

One day this past week I signed on to my Facebook page to check my newsfeed. This is always an adventure. You never fully know what you’re going to find there. For those of you who are not Facebook users and might not know what a newsfeed is, a newsfeed is exactly what it sounds like. It’s a place where you can go to be fed the news of the day. In this way, it’s not unlike *Fox* or *CNN* or *The New York Times* or even *The Valley Breeze*, except that on Facebook your news is coming directly from your friend Tony or your other friend Marissa, or your uncle Jimmy, or Uncle Jimmy’s friend Jerry, Jerry who isn’t your friend necessarily but who through your Uncle Jimmy has access to your Facebook page, and today the news Jerry wants to share with you isn’t so much news as it is an advertisement. Jerry is going to the Grand Opening of a new church in your area this Sunday and he wants you to join him. He’s posted the invitation from the church for you to see.

“Come to the opening service or come any time after. We will be partying all day. Plenty of pizza, wings, popcorn, bounce houses, and lots of games for adults, too. And we will have our Favorite Local Football Team on our brand-new LED screen in the auditorium.”

Now not for nothing—I love wings and bounce houses as much as anyone, and I don’t think God looks down on a church that is willing to try new things—I believe the joyfulness of God is found in the daring and unexpected—but right next to Jerry’s news about this up and coming church was a post about the wildfires that are ripping apart Northern California right now. Maybe it was the Holy Spirit that brought these two things together right before my very eyes, I don’t know, but the first thought that came to me was: Does the Church of Jesus Christ have what it takes to sustain our world anymore? I don’t mean, does the church have what it takes to survive this world? I know churches that approach the world this way. The world is bad, bad, bad and it’s our job to protect ourselves and others from it. No, no, I don’t believe that. I mean, does the church have what it takes to sustain the world? Do we have on our table the right things to feed a hurting world with hope, to fill people with love?

Today marks the beginning of stewardship season here at Four Corners. We always seem to find ourselves talking about stewardship at this time of year. Part of the reason is because 2018 is just around the corner and simply put, we need to put a budget together. Among those of us who call this church our home, we need to figure out how much each of us is going to be able to give to keep the ministry going. We can't just cross our fingers and hope the money comes in. We depend upon each other's financial pledges to help make sure we don't live beyond our means and to make sure we don't settle for less than what God wants of us. Of course, it's never just a question of where the money is going to come from and how we're going to spend it. It's also a question of how, in spending our money, we are going to spend our time and energy. Because we know that where the money goes, we go too.

Another reason we tend to talk about stewardship at this time of year is because it's harvest time. Just yesterday Moira and I took the kids to get pumpkins at Phantom Farms. I'd never seen so many good-looking pumpkins in my whole life. All spread out on wooden tables. There must have been hundreds of them in a sea of orange! For me they were a reminder that the world is full of good things which we had no hand in creating but which we are given to take care of. How did the Apostle Paul put it? We heard it just a moment ago: this one plants, that one harvests, but God sends the rain and causes everything to grow. Paul's word for it is stewardship—everyone working together, lifting up and celebrating each person's contribution as equal, making sure everyone has enough because that's the way God would have it.

It sounds simple enough, and yet as early on as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Paul tells us that the church was already getting it wrong. "What's this, I hear?" he says in writing to the church at Corinth. "That some are going around saying, 'I belong to Apollos,' and others, 'I belong to Paul?' What is Apollos? And who is Paul?" Apollos and Paul of course were two of the earliest pastors to the church in Corinth, and apparently, when the church was just starting out, when people were trying to decide whether to attend or not, they would first ask, "Well, who's preaching this week? Is it Paul or Apollos?" And depending upon who it was, they might go or they might stay home in their bathrobe. Lucky you, you have only one preacher here and don't have to make that decision each week! But let's not be fooled; Paul

and Apollos are simply the names of anyone we have ever come to church hoping to see, or hoping *not* to see.

