around the globe. But when Scripture talks about church, it means community. The little fellowships of the heart that are outposts of the kingdom. A shared life. They worship together, eat together, pray for one another, go on quests together. They hang out together, in each other's homes.*
- E. Greg Toole, Council Chair's letter: As a church (a church is the people, not the building), we continue to believe that God desires CRC to be his hands and feet in this community. He wants us to be difference makers for Him. We do that by coming alongside each other within these walls to love, encourage, care for, and pray for one another. And then we carry this message outside these walls to do the same for our community.

### III. Show up for Transformation

- A. *(Acts 2:41-47 NRSV) So those who welcomed his message were BAPTIZED, and that day about three thousand persons were added.*
- B. The people who showed up that day were changed, transformed, Born Again.
- C. It is easy for the church to just become a closed environment for a group of people who share the same commitment, the same values and mission.
- D. The Church, however, is more than that.
- E. It is a place where people come to know the life-giving Power of the Resurrected Jesus.
- F. We must never lose sight that our main reason for existing is to see people Born of the Spirit, Born Again, to become New Creatures in Jesus Christ, and that is why we love to celebrate Baptisms publicly.

### IV. Show up for Instruction

- A. *{42} They devoted themselves to the APOSTLES' TEACHING and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- B. Last week I talked about the nature of devotion.
- C. That which we love will motivate us to discipline.
- D. To read the Bible, to come and listen to messages, to be in small group studies will be a challenging discipline if a person is not in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- E. When you love Jesus, The Word of God, you will also begin to love the Bible, The Word of God.
- F. *(Heb 10:23-25 NRSV) Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. {24} And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, {25} not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

### V. Show up for Association.

- A. *{42} They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and FELLOWSHIP, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- B. I am also blessed that I have relationships with people in my neighborhood, at the fitness center, I have a set of golf friends.
- C. I am blessed that my best relationships are formed around the church.
- D. The word fellowship is used probably most often in the context of Church.
- E. *Tragic Redemption Hiram Johnson pg. 119: "The church is the formal fellowship of the broken and accepted."*
- F. The Church is the only institution that one of the main requirements for membership is that you are broken.
- G. Probably the closest thing to the church is AA, and it has its basic values formed from the Bible.
- H. What makes fellowship such an important part of the Church is that it requires each of us to show up without pretense, without masks.
- I. Our fellowship requires us to share deeply in the joys and the pains of each other.
- J. *(Gal 6:1-5 NRSV) My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. {2} Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. {3} For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. {4} All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. {5} For all must carry their own loads.*

- K. The Good News Bible was one of the first Bible's that I owned as a teenager that was written in modern day American English.
- L. At the beginning of Galatians 6 is this picture that really describes the Church.
- M. At CrossRoad we really believe that Faith is a Journey. Even though we all carry our own weight, we share it together and do what we can to share the load.
- N. Philip Crosby, in his book *March Till They Die*, tells of a forced march of American and European soldiers in Korea. In November of 1950, the North Koreans were being pushed north, and they were taking with them the Americans and Europeans they had captured as prisoners of war. It was a terrible march. They were forced to go sometimes twenty miles a day though they were emaciated, hungry, suffering. Soldiers who couldn't keep up would fall back, and shots rang out. They had been executed.
- Philip Crosby and his friends, as they passed close to those GI's who were having a hard time keeping up, would say slowly in a whisper, so as not to be heard, "God is near us in this dark hour. His love is real. His mercy is real. His forgiveness is real. His reward is waiting for us." -- Don McCullough, "Reasons to Fear Easter," Preaching Today, Tape No. 116.

## VI. Show up for Inspiration

- A. {43} *Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.*
- B. Our mission statement is *To Inspire people to become followers of Jesus Christ.*
- C. Last week we talked about Prayer and that it is one of ways of expressing devotion and building your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- D. There is a need in every believer's life to be alone and have quiet time with God.
- E. There is also the need for us to gather together and celebrate God's goodness, His grace given to us, and to see how the Holy Spirit will inspire.
- F. Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, no. 17.: The task of pastoral ministry is, above all else, to arrange the contingencies for an encounter with the Divine.
- G. Judson Cornwall. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 2. Worship helps us find who we are and why God has placed us here on the earth. When we bow in God's presence with worship, only then are we made complete.
- H. You can do this by yourself, but there is something special about when a congregation gathers.
- I. Karl Barth was a well published theologian. One day on a streetcar in Basel, Switzerland, where he lectured, a tourist to the city climbed on and sat down next to Professor Barth. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired. "Yes," said the tourist. "Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth. "Yes," he said, "I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning." The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted. He went back to his hotel saying to himself, "I met Karl Barth's barber today."
- Quite often we sit next to each other, we speak cordially, we sing together, we listen and nod at the message, but we fail to see that Jesus is living in the person sitting right next to us.
- J. That is the gift of Worshipping together.

## VII. Show up for Continuation.

- A. {44} *All who believed were together and had all things in common; {45} they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. {46} Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, {47} praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*
- B. There is a lot to this last section of the scripture, but what I would like to point out is that the early church looked to each other for survival; for their lives to continue, they were going to have to be present for each other.

C. So many of the people who join CrossRoad do so after a long leave of absence from the Church, or after years of being skeptical or from some sort of abuse the church has caused.

D. I have a book in my office with pictures of all the people who have joined over the years.

E. There are so many stories of people whose faith has come alive.

F. Unfortunately, there are many unwritten and untold stories of people who just couldn't or wouldn't keep this part of the vow and just gave up, got their feelings hurt, felt neglected, felt unappreciated.

G. It is hard to keep people connected.

1. There is a story that you may have received from one of your email friends about a member of a church, who had been attending services regularly, but after a while stopped. After a few weeks, the friend who brought him to church decided to visit him. They sat down in the living room where there was a fire in the fireplace.

They sat in front of the fire for a few minutes and chatted, when the conversation moved to the church, it got quiet.

After about a minute, the friend walked over to the fireplace, took the tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone.

Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. They both watched all this quietly as the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished. Soon it was cold and dead.

Without saying a word the friend glanced at his watch and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow, once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

The friend reached the door to leave, his host said with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your visit and for the most on-fire message he had ever heard. I'll be back in church next Sunday."

2. Prayer