

EARLIER THIS SUMMER WHEN I SERVED AS CAMP CHAPLAIN, I TOLD OF GETTING THE NICKNAME OF WORD WOMAN BECAUSE I TAUGHT A WORD EACH DAY FOR THE GIRLS TO PRACTICE. SO WHEN WE BEGAN PLANNING OUR CELEBRATORY WORSHIP FOR THIS MORNING JAN, WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE JOINING OF THE ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN AND PRESB CHURCHES, TOLD BRENDA, THE CHAIR OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE, THAT SHE REALLY LIKED THAT NICKNAME. SHE SAID THAT WHEN THE UNION WAS BEING WORKED TOWARD, PASTOR FARMER SAID HE DIDN'T WANT THE CHURCH TO BE A BUILDING BUT A FAMILY OF FAITH. IN FACT, DURING THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR THIS BUILDING, HE SIMULTANEOUSLY RAN ONE FOR MISSION. THEY WERE BOTH SUCCESSFUL.

IN THE FORMING OF THIS CONGREGATION ONE IMPORTANT WORD WAS COMPROMISE. THE TWO DENOMINATIONS WORKED TOGETHER IN COOPERATION AND COMPROMISE, TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP. TODAY, 40 YEARS LATER WE WANT TO CELEBRATE WITH GRATITUDE AND JOY OUR ABUNDANT BLESSINGS OF SKILLS AND RESOURCES; OUR ABUNDANT MEMORIES OF PEOPLE AND MINISTRIES IN THE PAST AS WELL AS THE PRESENT AND WE WANT TO FOLLOW THE LEAD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO THE FUTURE.

WE CELEBRATE A MEMBER WHO HAS A TOTAL OF 80 YEARS OF CHURCHMEMBERSHIP. WE CELEBRATE THINGS LIKE THE EXERCISE CLASS THAT HAS BEEN GOING STRONG FOR 40 YEARS! THE COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY THAT IS HOUSED HERE, WITH A RECENT ADDITION OF TWO DONATION GARDENS AND SOME FRUIT TREES, THE PHENOMENAL OUTREACH AT CHRISTMAS TIME WHICH INSURES THAT NO ONE NEED NOT HAVE FOOD, TOYS, WINTERWEAR, SOCKS OR UNDIES, A STRONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY EVOLVING FROM THURSDAY CLUB, THURSDAY NIGHT LIVE, WOW KIDS, COMMUNITY YOUTH GROUP, SS, VBS, AND SENDING KIDS TO NOT ONE BUT TWO CAMPS!

WE CELEBRATE THAT WE HAVE A VITAL MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION THAT WORKS WELL TOGETHER TO HELP THOSE IN NEED WITH RENT OR UTILITIES OR MEDICINE
WE CELEBRATE THAT OUR LENDING TREE THRIFT STORE HAS HELPED MANY FAMILIES OBTAIN HOUSEHOLD NECESSITIES AT LOW COST; THAT WE FEED PEOPLE ON SATURDAYS DURING THE WINTER AT NO COST; THAT WE HELP WITH SCHOOL SUPPLIES, THAT THE SCHOOLS CALL US FIRST WHEN A NEED ARISES.

WE CELEBRATED A MONTH AGO THE RENOVATION, PREPARATION, AND OPERATION OF OUR FAIR FOOD STAND, REDEDICATING IT TO MISSION FUNDRAISING AND THE GLORY OF GOD. IT MADE MY HEART HAPPY TO SEE A GREAT GRANPA TEACHING GREAT GRANDSONS HOW TO PREPARE POTATOES FOR OUR FRENCH FRIES, AND THE ENTHUSIASM AND PRIDE WITH WHICH THEY LEARNED. WE ALL HAD TO LEARN TO MAKE QUICK ADAPTATIONS AS WE WORKED OUT THE BUGS OF NEW SPACE.

