

Calvary United Methodist Church
June 28, 2009

OLD DOG
Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks



Children's Message

John 13:34

Birth Mark

God's blessing is upon us for he has given to people of every age and station of life the good news. We welcome the children to the front of this worship space to share what God has entrusted to us.

Good morning everybody! How's everybody doing? I'm not even going to wait for the response; we're just going to keep on going.

How many of you know what this is? (Pastor has an old-fashioned telephone from the early 1900's.) Do you have any idea what this is? Let me show you how it works. You pick up this end and you put it to your ear and then you talk in this part right here and it goes like this. The phone bell rings. What is this? (Children don't know.) To congregation: How many of you know what this is? It's a telephone.

In fact this particular phone has most of the guts still in it. It actually is a working phone because about forty years ago somebody who really knew a lot about electronics took all of the battery pieces out and put new pieces in so that you could actually receive calls on it. Even though it is a working phone you can't make calls with it. If you look really closely on the front of it on this nameplate right here it says that it was manufactured in 1924. Actually this was the first phone that my grandmother's family (and my grandmother is ninety-three) ever owned. It is the one thing that I asked her if I could have when she finally got rid of some stuff, so she let me have it. As a matter of fact, this was so new to her when she was eight years of age (which is when her family got this phone) that she would sit underneath it and wait for somebody to call. Now there weren't that many people who could call so she often waited a whole day and nobody would call.





Every time they changed phones she always thought it was a cool thing because every time you change phones it's usually because something new has come along. This was new to her. Take a look at these pictures and see if you can figure out what has changed from the slide you are currently looking at to the next slide. You can see on that particular phone and several of those candlestick style phones that there is now a dial on them, but you still had a piece to hold in your hand and a piece to talk in.



In the next picture you can see they put all that together. They put the dial and the speaking piece and the hearing piece in one piece and that's what a phone from about the 1940's and 1950's looked.



Then we got fancy. We made everything out of plastic and we have this old rotary phone.



Then we went from the rotary phone to this which has the push buttons as digital stuff became more and more in vogue.



Then we went to these portable phones with a base that you charged it in and a big antenna and you could walk around the house. How many of you had these things? Isn't it kind of cool to see how this technology evolves over time?



Then we got to this thing. This is one of the very first cell phones ever made. It weighted about five pounds, it was about that tall and had an antenna that went really, really tall.



This is what you now know as a cell phone. This is kind of a basic cell phone that when they got smaller and smaller they got a little more basic.



Now, this is what a lot of people walk around with. It's called a Blackberry and you can do anything on here from getting a mortgage application done to actually making a phone call.



The point I wanted to make by showing you all these changes is that when things change and stuff is brand new, a lot of times it's cool and it's fun and that's why we go out and buy new stuff. Because the new stuff does stuff that the old stuff didn't do or it does it in ways which are faster or better or just more fun. So change can sometimes be cool and fun. Right?



How about this? What's that look like to you? This is called an Equalizer Walker. In the hospital they call these moon boots. This is the new piece of clothing you get when you do something like break your ankle which is what Grandma did on Wednesday. Grandma decided to do something new and wrestle one of her kitchen chairs. The chair won. So she is doing all kind of new things over the last couple days.



She went to a place where she had never spent the night before—Community General Osteopathic Hospital.



She got to sleep in a bed she had never slept in before. That's actually a picture of the bed next to her in the room which happened to be empty when I was there yesterday.



She got to eat real hospital food.



She then got to go someplace called physical therapy where she got to learn how to stand up and do things in ways that she never had to do before.



Then she got to take a ride in a wheelchair which she hadn't done before.



And her new best friend looks like this. That's called a walker which she's never had to use before.



As you can imagine she is having a lot of fun—right? She's not having a lot of fun because, frankly, a lot of new stuff is scary and it's expensive and it makes us sad and it can be painful and a lot of time it's just no fun. It's no fun to get hurt. It's no fun to not be able to do stuff. However, one of the things we have to remember as Christians is that everything is new every day. Sometimes the new stuff we enjoy and we celebrate and sometimes the new stuff we don't like and we complain to God.

God is all about new stuff, however. I want you to understand that. God is always making everything new. That's why there are new days. Today is a new day. It is the beginning of a new week and today and this week are not going to be like anything else that you have ever known before. God is all about new stuff and God at one point, through his Son, Christ, gives everybody something new to think about. Here's what Jesus said:



I give you a new commandment; you love each other exactly like I love you. This is how everyone will know that you follow me.

This new commandment means that everything is new. God promises to always be with us but more importantly, God promises that if we promise to take care of each other in new situations, where they are happy or whether they are really tough, we will be given the strength and the blessings to be something that comforts each other. We will be there for each other in tough times and really fun times. We will always be there which means we will never be alone. We will never be by ourselves when new things happen and things kind of fall apart.



