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THE SALTSHAKER

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By Invitation Only

By Rev. Sean McCann

Do you remember the last invitation you received in the mail? Somewhere in that pile of junk mail and advertisements you found something personal. Maybe it was a beautiful wedding invitation embossed on high-quality paper. Or maybe it was for a birthday party promising all the cake and fun you could handle. Whatever it was it meant one thing: you were special enough to someone to make the list and be invited.

As we've been studying John's Gospel in our Sunday evening sermon series, one thing has become clear: invitations have a rich history that dates back to the New Testament as one of the reactions people had to meeting Jesus. A few weeks ago we saw how the woman at the well "left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?'" (John 4:28-29) In issuing this invitation she was following in the footsteps of others like Andrew who brought his brother Peter to see Jesus (1:42) and Phillip who asked Nathan to "come and see" (1:46).

Pastor J.C. Ryle reflects on Andrew's invitation to Peter: "Out of the three first members of the Christian Church, one at least was brought to Jesus by the private, quiet word of a relative. He seems to have heard no public preaching. He saw no mighty miracle wrought. He was not convinced by any powerful reasoning. He only heard his brother telling him that he had found a Saviour himself, and at once the work began in his soul. The simple testimony of a warm-hearted brother was the first link in the chain by which Peter was drawn out of the world, and joined to Christ."

In today's advertisement-saturated culture, the power of a personal invitation still holds sway, so I want to encourage you to joyfully invite others into your lives so that they too might meet your Savior. In light of the power of an invitation, I want to highlight three ways to invite others to encounter Jesus.

1) Invite people into your home. I heard a pastor once say that you shouldn't invite someone to church until you've invited them into your home. Now I certainly don't think that should be a hard and fast rule, but I understand the point he is trying to make about the importance of hospitality. Nothing breaks down barriers faster in a relationship than a shared meal around the table, and nothing shows love for a friend or a neighbor quite like opening your home and your life to them.

2) Invite people to events with other Christians. This could include a church event like a meal or a Bible study, or maybe something in the broader community where you know they will be around Christians. The Bible is clear that the Christian community is very different from any community the world has to offer, and sometimes just being around Christians goes a long way in softening someone's heart towards the gospel.

In a recent article in *Christianity Today*, Ed Setzer reflected on why this is so powerful: "In our post-Christian nation, people who are skeptical of the faith are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message. Therefore, introducing people into the relational network of a local church community becomes an important aspect of their journey to the faith...The personal invitation is an effective way to break down any real or perceived barriers one might have to walking into a new church building or being willing to engage in a new circle of people."

3) Invite people to a church service. In an article for the website *GoThereFor.com* entitled "The Inviting Nature of Christianity," Australian Pastor Stephen Liggins writes, "Invitations are powerful things. The Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) once reported that two thirds of Australian Protestant newcomers first joined their church through someone inviting them." It sounds so easy to invite someone to church, but Pastor

Upcoming Events

March and April			Weekly Events		
March 5	Noon	Elder Groups	Sunday Morning:		
March 12	Daylight Savings Time Begins		Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
March 12	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Sunday School	9:45 am	
March 12	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Morning Worship	11:00 am	
March 19	Noon	Fellowship Meal	Wednesday Evenings:		
March 26	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Supper	6:00 pm	
March 26	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm	
April 2	Noon	Elder Groups	Bible Study		
April 9	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	For Men:		
April 9	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
April 14	6:00 pm	Good Friday Service	ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
April 23	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
April 23	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
April 30	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
			For Women:		
			Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
			Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
			Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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Liggins goes on in his article to write, “Unfortunately, despite the potential impact of an invitation, many Christians shy away from them. The NCLS survey also showed that 36% of respondents *willing* to invite someone to church *hadn’t* in the last twelve months.” One reason for this reluctance may be that we misunderstand our role in inviting others.