WE CELEBRATE THE GENEROSITY OF THOSE WHO STARTED THE ENDOWMENT FUND, MAKING IT POSSIBLE TO DO SECOND MILE GIVING TO MISSION AND MINISTRY NEAR AND FAR, TO ALLOW THE

BOARD SOME EXTRA DISCRETIONARY FUNDS FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS OR NEEDS, AND TO SUPPORT SCHOLARSHIPS FOR CAMPS, MISSION TRIPS, WORKSHOPS, SYNOD SCHOOL, AND MORE

WE CELEBRATE THAT WE HAVE A SEPARATE ENDOWMENT FOR MUSIC MINISTRY THAT SUPPORTS EXTRAS FOR OUR CHANCEL CHOIR, A CHIME CHOIR AND THIS YEAR WILL BEGIN A CHILDREN'S BELL CHOIR. AND WE HAVE 4 ACCOMPANISTS FOR OUR ORGAN AND/OR CLAVINOVA, A COUPLE OF DRUMMERS AND GUITAR PLAYERS, A COUPLE MORE BLOOMING KEYBOARDISTS AND A BUDDING 2 YR. OLD CHOIR DIRECTOR. OUR ENTHUSIASM FOR MUSIC IS BURSTING AT OUR SEAMS!

WE CELEBRATE THIS BUILDING, OUR BIGGEST MISSION TOOL. DUE TO OUR POLICY OF WAIVING USAGE FEE FOR NON-PROFITS, CUB SCOUTS, DAISY SCOUTS, 4-H, MVBC, TAE KUAN DO, S.T.E.M. CAMP AND OTHERS USE OUR FACILITY FOR THEIR MEETINGS. OUR MOST EXCITING SHARE OF SPACE IS FOR OUR 7TH DAY ADVENTIST BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO HAVE A PLACE TO WORSHIP, STUDY, AND FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER.

WHEN I ATTEND EVENTS AT THE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE CENTER, I HEAR BILL SPANGLER-DUNNING TALKING A LOT ABOUT BEING DISCIPLES TOGETHER. I WITNESS HOW THIS IS DONE WHEN WE PLEDGE TOWARD AND WORK SIDE BY SIDE TO RENOVATE THE CAMP AND DO IT QUICKLY AND DEBT FREE; WHEN PASTORS GATHER IN JANUARY FOR A TIME OF REFRESHMENT, STUDY, AND FELLOWSHIP AT MINISTER'S INSTITUTE; WHEN I'M INVITED TO WOMEN'S RETREATS; WHEN WE HAVE THE ANNUAL ALL CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING IN AUGUST, AND WHEN I MEET MONTHLY WITH COLEAGUES FOR LUNCH AT OUR CLUSTER MEETINGS.

WHEN I ATTEND EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE PRESBYTERY OF EAST IOWA I HEAR THE PHRASE COVENANT COMMUNITY. I SEE HOW WE WORK AND STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS, SUPPORT CAMP TOGETHER, HAVE A PRESBYTERY WIDE MISSIONARY EMPHASIS, GO TO PW EVENTS, ATTEND WORKSHOPS AND BOOK STUDIES, AND AGAIN, MEET FOR LUNCH AND STUDY WITH COLEAGUES.

IT IS EVIDENT THAT BOTH DENOMINATIONS ENCOURAGE AND TRY TO MODEL CONNECTEDNESS AMONG THE CHURCHES THAT MAKE UP THEIR FAITH COMMUNITY.

I PERSONALLY CELEBRATE THEIR COOPERATION IN MY CALL TO SERVE AS PASTOR OF THIS CHURCH. IT IS A PRIVILEGE AND HUMBLING EXPERIENCE TO BE A PART OF THIS CONGREGATION THAT IS WIDER THAN THOSE TWO DENOMINATIONS, FOR BY NOW WE COME FROM MANY BACKGROUNDS-BAPTIST, METHODIST, CATHOLIC, LUTHERAN, AND HINDU. OUR FAMILY TREE IS QUITE DIVERSE AND INDICATIVE THAT WE TRULY HAVE BEEN CALLED BY GOD AS A FAMILY OF FAITH, INCLUDING OUR BLACK SHEEP, OUR GRUMPY OLD MEN, OUR CRABBY WOMEN, AND OUR SASSY YOUTH ALL DOING OUR BEST TO LOVE EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE LOVE JESUS CHRIST.

AND SO SPEAKING OF CALL, WE FINALLY GET TO THE SCRIPTURE LESSON THIS MORNING. LUKE TELLS US THAT JESUS GETS IN A BOAT AND SITS DOWN TO TEACH.

