TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Bobby Rader / Opening Prayer by: Robert Ward
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Danny Balch

#857 I'll Fly Away
#881 Mansions Over the Hilltop

Scripture Reading by: Parker Balch
383 Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross

Communion Devotional by: Bryant Perkins
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#867 To Canaan's Land I'm On My Way
Sermon: Guest Speaker: Tim Perkins
"Death - - What?"
Luke 16:19-31

#911 Bring Christ Your Broken Life
#864 Where the Gates Swing Outward Never
Closing Prayer by: Daniel Balch

Our Small Groups will not meet tonight

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

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

Oct. 22, 2023

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

A Place to Belong

We are in the midst of a loneliness epidemic in our world. It is severe enough that earlier this year, the Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy, released an Advisory to call attention to it as a public health crisis. Countries such as Japan and the UK have gone so far as to appoint Ministers of Loneliness in their government. Our isolation and lack of connection to one another creates myriad physical problems that are worthy of notice: there is an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and dementia. Overall, it amplifies the risk of premature death by more than 60%; that's comparable to the effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. That doesn't even count the mental health and economic consequences, either.

This has been building for many years. According to a survey conducted in 2019, 52% of Americans stated the sometimes or always felt alone. 47% sometimes or always felt that their relationships were not meaningful. 58% said they sometimes or always felt like no one knew them well, and 21% stated they had no close friends. This is all pre-COVID pandemic. You do not have to be a psychologist or a statistician to understand how that event exacerbated this underlying problem.

Scripture is aware that this is a struggle for us as humans. Way back in the beginning, God looked at Adam in the Garden as said, *it is not good for the man to be alone* **(Gen 2:18).** We were created for community, to live in relationship with God and with each other.

And that is why God did not call us as individuals, but created a people, the church. We can think of the account of the Great Commission in **Matthew:** *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. **(Mt 28:19-20)** The God-given purpose of the church is to make disciples. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus, who learns to become like Jesus, in fact. That is a comprehensive process that cannot be accomplished from worship or from passively listening to sermons or sitting in Bible classes. It requires us to connect with each other in community—to be involved in each other's lives, to share in each other's struggles, to pray together, to study and learn with and from each other—something that does not just automatically happen

How did Jesus make disciples? Though he preached sermons and taught crowds, he didn't invite people to a weekly lecture on the kingdom of God and then dismiss them for a week: it was not an event, but a lifestyle. He called the 12 to walk with him, talk with him, eat with him, teaching them by modeling his example and answering their questions, and empowering them to join in the work too.

You see, making disciples takes time, it takes effort, it takes investment. As has been often said, "disciples are handmade." They are not mass produced in the assembly or even in Bible classes. To effectively equip someone, we have to have a real relationship with them; to know their maturity level, their strengths/weaknesses, their gifts. We have to be part of a real community of believers.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Patricia Prater, Edna Semien, Wilson Semien, Betty Spencer, Willie Spencer, James Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Kelly McCain, Wayne Noonkester

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, 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, Minister meeting Monday, Oct. 23rd at 5:30 p.m.

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

Homecoming is today. The meal will be catered and we will need to provide desserts.

Baby Shower for Kora Ward on Sunday, Nov. 5th. See Lori David for more information.

Food Bank

We served 133 families on Tuesday, Oct. 19th at our food bank. That equals to about 414 individuals. We had 18 volunteers.

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That is where the church comes in. Just think of some aspects of the church that can only be accomplished in relationship with each other:

1. Fellowship. More than just the old, "How are you/I'm good" exchange—real knowledge of each other. It requires us to really get to know other and to open ourselves up enough to really be known.

2. The "one another" commands. Closely related to fellowship, these authentic relationships are the only way we can really fulfill all of those commands that are supposed to characterize us as Christians.
Love one another – *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* **(Jn 13:34-35)**
Serve one another – *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*. **(Mk 10:43-45)**
Encourage one another – *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing*. **(1 Thess 5:11)**
Build up each other - *Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding*. **(Rom 14:19)**
There are others we could note; this is not exhaustive. The point is, we can only do these when we really are a community, something small groups help to create.

3. Promoting accountability. Our culture is extremely individualistic, and that has seeped into the church; we talk about a personal relationship with Jesus and think that we are responsible to no one else. But Scripture not only talks about those positive responsibilities we have toward each other, but that we should *submit to one another* **(Eph 5:21),** *confess our sins to each other* **(James 5:16),** and *bear each other's burdens* **(Gal 6:2).** A healthy church cultures realizes that we are accountable to each other.

4. A culture of family. It is not accident that the *family of God/ household of God* is the most frequently used image for the church in Scripture. We must learn to get along with each other, to be hospitable to each other, to put up with each other just the way we have to in a physical family.

Incidentally, cultivating this sort of culture is the primary goal of our small groups ministry. We study the Bible together, but they are not study groups; we pray together, but they are not prayer meetings. They are fundamentally about creating this sort of community, about building authentic relationships, so that we can be what God would have us to be. We do not have to be lonely; we have a place to belong.

And that is what days like today are all about, too. It is an opportunity to renew those old ties of community that bind us together as God's people. Thank you for being here. May God bless you.

Bryant Perkins