



Catalog No. 7303

Andy Drake

August 28, 2011

CELEBRATING GOD'S HANDIWORK

MINISTRY CONNECTIONS SUNDAY

Our PBCC Ministry Connections Sunday is one of my favorite days of the year for us as a church. It is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the big picture of who we are as a church and what God is doing among us.

If you ask several different people, "What do you believe is the purpose of our Christian life and the purpose of any Christian church?", you will likely get a different response from each of them. Whatever your answer might be to that question, I believe we can all agree that at the heart of our calling is to love God and love others.

When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt. 22:36-40)

Our greatest calling is to love God and one another. We are called to love "not as the world loves", but to love like God himself. How do we love like him? This kind of extraordinary love was seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and because of the Spirit within us this super-natural love is expressed by us as well, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). This is how we live and love like Christ...we remain in him and draw our life from him. Our love and fruitfulness come from God. We become like him because his presence is within us.

God is love, so we love. God is light, so we are children of light. Our God has a mission, and we join him in that mission. We are his ambassadors to people near and far. We are a functioning, living organism designed to penetrate society at all levels with God's truth and love. The church is not a building, or organization, or religious club.

Some people consider the proper model for a church like that of a tour-bus...the pastor is the bus driver doing all the work while the congregation sits in their seats with their hands folded in their lap watching the world go by. I'm so glad our church is not like that. We have a deep conviction and strong history in valuing the ministry of the saints.

Each of us has a very important part to play. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus,

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-13,16)

The Apostle Paul compares the church to the human body. Every organ is distinct and has a function different than anything else in the body. Each part must exercise its own function for the body to thrive. The Spirit of God is alive and active within each of us as his children. Every Christian is uniquely blessed with spiritual gifts to help the church grow and mature unto the "fullness of Christ". No-one is left out. Our spiritual gifts are our privileged function within the body of Christ. Each of us is important to the health and maturity of the whole body.

The scripture makes it clear that our calling as the church, as the body of Christ, is not merely to run worship services on Sunday mornings, but to live out the life of Christ within us every day wherever we are. The ministry of the body of Christ takes place every day of the week, not only in our church, but also in our home, in our neighborhood, and in our workplace.

As I reflect on that truth as it pertains to our church, three different responses well-up within me. I'd like to share those with you and invite you to respond in similar fashion.

REJOICE

When I look at our brochure, and walk around seeing all the ministry tables, I can't help but rejoice because I see God at work in so many ways and in so many people. I see how the Lord, through his people, is touching the lives of the very young to the very old. There are ministries to infants, toddlers, grade-schoolers, junior highers, high schoolers, college, 20's, empty-nesters, Mandarin-speakers, Greek and Hebrew readers, etc.

We have special ministries to girls, boys, women, men, singles, and married. We have opportunities to gather in groups both small and large...opportunities to minister locally in our own community as well as internationally in places like Mexico, Romania, India, Russia, Africa.

Our church is a beautiful tapestry of God's handiwork. There will always be more people we can reach, and more that can be done, but my first reaction to our ministry connections fair is one of rejoicing for it is obvious our God is alive and actively at work in and through this church body drawing to himself those near and far ... glorifying his name for all eternity.

So, as you walk around the church campus and see the various ministries and people volunteering in those ministries the first thing I'd like to encourage you to do is simply to soak it all in. To see what an amazing and loving God we worship and rejoice and give thanks for his good work among and through us.

PRAY

The second thing I'm led to do is pray. Pray for God's ongoing work among us, in us and through us. I'd like to invite you to pray as well. Let's pray for those who are reached by our different ministries...

pray for those who are actively involved...pray for yourself as you reflect on ways the Lord might be prompting you to serve.

Allow your prayer to turn into encouragement. With your words or handshakes or hugs find ways to let them know today how much you appreciate what they are doing. Ask them, "How can I pray for you?". Let them know they are not alone, that you as a brother or sister in Christ are with them on this path.

CONNECT

We are not created to live isolated from one another, but connected together in community as the family of God. With God as our Father, we are brothers and sisters in the same family. We are connected at the deepest level.

As Eugene Peterson says, "So the question is not "Am I going to be a part of a community of faith?" but "How am I going to live in this community of faith?" We must find out what God has in mind by placing us in this community called a church, learn how to function in it harmoniously and joyously, and develop the maturity that is able to share and exchange God's grace".¹ It's not always easy to feel like a family when your only connection with your brothers and sisters in Christ is in our large Sunday morning gatherings. I want you to know that there is a place for you! We need you, we want you, and we want to bless you by helping you connect.

If you are not currently involved in a small group I can't urge you strongly enough to make your first stop our home fellowship table and let us know you want to join a group. We will find a group that is the right fit for you. We provide training and support for home fellowship leaders, so if you are willing to host or lead a small group let us know that too.

Not only our Home Fellowship groups, but each of our PBCC ministries offers you a more intimate setting to grow and mature in your walk with the Lord and connect with others from our church body.

By participating in our Home Fellowship groups or ministry groups you will discover what a blessing it is enter into a loving and authentic community where you can express your gifts in service and find support, encouragement, and healing as you share life's journey together.

Following Jesus is such a great adventure! So much joy for me to see over the years the various ways the Lord has led so many of you to express your love for him and your love for others. So many ministries of our church did not start as an idea of a pastor or elder, but a person like you with the passion and vision and faith to love others in a certain way.

So my question to you is, "Where do you sense the Lord is calling you to express your love for him and your love for others? Where do you feel led to initiate spiritual friendships, to be salt and light, and to be a catalyst for change?" Pursue your God-given passion. Let the Lord, through your passion, motivate and move you. If God is in it, there is no ministry too big or too small.

Some of our established PBCC ministries are already moving in the area of your passion. I encourage you to connect with the ministry leader and find out about the various ways in which you can help. We may not have an established ministry in the area of your passion. If that is true, then make an appointment with me because I would like to listen to you, encourage you, equip you, pray with you, and help guide you in any way I can.

As you step out in faith, communicate your passion with others and who knows...maybe others with the similar passion directed by the Spirit of the Lord will gather around you and join you in moving forward and reaching out. Whatever we do, we do it all for God's glory. Rejoice, Pray, Connect.

It is my hope and prayer that we remember the words of the Apostle Peter,

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11)

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience In the Same Direction: discipleship in an instant society* (InterVarsity Press; Downers Grove, Illinois; 2000), page 175