

Pastor Dave Discusses the Jan 10, 2010 Service

Well, it's a delight as usual to be in God's house on Sunday. As we start this morning I'd just like to say how much last week meant to all of us as a family - your words of kindness, your gifts, videos, pictures, and all of those things. It allowed us to sit up here and to cry, and to rejoice, and weep with what God has done in us and among us over the last ten years. I want to say thank you for last week's celebration. I also want to just say thank you for the privilege to be able to serve you because I do count myself extraordinarily lucky to serve this congregation, and I brag about you often to colleagues who also work in the ministry full time.

Last week in addition to being unusual in terms of, I, basically, was shoved off the stage and put down up front to celebrate, which was kind of nice the way it worked out. It was moving - the pictures, the words, the videos, and sharing what God has done. Then as we got ready to move into a time of worship and song, though it would have been somewhat abbreviated because we took a great amount of time to celebrate what God has done. Any good thing that has happened here, though we may have been involved in it, it's really you guys and what God is doing in you and among you. So, last week's celebration was really about us as a body and not just Annette and I and the family that have been serving here.

One of the things I think was meant to happen was we were to have a reception in the lobby, and that didn't quite happen the way it was expected. We did get some cake. There was one piece left that Annette and I got to split. Tom usually saves us one piece so that was cool, I don't know if that was you Tom or whoever saved it thank you. Anyway, we experienced that at the end of the service, there were specific words of knowledge for specific people, some encouragement to challenge and pursue God more passionately, and we need both. In my ten years of serving you here at Church in the City last week was utterly unique in terms of how long the service went and things that were going on there, which is a good thing in many respects because it was a time where God met some specific people during the course of the service. There were people praying specific prayers that God answered during that time. There were people who moved deeper in their relationship with God than they ever have before, and so we are excited about that.

In one respect, as we think about it as a body that's what we pray for every week. We pray, at least I do, that when we come together we aren't just going through the motions of the preliminaries of the service. That we look at God's word, sing some songs, and go home and go on to the really important things like watching the Cardinals lose or something like that, but that God will speak. He will speak through his word, maybe through the words of the song or through people as they minister to one another in different capacities here at the church. That's what we pray.

Now on the other hand there were people that last week that were really frustrated at stuff. So, I have to acknowledge this in terms of my call. My primary call is to be a pastor and teacher. That's how I function so when there's frustration in the body the

teacher in me wants to look at what do we need to look at what we can learn from this so that these frustrations can become teachable moments in which we encounter God and move forward. The pastoral part of me asks God what are you doing here? How do we move forward, Lord, so that we take from this what you have for us and are not content to stay where we are?

Some of the thoughts I had this morning are just pertinent and I want to walk us through some of last week and then spend some time in God's word. One of the things God has brought us to is unity in the body of Christ. If there is something the enemy can tear a body apart from, it's from being on different pages, even though we are following the same Lord.

Some of the frustrations, and I'm just going to put them out there. We're a family so we are just going to put them out there. Some of the frustrations were that some people were ready to move right into some songs right after I finished speaking and that didn't happen. Some of you were frustrated because the service went so long and some of you felt trapped, even though David gave some opportunities and I alluded to things winding down. The way things were progressing, you couldn't get out of here and that was frustrating because you had appointments, places to go, and things to do. Some of you were uncomfortable either watching or being someone who had been called out during that service as God was, I believe, speaking. For some people that made them very uncomfortable. Maybe it was something they had never experienced. Other people were uncomfortable or frustrated because they felt that last week was supposed to have been primarily a celebration for us as a body and for Annette and I in particular for having worked here among you, and that somehow got buried in what happened after 11:30. Some were frustrated not just at the length of the service but if it had been someone other than David leading, because he's my son, I would have cut it off. That's a thought. There were some people who were frustrated by that and that the service would have ended earlier.

The good news is, as a pastor and a teacher, I'm encouraged because we have encouraged you as a congregation to handle your frustration and anger in a constructive way. We have tried to teach here that frustration and conflict needs to be dealt with God's way rather than going underground and becoming fodder for murmuring or complaint. Many of you shared things either with me or with the leadership team in private and shared your concerns and for that I thank you, that was mature. Matthew 18 says if you've got a problem or a challenge, go either to the person and or to the people who can make the changes that need to address it. So, for that I just want to thank you so much because I think God was honored in that. However, because of what happened last week God has given us an opportunity to learn about his church in general, the church universal, and Church in the City in particular. I believe if we choose, we have an opportunity and an obligation to learn from this situation. We can become both a stronger congregation and lay a stronger foundation for what God has for us in the future, or we can gripe, moan, and walk away. That's an option.

