

Wesley Celebration

September 20, 2009

“Think Again”

The United Methodist Church has had a slogan, if you will, or a campaign going for some time. Maybe you have seen the banner here at church, seen it on a t-shirt, or somewhere else. The slogan was, “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors”. But in many United Methodist Churches this didn’t necessarily ring true. You could come in but if you were Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender you couldn’t serve and you probably would feel very uncomfortable. But unlike those Methodist churches, we have Wesley that has lived by this campaign for 25 years. Well, if you have been to the morning services at all, you would have heard the new campaign that is replacing the old, it’s called Rethink Church.

They are asking us to rethink the church as not a noun, which the church has been known to be: a place, a thing; but more looking at it as a verb, an action and I think a little bit of a noun too. Let me explain my thoughts here: if the church were just a place then if we destroyed this building, Wesley United Methodist would no longer exist. But if we are the part of a noun that is the persons, it wouldn’t matter if the buildings were destroyed because Wesley would still be intact. We are not limited by this building or these grounds, but rethinking church is taking those persons that make up the church and moving them into action; moving them to be the church wherever they go, not just when they show up to a service on Sunday. What about all the other days of the week when you are in your car, at work, or school, at home, at the store, or anywhere else you might be? Are we the church then? Do we show others a difference by what we do, what we say, how we act or react to a situation, remember we are asking us all to rethink what church is and moving church into a verb, which means actions.

You might be wondering why we need to do this. Why do we need to think again about church? What’s wrong with the way we think about it now? Look around you, how many empty seats do you see? How many people can you think of in an instant that are hurting and are in some need whether it be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or whatever. How many people do we see on a daily basis that are asking for help in the best way they know how and we are so busy that we rush past, drive by, maybe think for a moment, “oh, how sad.” And then move on to your next event. That’s not what we have been called to do, we have not been called to pass by, ignore, and look away from those who are lost and alone. In Matthew 28, we were given the great commission as followers of Jesus Christ, **“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! ¹⁹Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.”** When I was little I told my mom that I was going to be a missionary. She was very happy with that statement; in fact all she could think of was me in the middle of Africa in some hut surrounded by who knows what.

But as I got older and we talked about it again, and of course laughed, she realized that it was true. I am a missionary, I have been for some time, but I am not your typical missionary that travels far away sharing the good news of the gospel, but a local one that tries to follow the great commission every day of my life. I believe many of you are missionaries too.

There is a great quote by St. Francis Assisi, **“Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”** It’s time to rethink what our daily lives consist of, are we so busy with work, school, social engagements that we forget what we have been called to do? Yes, we come every 1st and 3rd Sunday and we sing praise songs, hear a message, eat some great snacks and leave and head back to our own jungles of the world. But then what? Is that all we are an every other Sunday kind of group? Is church only on Sunday? Is our faith reserved for Sundays? Is faith more than just a belief? You can say, “I believe, I am hungry,” or “I believe that was my favorite song”, or “I believe this is fun”. But what does that mean? All of those statements might be true but where is your real faith? The one that comes from **Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** And how does that translate into our daily lives? Why are there so few of us? Why aren’t these chairs filled every time these doors are open?

We sent a little survey out today when we sponsored the reel pride movie screening of “Prodigal Sons”. Here are some of the responses we got back:

Out of 25 responses that we received, we had more no’s than we did yes’ to the question are you involved with some form of church or spiritual community. In fact I was a little surprised at some of the no responses to why they don’t attend. One mentioned they didn’t believe in mythology, one didn’t believe in fairy tales, another had been hurt by the church growing up and couldn’t bring themselves to go to church. Another no response mentioned that if they did they would attend Wesley. Some of the yes responses were that they had their own community and it strengthened them for the week. Another just said because. And that about sums up our survey.

Unfortunately, I think we have been lumped in with a group of people that have not followed Jesus’ commands. Because we say, “church” we are immediately thought of as hypocrites. 85% of young adults say that church is nothing but hypocrisy, that our lives don’t match our beliefs. That the church is just standards and rules without sacrifice, it is nothing more than Christian rhetoric without tangible acts of love. There are churches on every corner with people hurting people outside; hypocrisy at its best.

Here is another reason to rethink church. Do you want to be lumped into those categories, are we more than standards and rules? Do we show love and sacrifice for those who are hurting? If we are the church then what are we doing to set the record straight. What are we doing or not doing that can take this talk of faith into action? There are many of you here tonight that have been in action, working your faith out through different service opportunities within our church. Tucker is the youth pastor for our teenagers and I would say that is walking out some faith and putting in

to action. He meets with them on Friday nights and hangs out which shows that church is not just a Sunday thing. Josie is our top chef for our Thursday night Base Camp, she comes in each week with a crew of people and serves the church and the neighborhood food prepared with love. Ryan and Peter are involved with a youth program on Friday nights, it's not necessarily "church" but by them being there and walking out their faith and being authentic about who they are, they are demonstrating preaching without using words. I am sure there are many more opportunities and things that many of you are involved in but what I want to ask is what are the rest of us doing? How are we acting out our faith? How are we being the verb part of church and not the noun or place part of church? It says in James 2:14 and following, **"¹⁴My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you? ¹⁵If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, ¹⁶you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? ¹⁷Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead!"** So, I have asked that each of you be given a slip of paper, and on that paper I am going to ask you to write down something you are passionate about. I am asking that you write down a place where we as the church can be the church to those that are hurting, lost, in need. I want you to write down what you are involved in now, and a way that we as the church can join you and support the efforts that are already in motion. This is our opportunity to begin to take the first step in rethinking church, to be the church, to follow the great commission that has been given us and to walk out our faith through opportunities.

I have to say one more thing, I think something that is important to set the record straight, I know I have said that twice but it is true, is that we, the church, as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, and straight allies begin to show those who would soon throw us away than look at us that we are not the people they stereotype us to be. We are mothers, daughters, friends, sons, fathers, and neighbors who are not all about sex, partying, drugs, and promiscuity. But we are persons of faith, integrity, love, and followers of Christ. I am ready to rethink church, how about you?