



It is amazing what has happened over the last few years in the area of computers and the internet. To see some of those changes all I need to do is turn on my cell phone as it has a very good camera, gives instant weather reports, has GPS, a full bible and immediate access to the internet and the ability to make purchases on line. It instantly puts me in contact through Face book, Twitter and my email to friends across Canada and around the world. When I have my phone, I am never alone. I am always a part of a community of friends. I recently found a list of the 10 maxims for the internet which sum it up.

1. A journey of a 1000 sites begins with a single click
2. Don't byte off more than you can chew
3. Home is where you hang your @
4. Speak softly and carry a cellular phone
5. There is no place like www.home.com
6. The geeks shall inherit the earth
7. Too many clicks spoil the browse
8. What boots up must come down
9. You can't teach a new mouse old clicks
10. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to use the Net and he won't bother you for a week

For the last 3 weeks we have been talking about things we share in common as a church. We have looked at Communion (a place where we can encounter God), Baptism (a place where we can be transformed) and today we want to look at the church (a place where we can connect in community).

When I talk about getting connected within the church, for many it seems like a natural thing to do because they have grown up in the church. But for others who grew up outside the church (because the church has received some bad press both deservedly and undeserved or because it hasn't seemed to connect well to their world), the church has felt foreign and irrelevant to them. There are still others who are on the out's with church, for it has been a place which either hasn't lived up to it's promises, or sad to say has been a place where they have been hurt from those they thought were their friends. I say this because when it comes to discussing the church, if we are honest, different people have had different experiences within the church. Even I as a person who loves the church and has spent his life involved in the church, I would have to say that there has been times when it has caused me pretty deep pain.

I. Big Deal #1 God Loves the Church

So if our experience has been so varied, maybe we need to do a cost analyses concerning church and start by asking 'what is the big deal about church'? Let's begin with a question I often hear: "Why should I be involved with a church when I can meet God out in nature?" The quick answer to that question is that while you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, what I have noticed is that if you try and be a Christian without going to church, almost 100% of the time your walk with God goes down hill. Why... because God's plan is to place us in community with other believers and

because God loves His Church. That has been one of those statements which I can never run away from. No matter what is or has happened in the Church, God has a passion for it. Just think about how God describes His church. He describes His church as His Bride (Revelation 21:9). That look you see in the eye of a groom as he stands in front of the Church and sees his bride begin to walk down the aisle is the exact way Jesus looks at Brentview every day of it's existence. That passion is so profound that Ephesians 5:25 says that Jesus loved His church so much that He gave His life for her. Part of the reason Jesus died on the cross was so that His church (this church) could not only exist but so it could thrive. If you look through the New Testament you will see that Jesus sees us as a hand chosen gathering of His Royal Priests (I Peter 2:8-10) and he sees us as this phenomenal Cathedral which he has and continues to build brick by expanding brick as you and I are added to His architectural masterpiece called His church. Ephesians 2:22 says '...and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit'. He dwells here. But to me, the most profound comment Jesus makes is that He sees the church as being like a body. In I Corinthians 12, Paul uses an analogy of the body to describe what happens at a church. Verses 12-13: how does it work? Verses 7-11: That is how God says He has made us as a church. He is saying that within this gathering of people are individuals who are given these gifts to be used, as verse 7 says, for the common good. They are given to not only care for those around them, but to help us become a powerful, world impacting church. Now turn to verse 27. What it is saying is that not only has God placed supernatural abilities, gifts and powers within this body of believers (within you as individuals), and not only are we a place that needs to use these supernatural gifts, but when you put these gifted people all together, you don't just get a Church located at 3512 Charleswood, you get the actual Body of Christ. That is what verse 27 is saying. As we gather and these gifts are used and we are transformed into the image of Jesus, Jesus bodily is present among us. For this place is not only to be a church but it is to be the lived out expression of Jesus' actual presence in this place and in this community, touching His world.

Following the French Revolution, the people took one of the sons of King Louis 16 (who was beheaded) and gave him to a horrible lady who ran a brothel in Paris and told her to raise him. They told her to abuse him, belittle him and to warp his character and turn him into a degenerate person. So she spit on him, showed him the worst things she could and beat him any chance she could. When he was about 12, she attempted to make him do something that was very wrong and when he refused, she beat him mercilessly. Half way through the beating all of a sudden he stood up grabbed her arm and said "I will not do it for I am the Son of the King and it would be wrong for me to act in any other way". However, there are times when the Church of Jesus Christ has not lived up to the wonder and gift of our being the actual body of Jesus. We can never forget that it is still exactly who we are. And the more we are open to using the gifts He gives us, open to living obediently and open to living in the unity together, His body (this church) not only thrives, but is a place where Jesus is actually present among us. So, if this Church is Jesus' body, I need to love it. God loves the Church and so should I.