So really, as we go through this morning it's a chance for us to reflect together. If we don't learn, and I think God does call us to learn from these things, I believe the Evil One will gain an opportunity to bring disunity in this body. He will negate what God wants to do with us as individuals and for us as a body and for this church here. So, I am trying to grow, and I will always be trying to grow in my pastoring. There are times I do things okay, and there are some things I don't. Sometimes I miss it; sometimes I'm trying to figure things out. I know that as I try to grow in my pastoring it helps me to feel some empathy for the Bret Favres of the world who are going to be second guessed on why they threw or didn't throw, why they fumbled or handed off, or what ever because after all we Americans love being the armchair quarter backs right. It always looks good in replay and it just confirms what I knew all along, right?

Okay, so, I understand we have both the ability and a responsibility to address this. So, one of the things I will say is that because it was so unique last week, and in my 10 years it has never been that way, I wasn't sure how it was going to unfold. So, I tried to walk and let things move because I didn't know if the next moment was where things would kind of wind down. 20/20 hind sight as I reflected on this during the week looking at things I would do things different. We will do some things different and yet at the same time though we look at doing things different. One of the things this church is committed to is being open to whom God is and what he wants to do among his people, right? Are we the church if we dictate to God what he can and cannot do in any given service? We say we want to hear from him. I know we have done sermons where we were talking about Samuel, and we've chanted together as a congregation speak Lord your servant listens. The problem is that sometimes when God speaks, he speaks in ways, and at times, and in seasons that are uncomfortable and inconvenient and bizarre. Since he's God and I'm not, if you don't like some things in how he works, you are going to have to talk to him about it. Which I would kind of like you to do anyway. I think it's kind of a good thing. This is an opportunity for us to look at this and to grow.

When we look at scripture, and I'm going to come to the things at the end of the message that we are going to be doing. When we look at Jesus, we have been in the gospel of John, and one of the things that is so crucial and I've taught in aspects of this before, is unity in the body of Christ. When we look at Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, we are not there yet in the series but we will get there. It's so rich that getting a chance to touch on this is a good thing now. When we look at chapter 17 verse 11 Jesus' primary concern at that point is for his current followers, particularly the twelve (it may include others but particularly the first believers) is that they remain united, that they work together, and they move forward because the world is going to try and tear them apart. Jesus desires that his disciples enjoy intimacy and openness that are analogous to the intimacy and oneness that he as the Son of God has with the Father and the Holy Spirit at this point in history - an unbroken chain of community, love, grace, and beauty.

The reason for Jesus' concern is that his service of providing teaching, leadership, and guidance is about over. He is leaving this earth and in fact, he uses the present tense saying I am now no more in the world, the job's done, I just have to die to bring about your salvation, so I'm leaving. Later on in the chapter, Jesus is aware that not only is he departing the world but one day these who he has mentored over the last three years, these who he has taught and tried to pour out his life into, model, and eventually pray on to receive the Holy Spirit, that they're going to die too. Death and taxes, it's going to happen. When they leave there will be those who have encountered Christ, met him, been transformed, and begun following as well are going to be disciples. They are going to be the church that continues on and they will represent God's kingdom in the world.

So, Jesus turns now in the later part of John to pray for them as well as those who he has not yet met. He knows they're coming, he knows his people will share the good news and they will talk about how their lives having been transformed by this fisherman, these fishermen who have followed Jesus and have encountered the Son of God incarnate. So, Jesus prays for these followers, men and women who have followed the apostles and we are the descendants, if you are a follower of Christ today, of those people. Jesus prays that they will have unity like that of his disciples, and unity in scripture has got to be based on love, not necessarily convenience. His unity must be visually based on love so that when the world sees it they will immediately know that, ah, I see love, they must be followers of Jesus. By this, all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another.

We see another instance of this in 1 John chapter 3 verse 11. Love and unity are not just based on gutting it out. It's not a moral effort empowered by human energy. It is an outgrowth of each one of us personally plugging in and drawing close to God. That's where the love comes that allows people from every nation, language, tongue, kindred, philosophical background, and socioeconomic level for God to somehow knit and bring them together and form an organism, a body. It has to be a supernatural thing. That's why in our vision statement here at the church we want to create, well, we can't create, God's got to do that, to create a vibrant community that invites people to follow Christ passionately. So here, the union that we are meant to enjoy with Christ we are to enjoy with others as well. This begins to happen in John chapter 3 when we are born again. When that which is spiritually dead is raised to life as we receive Christ as forgiver of our sins and the leader of our lives. That's where this rebirth takes place.

