TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Bobby Rader/Opening Prayer by: Jerry Mallernee
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Danny Balch

#709 How Sweet, How Heavenly
#731 Take Time to Be Holy

Scripture Reading by: Matthew Girard
#701 My Jesus, I LoveThee

Communion Devotional by: Don Lynn
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#480 Blessed Assurance
Sermon: "...One Another"
John 13:34-35

#934 Softly & Tenderly
#738 Take the Name of Jesus With You
Closing Prayer by: Craig Girard

Small Groups

Our Small Groups will meet tonight. Robert Ward's group will meet at the building. If you have singed up and not been contacted, get with Bryant or one of the Elders.

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Jan. 29, 2023

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Questions and Answers

As most of you know, we had the first meeting of our new small groups last. Nearly every person who signed up to participate was present, and the few exceptions all had good reasons for their absence like illness or travel—no one just flaked on us, in other words. And since then, in face-to-face conversations, in text messages, in secondhand word-of-mouth reports from others, I have heard nothing but positive feedback from all quarters.

I do not like to talk about numbers much—we do not publish them in the bulletin, and this effort is first and foremost about building and maturing those who do participate—but to put it in terms that are stark and easy to understand, we had 61 meeting across our 4 groups, even with those folks who were missing. I do not know the last time this congregation averaged having 60+ in attendance on Sunday evenings, but it not only is BC (Before COVID), it predates my tenure here. That tells me, frankly, that there is something greater at work here, a spiritual hunger for the possibility that the church can be more.

That enthusiasm which has greeted this new ministry has been extremely encouraging and surpassed all expectations that I had for it. Maybe I was thinking too small! I want to thank all of you who have initially engaged in this with such fervor.

But some are obviously still on the fence about getting involved. And even for the rest, there are likely some questions we still have. We will wrap up our sermon series this morning that has laid a doctrinal foundation for us. But I want to briefly address some of those concerns that emerge in literature on this subject or that have come from some of you in different ways, in the hopes of encouraging those of us who haven't jumped on board yet to do so, and to reassure those of us who have:

1. **Does this mean what we have been doing on Sunday evenings for decades is wrong?** Of course not! There is nothing wrong with gathering together to sing songs of praise, to pray, and to study the word in a corporate setting; in fact, there is a whole lot right with it! After all, that is what we do in the morning assembly—and, if you think about it, that is what we are doing on a smaller scale even now, minus the singing (though you certainly *could* sing in your groups if you wanted to!)

   With that said, we need to be cautious here. The church has a role to play outside of the assembly—which is, in fact, a very small part of its presence in the world, even if it is the most visible manifestation of it. It exists outside of these 4 walls and the meeting times that we have on the sign by the street. We have the example of the earliest Christians meeting together on the first day of every week to eat the Lord's Supper together and participate in those other activities that we emulate to this day. That is all extremely important: we come together to worship God and, as a church, to encourage each other. We must not ever neglect that; it is a privilege and a responsibility.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Robert Williams, the Mast's son in law has been diagnosed with cancer in his jaw.

Carmen Williamson, Kelly & Susan McCain's granddaughter is in the hospital with RSV.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones, Linda Frank, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Susan McCain

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Deacons, Minister meeting Monday, Jan. 29th at 6:30 p.m..

We will have a meal this Wednesday night at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, Feb. 7th at 8:00 a.m.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

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But having done that, there is no reason that all of our gatherings need to take that same format. In fact, as we have seen, we have another pattern in the NT of Christians meetings in smaller groups in homes, eating, fellowshipping, studying, praying, together. That is just as good and right as those gatherings of the entire body; in our contemporary culture, it is quite possible that they fill a role that much of the world is yearning for, and that we have neglected to our detriment.

2. **Do we really need these groups to meet every single week?** This can have different shades of meaning that get to a more fundamental issue. Some relate to the first question and an aversion to any sort of change. I would urge us to be careful not to confuse tradition with traditionalism. Tradition is not in and of itself a bad thing; we literally could not function without it. Our Sunday night services are a tradition (and a relatively recent one, at that, in the grand scheme of things). But tradition becomes a problem when it morphs into traditionalism: binding what we do on others because that's the way we have always done it.

   Sometimes, it relates to logistics: is it really feasible to expect people to meet like this every week? I would simply say this: churches of Christ have been meeting in small groups on Sunday evenings for as long as I have been alive—even though I have never been part of a congregation that utilized them like this before, they really started to catch on in the late 80s and early 90s; in the denominational world, though I would disagree with them doctrinally, multiple churches have been built as cell churches that are basically a giant congregation composed of small groups—the classic example is the Baptist megachurch Saddleback in Orange County, which has literally thousands of small groups that meet each and every week; and then we have the example of the earliest Christians that we have noted already, who would puzzle over such a question, given that they were meeting together literally every single day.

   When faced with so many examples from different historical, geographical, social, and cultural contexts that have made similar efforts thrive, we have to honestly ask ourselves if we really think Liberty County is somehow unique. Are our people busier than others? Are our lives more complicated? Is it harder to navigate? Or is this a convenient excuse?

   Sometimes, this question relates to a final concern,

3. **What about people getting burned out?** It's true, that's a possibility; the flush of early enthusiasm we see now has often faded in other ministry efforts in the past, not just here, but in all churches. That is where the doctrinal foundation we are laying comes in; I hope that we have seen the importance of discipleship, and we will talk this morning about how that even involves the need for us to live more sacrificially because of that. It's not that we never need time away for ourselves and our families, though; it's just that we need to really, truly make our church family a priority too. Small groups encourage us to do that.

   I hope you will take up the challenge to make it a priority, even if it is new and different and takes you a bit outside of your comfort zone. And I pray that each of us individually, and this congregation collectively, will be blessed by the Lord as we strive to live out the community he envisioned and take seriously our responsibilities toward one another.

Bryant Perkins