

We Are The Church
May 29, 2011

I Love what this video says about what the church is to be about – because it captures, I believe, what God intends for His church to be.

We are on a mission to love people.

We are on a mission to grow into the people God wants us to be.

We are on a mission to make disciples of all nations.

We do exist to change the world.

Last Sunday we concluded a seven month journey through Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

How many of you were here when we started back in October of last year?

I want to commend you for hanging in there from start to finish.

I'm proud to be the pastor of a church that is hungry for the unvarnished truth of God's Word.

Before we get started into our next book study I want to take some time and talk about where we are as a church where we are going.

First, I want to deal with the subject of our facilities.

This isn't the most important thing we will discuss today, but because a lot of you have been asking about where when we might get a permanent home, I want to let you know where we are in this regard.

When we moved into this warehouse we signed a three year lease with a three year option.

That lease ran out a few months ago and since that time we have been month to month.

At this time the owner of the building is negotiating to sell the building and the new owner would like very much for us to commit to another three years.

We are praying about this, but it look as if we probably will do so.

Even though we have maxed out in a number of areas; the first being the restrooms, the fact is we don't have another viable option with regard to another facility at this time and in all likelihood it will take another three years before we can acquire land and build, or find another suitable building.

We will eventually add a third service to continue to give us room to grow and be as creative as possible to meet the needs of our church.

So, it looks as if this will be home for another three years.

There is a Proverb that I believe speaks to our situation.

Prepare your outside work,
Make it fit for yourself in the field;
And afterward build your house.
- Proverbs 24:27

This proverb is talking about the priorities of a farmer.

This proverb is saying the wise farmer gives first priority to plowing, planting and harvesting – then decides what kind of house to build.

Our first priority is to become the church God wants us to be – before we involve ourselves in building the building we need.

This is fitting because the church is not a building.

The church is people.

The church existed for some 300 without building buildings.

Buildings are important because facilities facilitate ministry.

For the first year we were across the street at the Marquise we only had access to a building on Sunday mornings.

This limited what we could do.

Now there is something happening here almost every day or night of the week.

I've been without buildings and I've had buildings.

Trust me, having a building is better.

But buildings without clear purpose and right priorities can also be a burden.

That's why I want to take some time and talk about what we want to be about here at The Bridge.

I want to do this by using **three key words** I believe capture what we want to be about.

Connect

We want to help people connect with God and other believers.

Sometimes people connect first with God and then with other believers, but a lot of time people connect first with us before they connect with God.

That's because people generally see us before they ever meet God.

Jesus said in John chapter 8:

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

– John 8:12

But in Matthew 5 He said to His disciples:

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.”

– Matthew 5:14

So, which is it?

Is Jesus the light of the world, or are we the light of the world?

It's both.

Jesus is the light of the world, but the world can't see Jesus, unless they see Him in us.

We are the only Jesus people are going to see before they come to meet Him.

So, our first priority is to properly represent Jesus in the world.

The way we do this is by receiving people, accepting people, welcoming people.

We do this on the job, at school, on the soccer field where our kids play soccer.

We welcome and receive people when they come to this church.

I had someone say to me last week; *“I've been to two churches in my life before coming to The Bridge (and then she told me the two kinds of churches she has attended) but this is the first church where I ever felt comfortable.”*

I believe we are a welcoming church and I believe we can be the most welcoming in the world.

We should welcome and receive people because that's what Jesus did.

We see this throughout Jesus' life and ministry.

Following a time of extensive ministry, Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds for a little R & R with his disciples.

Luke 9

¹⁰ ... Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ But when the multitudes knew *it*, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.

Jesus received people.

People connected with Jesus.

Jesus spent time with people that the typical religious leaders would not spend time with.

After Jesus called **Matthew** to come and be one of The Twelve Disciples Matthew invited to Jesus to his house for a dinner party.

Going to someone's house in this culture implied acceptance of that person.

Because Matthew was a tax collector for the hated Romans he was ostracized from the Synagogue and was forbidden from entering the temple in Jerusalem.

That Jesus would go to this man's house was scandalous to the religious leaders.

At this dinner party were all the other religious outcasts of Israel.

Matthew 9

¹⁰ Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ But go and learn what *this* means: '*desire mercy and not sacrifice.*' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

People connected with Jesus because Jesus accepted people where they were.

We want to connect with people, we want receive people, we want to welcome people because as we welcome and receive people they begin to believe they can be accepted by God.

Illus. As many of you know we were asked if we would be willing to pick up guys from two different half-way houses and bring them to church.

We agreed to do so, but we only had one van.

Then I remembered that Jeff and Dara McDowell had a limousine service.

We asked if they would pick guys up from one of the houses in their limo.

We might be the first and perhaps only church in the world that picks up convicted felons and brings them to church in a limo!

A couple weeks ago Jeff had picked up the guys and then realized he was low on gas so he pulled in to the gas station.

While they were gassing up one of the guys recognized his son at one of the pumps.

He said, put the window down.

He called out, *"Hey son!"*

The young man said, *"Dad? Did you escape?"*

He said, *"No, I'm on my way to church."*

The son said, "In a limo?"