That's a real blessing because frankly nobody wants to meet Mr. Boot. But you never know, do you? Everything is new every day and so are God's blessings and our willingness to be the vessels of God's Spirit.

Thanks for sharing in our time this morning.

Message

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

(A video, *Rethink Church*, is played.)

What if we rethink church? What if church was less about Sunday and more about the other days of the week? What if church wasn't just a place we go but something we do, a menu of adventure, an active verb instead of a noun? What if church wasn't just a building but thousands of doors each of them opening up to a different concept or experience of church so that whoever knocks might find a journey to call their own? What if church was the way church was in the beginning, outbound, unbound, active, human beings from completely different worlds united by common purpose, experience and belief, creating real solutions for their lives? What if church looked at itself with seekers eyes recognizing that even the smallest step from one of our doors is an act of courage, a moment of vulnerability but solving secular need convenient to spiritual interaction? That so-

cial relationships can offer opportunities for discussions of faith and provide inspiration for discovery. And that for a secular world actions often do speak louder than words. What if the church was more of an out of church experience, an opportunity to prove what we say what we believe with our lives? Then perhaps Sunday could be a day of rest and reflection on all that we have accomplished Monday through Saturday. What if we rethink church not in terms of what it is but what it could be and what if we could convince the world to do the same?

Together we can open hearts, open minds and open doors.

The people of the United Methodist Church

Pastor Parks

What if we rethink church?

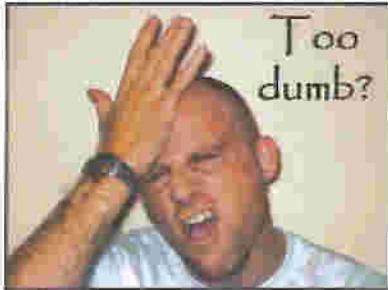
Several years ago the United Methodist Church Communications Division came up with a strategy for marketing, publicity, called "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors."

A couple of months ago I received this DVD in the mail which launches the second phase of that campaign. I have to tell you when I played this my immediate reaction was to put my head down on my desk. I've been doing this for twenty-eight years as of today. I've been doing this here for ten years as of today. The idea that I need to rethink church in that moment struck me like a hammer as though everything I've done up to this point really wasn't particularly relevant or valid. It just sort of stuck me in a strange way. Believe it or not, I got a piece of paper and a pencil and in thirty seconds I wrote down nine reasons why I don't want to rethink church. I would guarantee you as you as sitting there and you watched that video at least one of these things passed through your head when you think about what that would mean in terms of what we do at Calvary.

In no particular order, these are the nine reasons that I wrote down in thirty seconds why I don't want to grow in my discipleship, why I don't want to change what we do, why I don't want this con-



gregation to do anything different now than it had done ten years ago or should do ten years from now. Why I don't want to start over again and rethink church. See if any of these resonate with you.



I'm too dumb to rethink church. I'm not that smart to reinvent the wheel. I know what they are calling for. It's a new awareness of how it is that we might move outside these walls, but frankly I'm exhausted when it comes to coming up with new ideas and new ways to put the Gospel in front of you. I'm not that smart to rethink the entire Gospel message which really is so simple and so clear and so common, at least in our minds. I'm not that smart to put all this effort into reinventing the wheel. I'm kind of dumb when it comes to creativity and I know it. That was my first reason.



The second reason I came up with: I'm tired. I'm fifty-two years old, that's ancient. When I put my head on the pillow I'm asleep in thirty seconds every night without fail. It's not because I'm bored, it's because I'm beat. I'm beat at the end of the day. Ministry is hard work. I'm not talking about what Jeff and I do professionally, I'm talking about being the arms, the hands, the feet, the voice, the Spirit of the Living God. That's hard. That's exhausting. That's draining. Since we've all committed to that we all understand that. This is tiring work, folks. It will suck you dry and there is always somebody who needs something. You are never off, unless you are off. Do you know what I mean?



Thirdly: I'm too busy. Man, this is a big church. There is a lot going on. There are a lot of things to do. There are a lot of things to catch up with and that's just here. That's not in the lives of some other people that I have some responsibilities to. You've got this problem too. I know that. I'm not saying I'm any busier than you are. We are all busy people but it makes doing a lot of things at church a real big rock to roll up the hill. We're really busy.