John Ortberg says 'the church is not a place to gather occasionally for religious services. It is not one more social institution among many others. The church is God's dream for His most cherished creation. There is nothing like the church. No accomplishment, no organization or country or civilization. There is nothing as

important as the church, and only the church will survive history to share God's eternity. What has transcended the last 2000 years - the church.' Ortberg says this because true fellowship has the power to revolutionize lives and be a place where masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, and tenderness flows. People really do become like brothers and sisters who shoulder each other's burdens. What is the big deal about the church? It is a place which God loves and a place where He loves to live.

II. Big Deal #2 The Church sometimes has Struggles

If there is something that keeps surprising me (and by now it shouldn't) it is that despite the fact that we are the very Bride of Christ, His gifted spirit empowered people, there are times we struggle within the Church. We struggle within this Church. When I read that 85% (a US statistic) of all non-churched people in North America consistently attended Church at some point in their lives, it affirms what I know from experience that there times the Church isn't all Jesus wants it to be.

Grab your bibles and turn to Acts 14:27- 15:1. The date is 48 AD. Let me tell you what has been happening. At the church in Antioch they have seen people saved and people joining their church from around the world. People like Lycius of Cyrene (Simone of Cyrene's son) and the former Christian killer Saul/Paul find faith and join the church. Then God led the church to become the launching pad from which missions for centuries to come will get their start which will result in millions finding Christ. Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey and Gentiles are becoming Christians. Lives are changed, churches planted and a world is beginning to see the power of Jesus' church having an impact on their cultures. And right in the middle of this something sad happens. A group of Jewish Christians travel to these new churches and try to make sure that they do church and faith just like they believe and practice back home (and that means that all non-Jewish men need to be circumcised if they want to be a Christian and join the church). It isn't long until these churches start to fall apart and Christians start to be hurt and leave the church. As I read this I find myself saying "How can such a thing happen with these vibrant, society impacting churches"? I think the answer is two fold.

First, they were under attack by the devil. You see the devil understood that the churches in Antioch and in Galatia were dangerous churches which needed to be destroyed before they made too much of an impact in their cities. And although these folk couldn't visibly see Satan attack them, Ephesians 6:12 puts it this way: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." I Peter 5:8 says 'Be alert, your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour'.

We can be so naïve as Christians and miss the fact that a church on the go for God will have to struggle at times with problems. The devil will do anything he can to stop the work which God will be doing in us and through us. You see, if the church of Antioch went down, was split down the middle or became alienated from their Jewish brothers in Jerusalem, the church we know today may not have come into existence.

The second point is this. The ones whom the devil used to cause dissension in the church were those who were Christians from the church in Jerusalem. Now of course it only makes sense that because the church is full of people, at times it will have

trouble because let's be honest, all of us at times can do some 'less than brilliant' things. But when you look at this passage, you will see that these Christians could have been the ones who stopped all future foreign missions to happen. So the second place troubles can come from, sadly, can be from within the church. From Christians who hear their own voice over God's voice. That is why Ephesians 6:10,11 says 'Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. And having done all to stand.' That is why we have a Personal Covenant that we want people to agree with, as they become members of Brentview Baptist Church. We want to make sure that you and I will not be the ones through whom the devil will work to hurt or hamstring people and hamper the work of God. In the book 'Why We Love the Church' by Keven DeYoung and Ted Kluck, it reminds us under the heading *A look in the Mirror* that 'Finally because of the doctrine of original sin we are forced to take a more honest look at ourselves and our remaining indwelling sin. This goes for all of us'. I have seen churches split and people hurt by well meaning Christians who are convinced that they are right. And honestly, I know from my own heart that while I am saved by Jesus, there is still a lot of the 'old Dave', though I became a new person (as we said is pictured at baptism as I come out of the water) at times my heart and actions are still wrapped up in my sinful nature. That is why I need Elders, fellow staff members and others to at times hold up the mirror of our Church covenant and the scriptures and say "How are you doing for your sake and for the Brides sake?" That means I need to say that on a personal level, a church level, a denominational level and as World Christians, there needs to be much more open repentance for what we have done and what we have left undone. For those hurt or neglected by the Church, that means that we need to keep asking how can my actions care well for Jesus bride. For my passion (and I hope yours) is to see this church live like the triumphant Bride of Christ. Just as I want to do nothing to hurt my Bride but instead want to make sure I help her win and I will keep attempting to let my life fall under all the guidelines of scripture. While the church may at times have struggles, I want to make sure that I am not the cause of those struggles but am instead a person who helps Christ's Bride thrive.