"It's no wonder the state of Kentucky is going broke!"

We are the kind of church that brings convicted felons to church in a limo.

I kind of think every time that limo pulls up in front of The Bridge every Sunday morning that there is an angel looking down who says to the other angels, *"Hey guys, come see this – the guys are getting out of the limo!"*

"Man, I love that Bridge Church!"

We want people to connect with us – so they can connect with God.

That's the whole idea of the incarnation.

God became a man so people could see what He is like.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

We are now The Word incarnate.

We are Jesus with skin on.

So, we connect with people, we accept people so they can get close enough to God to connect with Him through Jesus.

Once people connect with God it's critical that they connect with other believers.

This is how God intends for us to be nurtured, to receive ministry and to grow.

The fact is, we really can't be a biblical Christian without being deeply connected to others in the body of Christ.

This is made clear by the many "one another" passages in the New Testament.

As Christian believers, we are to:

be devoted to one another
 prefer one another love
 contribute to the needs of one another
 rejoice with one another
 weep with one another
 be of the same mind with one another
 be at peace with one another

And that is just **Romans chapter 12**.

The New Testament is filled with "one another" passages that make it clear we are to be connected to one another.

Some of these include the following?

We are to show forbearance to one another, speak the truth to one another because we are members of one another.

We are to be kind to one another and forgive one another.

We are to teach and admonish one another.

We are to love each other and comfort one another, encourage one another and build up each other up.

We are to warn one another about the deceitfulness of sin, stir one another up to love and good deeds, while not forsaking our own assembling together.

We are not to speak against one another or judge one another.
 We are not to complain against one another, but confess our sins one to another and pray for one another.

We are to fervently love one another from the heart.

We are to fervently love one another from the heart.

We are to be hospitable, sympathetic, brotherly, and be clothed with humility toward one another.

It is virtually impossible to obey these commandments if we only see each other for an hour and ten or fifteen minutes on a Sunday morning in a worship service.

The Christian life is to be lived in community with other believers.

This is why we have **Connect Groups**.

At this point in the life of our church I'm more concerned about building Christian community than I am about building a building.

Spiritual growth happens best in the context of relationships.

Which leads to our second key word:

Grow

Although God accepts us where we are and He loves us as we are – He has not intention of leaving us where we are.

God's purpose for each and every one of us is to transform us into the image of His Son.

In this sense the Christian life is a bit of paradox.

Do you know what a paradox is?

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory but is nevertheless true.

God says, *"I love you and I accept you completely as you are but I am committed to transforming you into something completely different."*

Jesus was at the same time the most accepting person who ever was – and the most demanding person who ever was.

Consider the woman taken in adultery in John chapter 8.

A woman is dragged into the temple right in the middle of Jesus' sermon and is thrown down before him.

The scribes and the Pharisees say to Jesus:

John 8

⁴ ... "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." – John 8:11

On the one hand Jesus showed incredible mercy.

On the other hand Jesus demanded radical change.

That's what He does with us.

He forgives us freely of all our sins – and then says, "Now, live differently."

Salvation through Christ is the most costly free gift you'll ever receive.

Salvation is completely free, as expressed in Ephesians 2:8-9:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. – Ephesians 2:8-9

Salvation is free, free, free!

Then Jesus comes along and says in Luke chapter 9

²³ ... "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.
– Luke 9:23-24

"Take up your cross?"

"Lose your life?"

Doesn't sound too free to me, does it you?

Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything.

After providing for us the free gift of eternal life – Jesus bids us to come and die.

The world has seen enough of Christianity that is Christian in name only.

The world needs to see less of us and more of Jesus.

Illus. Mike Breaux tells of a time he was eating with his family at a Golden Corral.

A server was bringing out a 5 gallon container of Thousand Island dressing through one of those swinging doors that go into the kitchen when her heel got caught on the door and she fell forward and launched the entire container on a man in a suit.

He was covered from head to toe in Thousand Island dressing.

It was in his hair.

It covered his face.

It was dripping off his chin.

It was on his shirt.

It was dripping off the lapels of his suit.

It was on his pants and on his shoes.

He was completely covered in Thousand Island dressing.

He stood there for a moment in stunned silence and then just went ballistic.

He railed on this girl, calling her every name in the book.

He said, *"This suit cost me \$350 and this the first time I've worn it."*

On and on he went about how stupid this girl was.

Then his wife chimed in.

Then he demanded to see the manager.

The manager walked and looked at the man covered in Thousand Island dressing and said, ***"Is there a problem?"***

The manager said, *"We'll pay to have the suit cleaned."*

The man said, *"I don't want it cleaned."*

"The suit is ruined."

"I want a new suit."

"I want a check for \$350 right now."

Mike Breaux said the interesting thing about this was this happened on a Sunday afternoon.

"What is a man doing in a suit on a Sunday afternoon?"

"Oh, I don't know – could it be this man just came from church where he had just heard a great sermon about loving your neighbor as yourself?"

The guy was obviously a church man.

