

**THE ENGAGING CHURCH:
(2) ENGAGED IN SERVICE**

Galatians 5:14

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PROLOGUE

The Bible makes it clear there is no mandatory retirement when it comes to helping others.

Barbara Klassen tells about her great-great uncle who lived to the ripe old age of 106:

He was healthy and spry and took joy in chauffeuring his less able-bodied senior friends around town. On his 100th birthday, his driver's license came up for renewal. When he went to the licensing bureau, the skeptical clerk said, "You're 100 years old! What do you need a driver's license for?" My uncle, completely nonplused, replied, "Somebody has to drive the old folks around!"

SCRIPTURE

"For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Last week I introduced the concept of an Engaging Church. It is my hope and prayer that we, as a congregation, would want to be an Engaging Church.

The term "Engaging Church" does not refer to a new denomination nor am I suggesting we change our name from "The First Presbyterian Church of Battle Creek" to "The First Engaging Church of Battle Creek." For one thing, the abbreviation is harder to pronounce. A common abbreviation for First Presbyterian Church is to say "First Pres." But if we changed to First Engaging Church then to abbreviate it would sound like something got stuck in the back of the throat. "Hey Bill, where do you go to church?" "Oh, I go to First Eng." See, it sounds terrible.

The term "Engaging Church" does not refer to a movement within Christianity. There have been several movements within Christianity over the last 2,000 years such as the Monastic Movement, the Mendicant Movement, the Protestant Reformation, and the Charismatic Movement, to name just a few. But most of the time, new movements fizzle out. In the late 1950s there was a trend in American Churches to have a clock in the back of the sanctuary with the hope that this would help preachers give shorter sermons. But the movement died a lingering death for lack of evidence that the strategy had any effect on preachers.

The term "Engaging Church" is used today by people like Charles Arn and Allen Ratta who help congregations with evangelism and outreach. My use of the term "Engaging Church" does not necessarily contradict their definition but is broader than their definition.

When I use the term "Engaging Church" what I am doing is borrowing language from the New Testament, specifically the writings of Paul (2 Cor 4:1), to provide a handle on what the Bible teaches concerning the mission of the Church. I like the word "engaging" not only because of the biblical reference but also because it is seldom used to describe the Church and so it gives us a fresh way to look at the mission of the Church. The mission of the Church is

to engage in what God is doing in the world. We are to be co-participants in God's work.

Last week we also looked at the marks of an Engaging Church. The Engaging Church Follows a Principle, Makes a Plan and Delights in Participation. This means that as we work for God we need to engage our hearts, our minds, our hands and feet.

Over the next few weeks we will be taking a closer look at how an Engaging Church would go about fulfilling the historic five-fold mission of the Church: Service, Outreach, Worship, Fellowship and Discipleship. Today we will be looking at how an Engaging Church would engage in Service.

1. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN SERVICE AND FOLLOW A PRINCIPLE.
IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN SERVICE AND FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF WINSOME LOVE.

At the beginning of this series I brought up the principle of winsome love. I like winsome love because it is a love that is welcoming, inviting, accepting, and delights in making new friends. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary even defines it as "engaging."

I also like winsome love because of its connection with Paul's ministry. The English words "win" and "winsome" are similar in that they share the same root (*wen-*, meaning "to desire, work hard for,") and "win" is a good translation of the Greek term Paul repeatedly uses to describe his ministry. He says:

"For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them" (! Cor 9:19 NRSV).

Paul desires to win people to Christ. The word for win (*kerdaino*, ker-dah'-ee-no) when it applies to finances means to obtain by investment and by implication when it applies to people means to develop a relationship, that is, make a friend. A winsome love is one that builds relationships, makes friends.

But the primary reason I speak of winsome love is because I think this describes the kind of love Jesus has for others and so it is the kind of love *we* are to have for others. In his earthly ministry Jesus embodied this kind of love. He said that he did not come to *be* served but *to* serve and give his life for others that they might gain eternal friendship with God (Matt 20:28; John 15:13; 17:3). The Bible says:

"... Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also" (2 Corinthians 5:18 TEV).