So, Jesus in John 17 pictures a deep spiritual intimacy that changes our lives as human beings. It's a unity encompassing the Father with the Son and the Spirit and the disciples with them, and then the disciples uniting one with each other. One of the passages I want us to keep in mind is in John, we are coming to that so we want to reflect on that. It's also appropriate to where we are at as a church based on the events of not only last week but as God has been working and stretching and growing amongst us.

There are some things we need to think about and wrestle with as a body. One of the things is about this church, when it was planted 21 years ago, is that part of its planting was that people who felt loved by God could come and that there was not, as they saw it, a charismatic Pentecostal church on the east side of Milwaukee. They wanted a place where one reads in scripture that the God that was acting in Jesus' day to heal the lame and open the eyes of the blind and to walk still did that. Where those pages of scripture were not ripped out or consigned to the ash heap of history. That in fact there were no commands in scripture that said we don't need that anymore. It is out of that context that this church was planted.

When I look back at some of the literature as the church was planted one of the things that was the prayer of the church is that this would be a biblical functioning church based on the new testament model and that model is that when God's people are gathered together that the word was taught and songs were sung. We talked about worship, and we talked this summer about different types of worship that occurred and God spoke. He spoke through his word; he also spoke through prophetic words, and through messages in tongues and interpretations. That was part of the New Testament church and all we need to do is look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 through 14 and it's very clear.

1 Corinthians 12:14; there are different kinds of gifts and one spirit distributes them, different kinds of service the same Lord, different kinds of working but in all of them the same God is at work. Now each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good. He puts in the body of Christ people who can serve, people who can sing, people who can give, people who should, well we all should give and we should all serve and we should all evangelize. Some people are especially gifted in those things and as we look at that particular passage, we are given to each other to build up the body of Christ. We are to be the best possible reflection of the light and life and grace of God in a very dark world. We are meant to be a salt factory in which spiritual thirst is created, and in which decay in our culture can be arrested as we yield to the person and work of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Historically this church, both because of its denominational affiliation and because of its planting, has recognized that God wants to operate among us. Now sometimes there are different gift mixes. Over the ten years that I have been here, they have been present and sometimes there are things that function more than others. Early on, we probably had more messages in tongues and interpretations and in more recent years, we have had more prophetic words during the course of the service in which it was kind of a straightforward speaking. Whatever it is and we can see different things that can operate words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and all kinds of things in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. We have encouraged people to pursue God passionately. I went through the membership class this morning, one of the things we want you to do is identify your gifts and then begin to use it, and the church will support it. If it is a gift that is inspired by the Holy Spirit, for us not to use

it or to quench it is to say, "I know what you want to do but we say no, we know better. That's kind of where it's at and we're not going there. "

So, to assist and guide there are principles that Scripture does give. There is absolute clarity that it's not to be a mad house on Sunday morning, there is to be order, things are to be done with dignity, and there are limitations on the number, for example, of messages of tongues and interpretations that can be given in a given service. As a result, there is the freedom for God to work spontaneously among his people and that what God wants to do in the ongoing building up, disciplining, and worship of his body also occurs. So, that's a tension.

We talked a couple of years ago about the person and work of the Holy Spirit and that we are practical believers in the bi-unity of God rather than the trinity because the trinity is the, when we look specifically at the Holy Spirit. We treat him sometimes as the ugly cousin who we hope hides in the closet and that we don't want out because he messes things up. The church becomes messy when the Holy Spirit is released and if you are not sure about that look at Acts chapter 2 and forward - all kinds of things happened.

Yet, there is structure and yet there is a way for things to be done in a God-honoring way where God has freedom. So, we are looking at balance here. I'm going to talk a little bit more about unity but before I get there let me share where I feel that we want to go and guidelines that I feel we'll try to follow as a congregation, whereby we are absolutely committed to God doing what he wants to do in a given service and yet ongoing work of teaching and discipleship and our time of corporate worship together can also occur. We have to remember that even if we are ticked off and frustrated it's a "both and" rather than an "either or." Scripture doesn't give us the option of an "either or;" it calls for both. So, if we are going to be biblically functioning as a community, if we are going to be true Christ followers, then we have to embrace all that he calls us to, not just part.