OTHER THAN THE WORD OF GOD, WE DON'T HEAR WHAT HE TAUGHT WITH HIS WORDS, BUT LUKE ALSO SAYS, 'WHEN JESUS HAD FINISHED SPEAKING HE TOLD SIMON TO PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP.' HE FINISHED SPEAKING, BUT NOT TEACHING.

THIS LESSON MIGHT HAVE BEEN MOSTLY FOR SIMON, BUT THROUGH HIM WE CAN LEARN TOO.

SIMON IS A PROFESSIONAL FISHERMAN WHO HAD BEEN OUT ALL NIGHT.

HE WAS TIRED, DIRTY, AND MOST PROBABLY DISCOURAGED AFTER NOT HAVING CAUGHT ANYTHING.

HE HAD ALREADY BEGUN CLEANING UP FOR THE DAY AND WAS READY TO GO HOME AND EAT AND

SLEEP. HE KNEW THE BEST TIME TO FISH WAS AT NIGHT. HE KNEW THE BEST PLACE TO CATCH FISH.

I DON'T THINK HE WAS TOO ENTHUSED ABOUT GOING BACK OUT AND LOWERING THE NETS AGAIN.

I PICTURE HIM SHAKING HIS HEAD A LITTLE, MAYBE MUMBLING AND DOING A SMALL EYE ROLL, BUT HE

DECLARES THAT BECAUSE JESUS SAID SO, HE'LL DO IT.

HAVE YOU EVER REACTED THE SAME WAY?

A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO I HAD A PRAYER PARTNER AT ANOTHER CHURCH. WE PRAYED ALL THE TIME FOR REVIVAL IN THAT CHURCH. A FEW OF US DECIDED TO START A MIDWEEK CHILDREN'S PROGRAM.

A RELATIVELY NEW MEMBER HAD THE IDEA OF OFFERING A MEAL AS PART OF OUR PLAN. I STARTED TO

HEAR THE TIRED OLD TAPE IN MY HEAD 'THAT WON'T WORK' WITH THE DREADED UNDERTONE, 'WE'VE

NEVER DONE THAT BEFORE' AND THEN REALIZED SHE JUST MIGHT BE THE ANSWER TO THAT PRAYER,

SO WE TRIED IT AND IT WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL. SHAME ON ME. THIS WAS MY VERSION, TO A LESSER

EXTENT, OF SIMON'S REACTION TO THE OVERFLOWING CATCH OF FISH THAT ENSUED. GO AWAY JESUS,

I'M A SINFUL MAN, FULL OF DOUBT AND 'KNOW IT ALL' AT THE SAME TIME, NOT DESERVING ENOUGH

TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE.

BUT JESUS REASSURED HIM. HAVING JUST SHOWN SIMON A BIT OF WHAT HE WAS CAPABLE OF HE

SAID IN ESSENCE, 'DON'T BE AFRAID OF ME AND MY BIG IDEAS. FROM NOW ON I'LL USE YOU AND

YOUR TALENTS AND GIFTS TO CATCH PEOPLE.' SIMON AND HIS PARTNERS WERE SAID TO HAVE LEFT

EVERYTHING RIGHT THEN AND THERE IN ORDER TO FOLLOW JESUS.

THEY HAD LEARNED A LESSON. THEY COULD GO ABOUT THEIR SECULAR LIVES WITH MUCH BETTER

RESULTS AFTER THE SANCTIFICATION OF JESUS' PREACHING AND INSTRUCTIONS. THE CATCH WAS

OBEDIENCE.

IT IS THE SAME FOR US. I'VE HEARD PEOPLE SAY MANY TIMES, 'WHEN I COME TO CHURCH IT JUST SEEMS LIKE IT MAKES THE WHOLE WEEK BETTER.'

HERE'S MY THEORY OF WHY THAT WORKS LIKE IT DOES:

WE GET TO HEAR NOT ONLY JESUS' WORDS BUT SEE IN OUR MINDS HIS ACTIONS.

WE GET TO BE WITH OUR FAMILY WHO WELCOMES AND ACCEPTS AND LOVES US, NOT JUST WITH

WORDS BUT ACTIONS. WE SEE DISCIPLESHIP MODELED.

WE FIND HERE HELP FOR OUR 'BIG CATCHES' THAT WE CAN'T HANDLE ALONE, HUGS FOR HEALING; COMFORT AND PEACE.