There are all kinds of reasons for why we may or may not show up to church from week to week. Who might be there is but one reason. Perhaps you'll be glad to know, though, that this is not a sermon about the reasons why *I* think *you* should be coming to church, and maybe coming more often. A little confession, but as your preacher and pastor, I don't take it as my responsibility to convince you to come to church at all. For we remember what Jesus told his listeners at the height of his popularity, when he stood to lose the crowd, he told them, "I am the bread of life. Unless you eat and drink of me, unless I become one with you and you become one with me, unless you are willing to oppose power without love and to lose your life in order to find it, you can have no part of me," and all but a few of his listeners said, "This is a hard sermon. If you could soften things a bit, we might come around a bit more," and Jesus said, "It is hard, but with God all things are possible." And picking up his cross, he walked on while the crowd stayed put. So, you'll have to forgive me if I don't feel the need to convince you to come to church even more often than you already do. I assume that like me, we're all just trying to keep up with Jesus. Which brings us to a question: what's for dinner? In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul says that all he could give them to eat was milk. What he wanted to give them, what they needed, was solid food, but all they could handle was milk. The problem is, in a world like ours, in a world of serious fear, where disaster is actually beginning to feel natural, where the questions our children ask are becoming more difficult, where so much hope and good is needed, milk isn't going to cut it.

So, let me ask us again, what's for dinner? In this season of stewardship, when we once again consider all that we have been given and all that we have to give, what are we serving up? Are our ministries here at Four Corners, and our commitment to those ministries like solid food or are they like milk, just enough to quench our thirst but hardly enough to fill us?

I want to close out this sermon by sharing with you a couple observations about church in general that I've made recently. These have been helpful to me in my own journey. Maybe they'll be the same to you.

First, have you ever noticed the things we will do on a daily basis because we believe they are good for us. We go to the gym to exercise and get in shape. We take on diet plans and eat disgusting but healthy food for whole months at a time. We tell ourselves we're going to learn a new language and save up enough money to take a trip, and we practice our vocabulary words every day and find ways to save a few dollars here and there, and we do all of these things not because of who we are but because of who we want to become. Likewise, we ought not to come to church because of who we are but because of who we want to become, and the question is, are we spending the necessary time here, and doing the necessary things when we are here, to make us into the people we want to become? If we want to be better neighbors, as Jesus calls us to be, then we need to spend time with our neighbors. If we want to be more compassionate and kind, then we need to put ourselves in places and with people who are not, or who at least need compassion and kindness, so we can learn to give it to them. If we want to become healthy, we can't show up to the gym and eat broccoli only once in a while. Who are we wanting to become by coming to church? Think about that.

Here's another thought (and this is where I'm willing to admit that the church with the bouncy house might be on to something), we all know that if you put food on the table that no one likes, or if you never introduce new foods, or at least new recipes, the same old food will sit on the table and grow stale. Some have argued that this is why some churches have taken to calling their sanctuaries "auditoriums" and why they're switching out their hymnals for projectors. It's new and people will show up for that. But I would argue that what's missing from churches today is not innovation but mystery, and wonder, and a sense of just how amazing God and grace really is. Let me ask you, when was the last time you were in church and something made you go, wow?

It happened to me just last week. It was during our first service. It was time to share communion and everyone was getting up from their pews to come forward to receive bread and the cup and a grandmother, who has been here only a couple times before, came forward with her grandson. He couldn't have been more than one year old and he was carrying a bucket of cars with him. When the grandmother got to the front she broke off a piece of bread from the loaf and dipped it in the cup. I began to say to her, the Body of Christ broken for you, when she leaned down and gave the soggy piece of bread to her

grandson, who was still holding his bucket of trucks. "The Body of Jesus for you," she told him. In that moment, I wondered where she learned how to do that. And then I remembered Paul's words to the church, put good things on the table for one another to eat, water generously with kindness, and then leave the rest up to God. And I went, wow. Amen.