In Luke's Gospel we read of the account of an expert in religious law who was grilling Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" But the expert in religious law found himself cross-examined in return, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The expert in religious law got the answer right: love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. But then he tried to find a loophole to justify his past omissions of love to others: "And who is my neighbor?"

Religious teachers in Jesus' day taught that the "neighbor" in "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" referred only to people who shared the same values and ethnicity (i.e. a fellow

Israelite). Jesus shattered that definition by telling the story we now refer to as the Story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Neighbor is not limited to people who are like you but includes people who are different from you, who may even dislike you. Jesus took the question, "Who is my neighbor?" and replaced it with, "How can I *be* a neighbor to others?" The lesson here is that love is not to be conditioned by its object.

Ian Pitt-Watson, the late professor of preaching at Fuller Seminary, made this observation about his daughter (adapted from *A Primer for Preachers*):

When Rosemary, my youngest child, was three, she was given a little rag doll, which quickly became an inseparable companion. She had other toys that were intrinsically far more valuable, but none that she loved like she loved the rag doll. Soon the rag doll became more and more rag and less and less doll. It also became more and more dirty. If you tried to clean the rag doll, it became more ragged still. And if you didn't try to clean the rag doll, it became dirtier still. The sensible thing to do was to trash the rag doll. But that was unthinkable for anyone who loved my child. If you loved Rosemary, you loved the rag doll—it was part of the package. "Love me, love my rag dolls," says God, "including the one you see when you look in the mirror."

Love means learning to treat people the way Jesus would treat people. It is loving all of God's "rag dolls" including ourselves. And we are to follow this principle as we engage in service to God by serving others.

2. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN SERVICE AND MAKE A PLAN.

IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN SERVICE AND MAKE A PLAN. We will think about what it means to serve God and then take the steps needed to be active in service.

When we talk about service to God we need to recognize two things: our vocation and our ministry. The word "vocation" is often used as just another word for job or career, but historically it has been a Christian term used to describe how we serve God through the way we live our lives. The word "vocation" is from the Latin word for "calling." This came into common use after the Bible was translated into Latin.

The point is, God calls us into service. Unfortunately, during the Middle Ages, the idea of a calling from God was limited to religious vocations such as priest or nun. Later, the Reformer Martin Luther taught that any honest labor was a way to serve God. Therefore every Christian has a calling or vocation to fulfill. Another Reformer, by the name of John Calvin, had an even broader view of vocation. He said:

"The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to God's calling"
(Institutes of the Christian Religion 3.10.6).

This is consistent with that the New Testament teaches us:

"...Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Eph 4:1).

Therefore we can say that every believer is called to use the gifts and abilities God has given in order to honor and serve God (1) in personal life, (2) in households and families, (3) in

daily occupations, (4) and in community, nation, and the world (See W- 5.6000). Vocation has to do with how we honor and serve God in all aspects of our existence including but not limited to our careers.

Ministry, on the other hand, usually has to do with how we serve God in connection with his Church. Every believer is a minister. Not every believer is a pastor, but every believer is a minister. Not every believer is an active minister, some seem to be on leave or even AWOL. But God wants each one of us to be involved in ministry. Ministry simply means using what we have to help others in the name of God. If we want to be active in ministry we need to plan for it.

First of all, we must DECIDE to serve. God wants each one of us, each believer, to serve him but he does not force us to serve him. We must decide to serve.

In the Bible the words "service" and "ministry" are translations of the same Greek term. So all of us are called to ministry just as all of us are called to serve. Some of you may want to say "I'm not called to ministry." But, in fact, you are!

Bill Hybels, founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, Illinois, once said:

"I thank God for those of you who are using your gifts and I pray for those of you who have been so deeply wounded in the past that you need a time of healing before you can begin to serve again but to the rest of you I have to ask a tough question, 'What's going on?' If you have been redeemed and welcomed into the family of God you should be lying awake nights thinking of ways to show your gratitude to God!"

Secondly, we need to DISCOVER our service.