Here are a couple of things that were shared. We spent many hours this week talking about this with the Elders and Deacons. Just myself, I've been in conversation with some of you, and some of you have been in conversation with our leadership. So, here is some of my learning of what, I feel, God is calling us to and it may change as we learn as we grow. Going forward I will try to be a little more aware in terms of talking with the worship leaders in case they have a sense that God might be up to something more than what is typical on a normal Sunday. That is a good step but God can call an audible. So, that is a step. We want to talk about that but we have to recognize that God doesn't always say well I think I'm going to give six words of knowledge here and there's going to be some healing and there is some repentance that needs to be done today. We don't always get that. That's number one.

Number two, if there seems to be some type of prompting, or things seem to be opening up, the Spirit is moving in some unique ways and it's somewhere probably, we have talked about as a leadership team, between 11:30 when we try to wrap

things up and 11:40 and God wants to do more, what we will try to do, and I will take the lead on this one, is to say: "You know it feels that God is up to something more this morning. So, I'm going to ask for either a song or an instrumental piece. If you need to go because you have an appointment, because you have kids, because of whatever, please slip out quietly. As you step outside the sanctuary please don't talk - let's keep the atmosphere of worship."

Close the doors, and our first impression greeter can make sure the doors are closed so we keep an atmosphere of worship. If you need to slip out then slip out, there is no condemnation. There are responsibilities. You see those people up here - the diaper devotional crew. There are diapers to change. There is no condemnation and there will be much indignation if they don't get up and relieve the person who is watching their kids. So, we will try to the length of the song and that usually takes 3 to 5 minutes to just do that. I will try to say "if you need to go please go," but I will also challenge you that if you don't have to go that maybe you should stay and see if God has something specific for you or if God might want to use you to go pray for someone else.

We need to grow in this. We have the freedom as a body to meet right now. There will be a day, I believe, when we will lose this freedom and we will not have the opportunity to do this. So we have a laboratory right now to say "God, as we gather together, teach us." Let us learn to work together now. Some of what we learn God does, and was doing last week at the end of the service, happens on Sunday night. The truth is some people have jobs and football, football, and football. Sometimes there is baseball or football but there are other things that we have to attend to and you can't be here. We recognize that.

So, what I am feeling from the Holy Spirit is that, alright if they cannot come then after giving people the opportunity to slip out because they must, not because they are unspiritual, not because of any of that, that we provide an opportunity as God's leading you, to stay, to seek after God, to pursue him, to be open, and to learn. I want to encourage those that want to, can, and by the way, this may not happen every Sunday. It might only happen every two months or three months. I don't know, but when it does, we want to say "folks, God seems to be doing something today. If you can stay please do. Let's pursue him together lets be on the same page and pray blessing on those who need to go, they need to go. Yet, let's pursue Him and open ourselves to all that God has."

Another challenge is, not only am I growing as a pastor, those that we are calling, and I just talked about every person in the body of Christ needs to learn to use their gift, that we are giving them opportunities. There are learnings that need to happen for those that function in the prophetic, or with speaking in tongues, or words of knowledge, or words of wisdom. None of you who are good at what you do professionally got there over night. Some of you went to school for it, some of you trained, and some of you had to pass tests. So, the fact that God uses us imperfect human beings means that there is a learning curve.

One of the things I think we can take for future context is that rather than calling specific people out by name that there will be more of "I think God wants to touch somebody." Maybe it's in that part of the sanctuary; maybe there is a back issue and God wants to touch you. God has done that in services here, so that might be something he does in the future again. Maybe it's on that side in the back corner, I don't know. If that's you, either move to the side so someone can pray for you or if you're not sure it's you, come up and talk with whoever gave the word. So, if it's Annette, or it's David, or Char, or it's Tina, or whoever, you can go up and ask. Sometimes we can use words that might not be clear, so if there is a chance to unpack what God seems to be sharing, we will have greater clarity in terms of whether a given word was for a given person.

These are some initial steps that I think will do two things. Number one, it will allow us to, yet if God gives a brief word of knowledge to something in the middle of worship time, we'll do that. But anything extended like this, we want to say "yes God," and yet we're going to also be aware that we are people and sometimes we have responsibilities. It's a "both and." Once the service is somewhat officially closed and we're opening for God, it's up to God how long it goes after that. So, if some people want to stay here until prayer at 5 or 6 or whenever that is, you're free to. If you can stay an extra 15 minutes, praise God. Once again, we want to go forward in terms of growth.

So, Philippians chapter 2 verse 1 and 2 if therefore there is any encouragement through Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love united in Spirit, intent on one purpose.