Pastor Liggins explains: “I would like to redefine what constitutes a successful invitation. In my view, a successful invitation is not when we invite someone to something and they come; rather, a successful invitation is when we simply invite someone to something; a successful invitation is an *issued* invitation.” Just like in evangelism, the results of our invitations are not up to us but are entirely in the hands of God. I wonder if we sometimes put so much pressure on ourselves to be “successful” that instead of faithful obedience we simply become paralyzed.

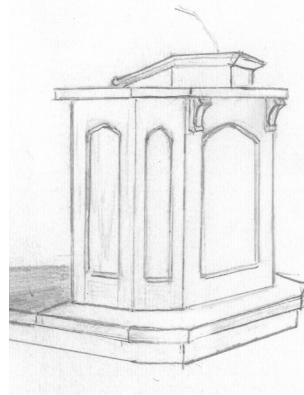
With all this in mind, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to invite people to church, so in May we are going to take a break in our sermon series through Exodus to work through a mini-series entitled “Encounters with Jesus.” (I’ll explain more

about this in the *Sacred Desk* article). While I will continue my pattern of preaching expository sermons, I plan to preach this series specifically with unbelievers and doubters in mind, and I would like to encourage each of you to begin to pray that the Lord would lay certain people on your heart to invite to hear these sermons. It could be a friend you’ve already invited a dozen times, or maybe a neighbor you’ve barely met. Pray that the Lord would lead you to people in whom his Spirit is already working – you may be surprised, even the most resistant person may be softened by a personal invitation.

Every Sunday morning your elders gather for prayer before the service and we pray that the Lord would bring the lost into our doors so that they might hear the gospel and believe. Would you join us in that prayer? Pray that God’s Spirit would go before us to prepare hearts and that he would break down barriers to the church and to the gospel. Pray that we all would be winsome and bold with the gospel, and that in obedience to the Lord we would “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



As we walk weekly with Moses and Aaron in their ongoing struggle with the stubborn and arrogant Pharaoh, it may be helpful to zoom out and remember where we are going in Exodus. The book tells one story in three parts: the narrative of the exodus event itself (Ch. 1-18), the giving of the law (Ch. 19-24), and the instructions for the tabernacle where God will dwell with his people (Ch. 25-40). Each theme (rescue, law, presence) finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus, so I have planned three breaks in our Exodus series to consider each theme. In May we will pause for a mini-series entitled “Encounters with Jesus,” then after spending the summer in the Ten Commandments we will pause again for another mini-series entitled “Jesus and The Law.” And then after ending Exodus with the filling of the tabernacle, we will conclude the year with an advent series, “Jesus: Our Glorious Tabernacle.”

In the first of these mini-series, “Encounters with Jesus,” I plan to preach on stories of conversions, like the thief on the cross (Lk 23) and the Roman centurion (Mk 15). We will see that the God who delivered his people from Egypt continues to do that same work in the ministry of Jesus Christ. I plan for these sermons to be intentionally evangelistic as we consider the simple gospel message and the new life that can be found only in Christ. I hope this series will provide a unique opportunity to invite those who do not believe to come and hear the words of life, maybe for the first time.

Pastor David Strain has written extensively on this topic and laments how true evangelistic preaching (as opposed to shallow gospel presentations) has fallen on hard times. He argues, “The church must recover evangelistic preaching that is churchly in sensibility, deeply doctrinal in conviction, thoroughly expositional in practice, unrelentingly bold in matter, and relevant in content.” He points out that evangelistic preaching has a rich history in the Reformed church in such men as Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Martin Lloyd-Jones.