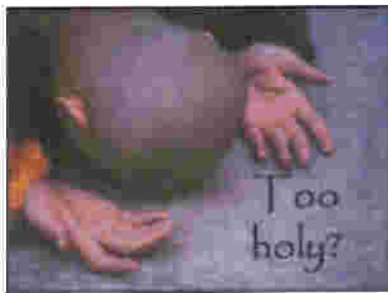


Fourth: I'm scared. If you take me out of my comfort zone by telling me what we have to do to reinvent what we do together and what it means to be the church, I'm going to go someplace I'm not used to going. I'm going to be asked to use gifts that I don't really trust that I have. I'm going to be asked to do things that I haven't



done before. That's frightening stuff. Whether it's big or little, it's scary. It takes me out of who I am and invites me to be who God would ask me to be.

I'm stuck. I'm too stuck. When I look at the Hymnal, by the way, and I pick the hymns for Sunday I know that I've got about a hundred hymns that I know and really like and the rest of them we don't sing because I don't like them. You don't like them and you don't know them and you won't sing them. I know what that is. We get stuck. We get stuck in the familiar, we get stuck in the comfortable, we get stuck in the easy. That's a reason not to rethink churches isn't it? Man, it's hard work. Frankly I like that seat I sit in. Don't you come and sit in my seat. I'm not going to introduce myself to you. I don't know you. You've got a name tag on. I get stuck. I sit with the same people, in the same place every week and I go out the door and I do the same thing. I talk a good game. I spend a lot of time and I look really busy and I'm stuck in where I think I belong. That's a reason not to rethink church.



Next: I'm too holy. Hey, I'm doing this pretty well. I'm too close to God to have to think too hard about change in anything. I've got it nailed. Me and Jesus are just like this. Why do I need to rethink the church? We're doing fine; paying bills, keeping the doors open. We took in new members this month. We took in forty members this month. Name me another United Methodist Church in the Central Pennsylvania Conference that it took in forty members in June? There isn't another one. That's because we are "this" close to being what God wants us to be—isn't it. You rethink church and you might blow it.



Next: I'm too cheap. This rethinking church thing, boy it's going to cost. It's going to cost us. Look at the last time we rethought church--\$5 million in the hole. Boom! There goes our security. There goes our investments. There goes our endowments. Hey, it costs money to do ministry. Not always, but often.



I'm too cynical. This is my favorite. I love this picture. Look at that photograph; that fish has traveled thousands of miles upstream to spawn and look where it ends up—chomp, breakfast. And there have been times in twenty-eight years and in ten years when I am the fish and some of you are the bear. And I really wonder if our hearts are big enough to do the hard work of rethinking what we are together as a church. There are many times when my cynicism completely wipes away my faith. When I am convinced that all the hard work that I might, that the leadership of the church might, that you might do is all going to go for nothing because of the sinfulness which is waiting right there to chew us up. The lethargy, the apathy, it's all around. We make this big effort, we build this beautiful building, we start hiring staff, we start reaching out beyond the walls and something is going to mess it up. Something is going to stop us: economic downturn, stock market goes in the dumpster, suddenly everybody is nervous. We are afraid. We can't do anymore. We have to stop. We have to preserve what we have. Status quo, survival mode. That's what this is about. Cynicism. It's a lack of faith. I've got that in spades. Twenty-eight year in and I still can't take my cynicism and put it on the shelf from time to time.



There are at least nine reasons. But the most important one is the one I saved for last—I just don't care. It's not that I don't care about you. It's not that I don't care about this place. But when you ask me to push and to grow and re-envision myself and to retool myself and to look more critically at what we do and what I do—do I really have the passion to do that? Do I have the vision to drive it? Do I have the courage to stand out front and lead it? I have to confess to you that there are times when I literally don't care what happens. I'm not proud of it but I have to be honest. You need to know where I'm coming from. There are times when I just don't care. I always care about you and I always care about God, I don't care to be involved. Do you know what I mean? It's just easier to sit back and watch somebody else do it.



I can think of nine reasons not to rethink church and I can only think of one reason to do it.



Unfortunately, wouldn't you know, it comes out of the Bible in 2nd Corinthians.

If you are joined with Christ you and me are new creations. The old life is gone, a new life blossoms. God has given us the task of telling everyone about the new thing he is doing. God uses us (us—cynical, dumb, tired, cheap and all those other reasons we can up with not to be used by God) to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them.



It seems to me what I have to do before I can help us rethink the church is to rethink my faith. And I commit to you that over the next year I'm going to rethink my faith. I'm going to ask God to take me, the lump of clay that I am, and mold me and make me to be able to be part of where this church goes in the next ten years. I'm not ready right now but I will be, I can promise you that. Because where we have to go as a congregation is not a safe place. It is not a cheap place. It is not a place where you can just do what we've always done and everything will work out just fine.

We are called to be new creatures daily, not the reality that we face in this day. May God help me, this old dog, to learn a couple of new tricks. And may God empower us to see where it is that he would have us go.