III. Big Deal #3 The Potential of the Church is Phenomenal

If the church is a Cathedral where God is the architect, if it is the Bride that Jesus died to give life too and if it is the Body of Jesus which will outlast eternity then despite any struggle it may go through, the potential of the church is Phenomenal. Phenomenal for the world since scriptures are very clear that the church has a key role in reaching and caring for the world. Phenomenal for it's impact in your life for the church is the way by which God will challenge and care for our hearts and spirits. I think that it only makes sense that I need to:

1. Get Connected with the Church

It is a place where we can experience fellowship. Matthew 18:20 says 'For where 2 or 3 come together in my name, there I am with them'. Acts 2:44 says 'All the believers were together and had everything in common'. Ephesians 4:16 says 'From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each does it's part'. Have you ever wondered as you watched a flock of geese flying in formation why they fly together in a 'V' formation? According to

NASA, each goose creates a wing-tip vortex as they fly that creates extra lift for the goose beside them. Because they fly in this formation, they can fly 71% further than they could if they were flying alone. God made us to do life and faith together and just like geese, when we fall out of formation we immediately lose the updraft from flying together and the journey gets harder. The problem is that all of us struggle to balance the need for friendship with the need to survive the business of life. The more I walk this life as a Christian, the more I find I need to make room and space to cultivate friendships so that as Hebrews 10:25 says, we can 'encourage one another and be encouraged by one another'. We live in a world where 'Critical thinking' has been seen as the best way to do life but often I think it has led us to a place where, to be honest, our first reflex is to be critical with what we see, do and how we view ourselves. Hebrews has the idea that our call instead, needs to be more inventive with how we can encourage and support each other. Just think what our lives would be like if we choose to think the best of each other and look for ways to encourage one another. Going back to the geese, every time I see them fly over head I am amazed at how noisy they are. But while they may be saying 'How much farther' or 'Don't pass another lake, I need a potty stop', I'll bet their honking is 'Keep it up - you can make it. We are right behind you and we know you can make it'. That is also why they can fly 71% farther in the group rather than by themselves. I invite you to become a member, join a small group, join the gaggle of geese for your care and so you can be an encouragement to others.

2. Get serious with Church

It is a place where your faith will be challenged. Dan Leffelaar is going to touch further on this next week.

3. Get Involved with the Church

It is a place where we can Make a difference. There is this great passage in Ezekiel 37 where God takes a discouraged Pastor Ezekiel to this valley that is filled with dried up bones and he was told by God to preach to them. As he looked at them I am sure he said "Oh, another Sunday service where no one will listen to what I say". But as he spoke you know what happened? There was this popping sound as the knee bone connected to the leg bone that connected to the thigh bone and then ligaments and skin were added and within minutes standing before him was a mighty army ready for action. I think if God had taken you and I to that valley He would have said to us, do you get what I am trying to tell you? There was a time when everyone in this place was not connected to God until Jesus began to change their lives. God starts by blowing life into us and then if we will allow him, the bible says we can become the actually body of Christ amply supplied with all the gifts and talents to make a profound impact in our neighborhoods and our world. And then, if we let the Spirit of God blow through us, we will become a mighty army and nothing can stand in our way. There are of course a few if's in that statement. *If* we will stand together and *if* we will be open to Jesus reconstructing us as a church. *If* we will see that our power doesn't come from ourselves or our wisdom but instead comes from His spirit, then what happens can be phenomenal.

Let me close with this quote I came across last week. 'Human beings are so made that whenever anything fires their soul, impossibilities vanish. A fire in the heart lifts everything in your life.' I see a church that is taking back a city for Jesus. I see a church that is reaching out to the lost and dying world with real answers and real

solutions to the most difficult problems of our day. I see a church doing this together because they are the body of Christ lived out in our world today. That is my prayer for Brentview and I want to challenge you to join me in it.

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