SOME DAYS WE MIGHT BE JOYFUL, AND SOME DAYS WE MIGHT HAVE TO GRIT OUR TEETH AND JUST SHOW UP.

SOME DAYS WE MIGHT CARRY A BURDEN AND FIND A WAY TO LAY IT DOWN.

SOME DAYS WE MIGHT HAVE A GREAT GOD EXPERIENCE WE CAN'T WAIT TO SHARE WITH OTHERS.

SOME DAYS, MAYBE MOST DAYS, WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO STAY IN THE SHALLOW WATERS OF EVERYDAY LIFE, WHERE IT IS PLEASANT AND SAFE.

SOME DAYS WE MIGHT CONSIDER STAYING HOME BECAUSE WE ARE RIDDLED WITH GUILT.

THEN WE COME HERE AND REALIZE IT IS TIME FOR CLASS, TIME FOR LEARNING, TIME TO LIVE WHAT WE LEARN, TIME TO OBEY JESUS' WORDS A LITTLE DEEPER, TIME TO GIVE AS WELL AS ACCEPT GRACE AND FORGIVENESS, MERCY AND HEALING;

TIME NOT ONLY TO RECEIVE BUT TO GIVE SACRIFICIALLY;

TIME TO NOT ONLY WORSHIP IN CHURCH BUT TO GO BE CHURCH, WORKING FOR JUSTICE, FEEDING, CLOTHING, VISITING, HEALING.

THIS IS A PLACE OF COMFORT AND PEACE, BUT IT IS A PLACE WHERE WE WILL BE CONFRONTED BY THE LIVING SON OF GOD WHO THREATENS OUR STATUS QUO;

WHO COMMANDS US TO HAVE NO FEAR, BUT TO BECOME WILLING TO FOLLOW HIM;

WHO SAYS TO PUT AWAY OUR DOUBTS AND TRUST HIM WHEN HE CALLS US;

WHO DOES NOT ACCEPT OUR EXCUSES;

THE GOD WHO CHALLENGES OUR DAILY PATTERNS, HABITS, TRADITIONS, AND ROUTINES, AND DISTURBS THEM BY OFFERING NEW WAYS OF THINKING.

THIS CELEBRATION TODAY IS NOT ABOUT US AND THE THINGS WE HAVE DONE AND THIS GREAT BUILDING WE MAINTAIN.

THIS CELEBRATION IS ABOUT OUR FAITHFUL AND LOVING GOD WHO CALLED A COUPLE OF SMALL GROUPS TOGETHER AND WHO IS STILL CALLING US TODAY.

THIS CELEBRATION IS ABOUT A GOD WHO DISTURBS US WHEN WE BECOME TOO WELL PLEASED WITH OURSELVES; OR TOO PROUD WHEN OUR DREAMS HAVE COME TRUE BECAUSE WE HAVE DREAMED TOO SMALL; OR WHEN WE HAVE ARRIVED AT A MILESTONE BECAUSE WE SAILED TOO CLOSE TO SHORE WHERE IT IS NICE AND SAFE.

AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE, THERE'S A CATCH-WE CAN'T REST ON THE LAURELS OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US OR OUR OWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS THUS FAR. WE CAN'T SIT IN EASY APATHY, OR RETIRE INTO COMPLACENCY.

THIS CELEBRATION IS TO THE GLORY OF GOD, AND SO SHOULD OUR LIVES BE.

WE ARE THE CHURCH. WHAT AN AWESOME STATEMENT. WHAT AN AUDACIOUS CLAIM.

MAY OUR WORDS AND OUR ACTIONS REFLECT WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR LORD, AND MAY IT BE EVIDENT THAT WE ARE STILL LEARNERS, BEING CALLED INTO DEEPER WATERS, BEING DISCIPLES TOGETHER IN A COVENANT COMMUNITY.

THE WORLD NEEDS US PEOPLE OF FAITH.

MAY WE BE BOLD IN WORKING TOWARD JUSTICE FOR ALL.

MAY WE BE RIGHTEOUSLY ANGRY ENOUGH TO SPEAK UP FOR RIGHT AND SPEAK AGAINST EVIL WITH COURAGE.

AND MAY WE BE STRONG ENOUGH TO DO IT IN PEACE AND LOVE. AMEN.