In order to discover our place of service we need to acknowledge that God has given to each and every believer one or more abilities to be used to build up the church. Paul says:

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7 NIV).

Eugene Peterson puts it this way:

"Each person is given something to do that shows who God is."

Thomas Edison invented the incandescent electric light bulb in 1879. It was a remarkable achievement. But it would be more than half a century before many Americans could appreciate it. The problem was not with the light bulb. The problem was the lack of electrical power. Many rural communities did not receive electrical power until the 1930's. The light bulb may be a great idea but it has no practical benefit without power.

Just so, it is a great thing to want to serve God. We are to show the light of God's truth and love to the world. But this is not practical without power. We need God's power. The Bible speaks of this kind of power in terms of spiritual gifts.

We learn our place of service as we recognize and use our spiritual gifts and other abilities to

strengthen the Church of Jesus Christ. Do not wait until you have a complete understanding of spiritual gifts before you start to serve. Jump in and help out as best you can. And if you think you have a particular gift then try to use it. God wants you to use what you *have* to help others. God does not expect you to use what you do *not* have. Finding out what you have been given will help you discover your place of service.

Thirdly, we need to DEVELOP our servanthood.

We are not left to our own devices to learn how to serve. We have a model for service in Jesus Christ. If we want to develop our servanthood then we need to serve like Jesus.

Serving like Jesus means being faithful. The Bible says:

"The one thing required of servants is that they be faithful" (1 Cor 4:2 TEV).

Jesus was faithful in his service. He did not give up. If we want to serve like Jesus then we must not give up. You may retire from your job someday, or you may already be retired from your job, but you never retire from serving God. The nature of that service may change but the fact of service does not change.

Ivan P. Downing discovered that it was a poor choice of words to say he was retiring from ministry rather than simply retiring from his job. He writes:

"I had decided to retire from the ministry, and one Sunday I explained my decision to the congregation: 'I wear two hearing aids and tri-focal glasses; I have a partial plate and I sometimes walk with a cane. It seems to me,' I concluded, 'that the Lord is telling me it's time to retire.' After the service, a white-haired lady told me, 'Reverend, you have misinterpreted what the Lord has been saying to you. He's not telling you it's time to retire; he's telling you that if you keep going, he'll keep you patched up!'"

The motivation for faithful ministry is God's faithfulness to us - his love will never let us go. The fruit of faithful ministry is great joy - it is to hear Jesus say:

"Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21).

3. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN SERVICE AND DELIGHT IN MUTUAL PARTICIPATION.

IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN SERVICE AND DELIGHT IN MUTUAL PARTICIPATION.

The Bible says:

{7} But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.
{11} The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, {12} to equip God's people for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, {13} until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:7, 11-13 NRSV).

It is God's plan that every believer engage in ministry, come to maturity and help the church grow in its ability to carry out God's mission in the world. We are Christ's hands and feet in the world. If we truly believed this then the functional direction of the church would change. We would shift from an inward focus to an outward focus. We would emphasize equipping, dispersing and multiplying followers of Christ. But something seems to be holding us back.

Non-profit organizations all across the country are crying out for help. The number of available volunteers seems to shrink daily. Considerable time and effort goes into recruiting volunteers to get the work done.

Unfortunately, the church is often regarded as just one more non-profit organization competing for workers. But this is a false image. The church is the people of God, called by God, to serve God. Don't say, "I'm waiting for someone to recruit me," because if you are a Christian you have already been recruited by God - He's just waiting for you to show up for work!

God desires to use us to do his work not because he needs us but because he knows we need him. Jesus prayed to the Father while in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). If it is our heart's desire to serve God then we will gain a knowledge of God's will for our lives and learn to work together in the joy and adventure of being the Body of Christ in the world.

CONCLUSION

If we want to be an Engaging Church we will engage in Service.

Bruce Thielemann, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, tells of a conversation with a member of his congregation who said, "You preachers talk a lot about 'do unto others,' but when you get right down to it, it comes down to basin theology." Thielemann asked, "Basin theology? What's that?" The man said, "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before his death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which basin will you use?"