I don't know if he was a Christian, or not, but I'll bet the girl who dumped the Thousand Island dressing on him knew he had been to church that day, based on how he was dressed.

Do you think that episode would have helped or hindered that girly from considering coming to Christ?

I heard of another guy – this guy is a preacher who was just the biggest complainer at restaurants.

He was at one restaurant where he had ordered a steak and when he cut into the steak he called the server over and said, "This steak is too rare."

She said, "I'll take it back and we'll cook it more."

She brought it back a few minutes later and when he cut into it he said, "Now it's overcooked."

She said, "I'm sorry, I'll get you another steak."

She brought him another steak and when he cut into it he said, "This one's okay."

Then he cut into his baked potato and it had a black spot in it.

He said, "Hey, come here."

"This potato is bad."

The server reached down and picked up the potato and started to spank the potato saying, "Bad, bad, bad, potato."

She put it back on his plate and said, "There, if it gives you any more trouble you let me know."

The guy just sat there in shock – but it broke him of complaining at restaurants.

We shouldn't be like the rest of the world.

We're called to be different.

We're called to show forth Jesus to the world.

We're called to be different at work.

We're called to be different at school.

We're called to be different on the soccer field.

We're called to be different at home.

God accepts us where we are – but He is serious about conforming us to the image of Christ - partly because we bear His name and He doesn't want us messing up His rep, but mostly because this is what we were created to be.

We were created in the image of God until marred that image.

The salvation God has provided calls for a total transformation into the image of Jesus.

That's why we are committed to teaching through books of the Bible verse by verse.

This is the only way to insure we are exposed to the whole body of truth that works to transform our lives.

We want to be a church that accepts you where you are – just like Jesus does – but I want you to know we are about radical transformation – because that is what God is after in our lives.

Illus. Mike Breaux also tells the story of taking his two boys to a Goodies Department store grand-opening in Danville, KY.

The little boys were six and four.

The store had hired some students from Center College to dress up like live mannequins.

The younger of the two boys said to his older brother, "They're real, you know."

The little brother said, "No they aren't, their mannequins."

"Every store has them."

The older boy said, "Their real, I saw one breathe."

The older brother said, "They aren't real, their dummies, dummy."

Just then one of the mannequins said, *"How's it going?"*

The older brother just about had a heart attack.

Every time the two boys went to that store after that they would walk up to the mannequins – look around and poke them to see if they're real.

We live in a culture where people are looking for something that's real.

That's what the world does with us Christians.

They poke us to see if we're real.

That's why we have to be serious about our growing in Christ.

We have to take serious the call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus.

We have a video that speaks to this.

We are about helping people grow into the image of Jesus.
The third key work in what we are about here at The Bridge is:

Serve

We want you to:

Connect
Grow
Serve

Serving is the natural outgrowth of growth and a major contributor to growth.

Jesus said:

²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” – Matthew 20:27-28

We serve because we have grown to care about others more – and serving others helps us to keep growing.

God has gifted every one of us with certain spiritual gifts, certain talents and certain abilities with which to serve others.

You will never know the fulfillment God has for you until you are serving with your spiritual gifts.

The world sees Jesus, not just by what we say, but by how we serve others.

Connect
 Grow
 Serve

That's what we want to be about here at The Bridge.

We are working to strengthen every one of these aspects of our church.

I ask you to join in the journey of connecting, growing and serving.

As we do – we will impact – not just the lives of those around us.
 We will impact lives around the world.

And that is what God has called His church to do!

Dear Leaders,

This was a big week in the life of our church. Sunday morning, Bo cast a vision for the future of The Bridge, and the future is focused upon you! I say it is focused upon you for two reasons: you are, first of all, a believer taking part in the ministry of The Bridge and, as leaders, you are taking part in ministering to others at The Bridge. In your Connect Groups this week, make sure to be repetitious in stating the three primary emphases of The Bridge. In consistently focusing on these simple ideas, we will be fulfilling the Great Commission by making disciples who, working as hometown missionaries, go out into their daily life to make more disciples. That is what The Bridge is all about: transforming lives by creating opportunities for people to **Connect**, **Grow**, and **Serve**.

1. Have you ever gone to a church that didn't help you feel connected to others or God? What was that like?
2. What are some of the "one another" commands we can find in scripture? (Leader Hint: I found a pretty good list of these scriptures at this web address http://www.cerrogordocob.com/sermons/One_Another.pdf)
3. If we are saved by grace, not works, what does it mean for us to be concerned with growth? What are the areas in which we should be growing as Christians?
4. Have you ever had the opportunity to serve others in a significant way? How did serving impact you, personally?
5. What is one of the most well-known examples of Christ calling his followers to serve? (*Leader Hint: we're looking for the Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-20*)
6. Was Jesus speaking to the church as a local body of believers or is he speaking to every believer under his authority? What does that mean for each of us?
7. What part can you play in fulfilling the vision of The Bridge?

Thank you for your work to make the vision of The Bridge a reality; Connect Groups have a direct impact in each area of focus: Connecting, Growing, and Serving.

Blessings,

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