These men were convinced that the simple, unadorned, glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was and is to be proclaimed for all – the simple and mature alike. So while our worship services will always serve the purpose of encouraging and challenging God’s people, I pray that God will use these sermons not only to draw the lost to himself, but even to restore to all of us the joy of our salvation.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
March 5	Ex. 8-9	
March 12	Ex. 10-11	John 5:1-18
March 19	Ex. 12:1-28	
March 26	Ex. 12:29-50	John 5:19-29
April 2	Ex. 13	
April 9	Ex. 14	John 5:30-47
April 16	Ex. 15:1-21	
April 23	Ex. 15:22-17:7	John 6:1-15
April 30	Ex. 17:8-18:27	John 6:16-21

From One Generation to the Next

By Rev. Bill Clark



In a recent morning worship service we all started to pray the Lord’s Prayer in unison. I was wonderfully blessed to hear from behind me this big voice from a little person saying “Our Father who art”... and continuing on with the prayer. I was so thankful on two fronts. One,

that parents are at work training their children in their homes and second, that people in this congregation are seeking to fulfill that portion of the Great Commission in which our Lord says, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” You see, I happen to live with the teacher who, along with Dona Barnett, is teaching our younger children over the course of several weeks to memorize the Lord’s Prayer.

This passing of truth from one generation to the next has always been an important emphasis in biblical religion, ever since the first Passover when Israel was redeemed out of Egypt. Exodus 12:26-27 speaks of the children asking their parents “what is the meaning of these things?” Then the parents respond to train the children.

Another source of encouragement to me has been in knowing of the biblical training which the children attending on Wednesday night receive through the medium of the wonderful hymns of the church. The evidence of this is clearly visible to us all on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall. There, we also are reminded of great biblical truths reflected in song and rejoice that the rising generation is being taught to sing the praises of the Lord.

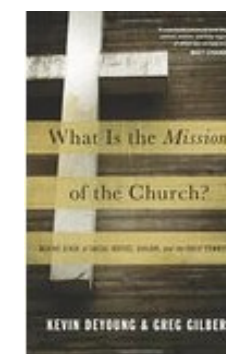
To mention these two examples is not at all to think less of the other teachers. We should all rejoice in the fact that we have among us those who care for the littlest in the nursery on through the upper ages of our youth. Hear me say, “Praise the Lord for you all!”

Would you join me in giving thanks to the Lord for His servants? But, also pray that the Lord will add to the number of our children and young people and that He will do that sovereign work of salvation in their lives which only He can do. Then pray, too, as to whether you would like to become part of these ministries in this church. We will work to provide you with all the training and resources you need.

“We will not hide them from our children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders He has done.” Psalm 78:4.

Book Review

by Rev. Sean McCann



Our 2017 Pastor’s Reading Challenge is well under way and with over 30 people signed up, I’ve been so busy ordering books that I’ve barely had time to read *What Is the Mission of the Church?* by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert. Yet it didn’t take long in re-reading this book to be challenged afresh by its message.

Since you’re probably not familiar with the latest movements in church growth

(and if so you’re not alone), then you might be surprised to discover that the idea of the church’s “mission” is more broadly understood today than ever before. In the opening pages of the book, DeYoung and Gilbert analyze the current “missions” of various churches: building the kingdom, partnering with God to remake the world, bringing God’s *shalom*, etc., and find them all lacking because they seem to mistake the mission of Jesus for the mission of the church. As the authors sum up: Jesus’ mission is not our mission. But if we aren’t supposed to do what Jesus did, then what exactly is the mission of the church?

In the most compelling part of the book the authors examine five Great Commission passages and conclude: “The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father” (page 62). While this seems like a pretty straightforward mission, the authors show how it has been compromised in recent decades as other ideas have crept into the church and replaced the clear command to “make disciples.” The authors argue that these other goals are not bad in themselves – in fact they are wonderful ministries for individuals and organizations – but they should never replace the clear objectives that Jesus gave his church. For example, in summarizing their apprehensions of the term “*missional*,” they write, “We are concerned that in all our passion for renewing the city or tackling social problems, we run the risk of marginalizing the one thing that makes Christian mission Christian: namely, making disciples of Jesus Christ” (page 22).

My biggest take away from the book is that the church must always *keep the main thing the main thing*. With so much good to be done, it is easy to get distracted and we need books like this one to give us a laser focus on what God has called us as a church to be and do: make disciples.

(It’s not too late to join the reading group, we will meet again in April to discuss our next book: *When People Are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.)