We are committed here to come in to know God. Churches can become places where we learn a lot about God and we can learn theology. I love theology. It is a revelation of who God is. We all need to learn far more than we do. So, there is a place for that, but on Judgment Day, when we stand before God, the question on the table is "do you know him, and does he know you?" So, go to the Sermon on the Mount. People coming before Jesus saying "Lord, Lord look at all these things we've done in your name," and he says "depart." In other words, eternal separation. And what is the criteria: "I never knew you." "But Jesus, I can quote the Greek New Testament in Greek," (which is a good thing). That's not what God is looking for. We've focused for years that God is calling out a people for relationship He's calling a people out to be a community and there is an experiential dimension of faith that God wants to move us to. We are uncomfortable with this particularly in the west because we like things that we can measure, quantify, work with, and contain.

That's where we are comfortable. But in this human heart, there is a hunger for the supernatural. Some of you think I'm blowing smoke, and that's okay, if I'm smoking what I'm selling. Here's the deal. Go to your TV and start looking at what kind of programming is out there. I actually heard it prophesied 30 or 40 years ago that

there would be a day they would show all kinds of spiritual demonic things on TV that it would be encouraged and create unhealthy interest in the supernatural. At the time, I thought somebody else was smoking wacky grass. The other day I'm flipping through and there was everything from witchcraft and spells, to demon possession, to vampires, to raising dead people, and zombies - all kinds of stuff. You know what? People are watching it and soaking it up sponges. Why is that? They want the supernatural. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 down about verse 10 or 11: "God has placed eternity in the human heart."

So we could spend our lives pursuing job and career and relationship and all those things are good and they're necessary. But those are temporary - they will pass away, but God and his word will never pass away. So if we stuff ourselves with that which is temporary, we will be dissatisfied. But if we pursue and know God and experience him, then not only are we changed, but people begin to see literally the incarnation of God in us. That shouldn't shock most of us because the moment of salvation is when the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us. It's the hardest part of this transformation that's meant to occur.

So, if there is a hunger out there, the question is, when people encounter us as believers, [so, if you are not a believer this is not for you this morning, if you are a believer this is for you] is there any supernatural dimension in what God is doing in your life. In other words, can people tell if you are just a nice person that was brought up by some decent parents or in fact, you have had an encounter with the living God who is transforming you from the inside out, in whom the Spirit of God dwells? If there is not, then I believe God's invitation to us is to come deeper. Isaiah 55: "Come and eat and drink that which I can provide; don't pursue that other stuff that's not going to satisfy." He is inviting us to be people in whom the power and presence of God works. Yes, it's going to look different for everybody, I understand that. But is it working now?

We will get into some things in the next couple of weeks in terms of things that God wants to do. There are some specifics about transformation that need to happen but they're not going to happen if we just hear another sermon, or if we just take in another teaching. The issues, by and large, with the church shrinking in the United States is not that we lack teaching. It is that people have failed to see in us Jesus Christ the hope of Glory in whom His life, power, and Spirit move. The fact that there is a market for the demonic out there, and the evil supernatural is being provided, is because the churches have put a kibosh often times, not always. There is some goofy stuff out there but scripture gives us guidelines to stay in the parameters and so those things that I talked about are meant to be banks to the river of the Spirit of God that God wants to flow here.

There needs to be a fireplace in which the fire of God can burn. I just want to encourage you because we have to move forward. The alternative is we will not experience the life and transformation that God has for us - one - and two, that we

therefore, will not make the difference in this world that God created us for. Both of those are unacceptable. God has called us to bigger and greater things.

So, I have a whole lot more. "Make every effort maintaining the unity of the Spirit." 1 Peter 3:8. "Finally, all of you have unity of Spirit, be like minded, sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate, humble." So that the deal is, guys, we are at different places and I understand that. Let's extend grace. Be careful when things don't work in the way you are most comfortable with. Is it possible that God is trying to stretch you out of your comfort zone? If it is, are you going to let him? We are called to transformation.

So, here is what I would like to do if the musicians will come. I have some more stuff, but this is the heart of what God has put on my heart, so that we are all on the same page. We are not going to give the Evil One a place to come in and submarine this. We are going forward. The kingdom always goes forward. The question is, will we be anchors that drag it back, or will we be instruments in which this unity will be sown? That doesn't mean we don't ask questions, that doesn't mean we don't raise concerns. I am so proud of you that you guys called and set up talks. I am so appreciative of that. Keep it up, but if God is God and he wants to move, we need to give him room.