

MORE THAN PUMPKINS
WE CONNECT
MATTHEW 22:35-40
OCTOBER 14, 2012

Ah, the sermon.

Time to sit back and relax.

But don't sleep with your eyes closed, because I can see that.

That's why I wear glasses.

Not to read, but to see faces on the back pews.

And don't snore.

That might keep your neighbor awake.

To keep you awake, I'm going to ask you to do something beyond just listen.

I want you to grab a pencil or pen

and get ready to write your answer to a question in your worship bulletin.

Here is the question for you to answer:

What are the rules that should guide Christian conduct?

If your children wanted to know what a Christian is supposed to do,
what would you tell them?

If your non-Christian, non-churchgoing coworker asked,
what would you say?

Write your answer in your bulletin.

Jesus was asked a question sort of like that, and his answer is probably worth taking note of.

MATTHEW 22:35-40

Love God and love people.

It's all about connecting in relationships.

This, too, is something we seek to do through our ministries.

And when those relationships flourish,

to the extend you support NWH financially that's your ministry.

Love God and love people.

That seems pretty simple and straightforward, right?

It was not a surprising answer.

Jesus was quoting both those love commands right out of
the Jewish Scriptures we call the Old Testament.

Love God and love people.

It's short enough we can put it on our sign out front and across the newsletter heading.

It would make a good bumper sticker.

"Love God. Love people."

But it's not really so easy to DO.

The tough part of the "loving people" thing is that Jesus did not specify just a certain group of people.

He did not say people who are the same color as you,

people in your income bracket,

people who think like you,

people who vote like you,

or people who LIKE you.

He just said, "Love people, love your neighbor,

love whoever you come across,

as you love yourself."

Charles Schultz was the writer of the Peanuts comic strip.
 From time to time he captured some serious truth.
 In one of his strips Linus says,

“I love mankind.
 It’s people I can’t stand.”
 Isn’t that the way it is sometimes?

But Jesus did not call us to love humanity in the abstract.

(Picasso painting)

He called us to love them in the concrete.

(photo of feet in concrete)

But not that way.

He called us to love particular individuals,
 in fact, EVERY particular individual we meet.

Love the person who takes 32 items into the express checkout lane ahead of you.

Love the next door neighbor who has a car up on blocks, never mows the yard,
 and is destroying your home’s resale value.

Love your coworker or your boss who is a thorn in your side.

Love the person who broke your heart.

Jesus even said, “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.” (Mt.5:44)

Love EVERY individual who crosses your path.

But there’s a special responsibility to love those we count as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Even here, within the family of faith, we meet people who are very different in many ways.

We don’t all have the same education level, the same income, the same kind of job.

We may have different skin colors, political ideas, and even some lifestyle choices.

But because we’ve been adopted into the family of God,

we are brothers and sisters together.

This is where we can practice loving,

so when we go out the doors to work and school and into the neighborhoods,
 we’ll be better able to love others.

Love.

When Jesus says “Love” he’s not talking about warm and gushy feelings.

Those are great, but they’re not his point.

He’s talking about wanting the best for another person,
 and when possible serving their best interests.

That may or may not be accompanied by warm feelings.

But you just do what is best for them.

And if we’ll learn to do that here in the church family,

we’ll be better equipped to love others out there.

And it will be a reflection of the love of Christ.

To help us love within the church family,

NWH has a variety of ministries and groups where people can

get connected in close relationships,

know and be known,

love and be loved,

serve and be served,

care and be cared for,

pray and be prayed for.

VIDEO: FELLOWSHIP

This is one of the key things Jesus called us to do: Love your neighbor as yourself.

If all you do is occasionally endure one hour of worship on Sunday mornings,
if you're not in a smaller group of some kind,
you are being disobedient to Christ.

You are also cheating yourself out of the rich experience of
the church really being your family.

Studies have repeatedly shown that,

if people join a church but do not get plugged into a class or choir or other small group
where they can get to know people,
in one year those people will be gone from the church.
Because it never became for them what God intends the church to be:
family.

But if you get plugged into a class, a choir or some other group,
the church family becomes real family,
it will be meaningful,
and you'll stick around.

If you're not yet connected, get that way as soon as possible.

It's worth it.

But church is not JUST about getting connected to other people.

It's first and foremost about connecting with God.

Love God because God first loved you.

(1Jn.4:19)

He created you in order to love you.

He created you in his image,

in part so you'd have the capacity to love him back.

Jesus, God in the flesh, loves you so much,

he willingly gave up his own life... to pay for your sins,

so you could be forgiven and brought back into a love relationship with your Creator.

Love God because he first loved you.

"Love the Lord your God with all that you are."

Love God above all else.

Love God completely, with nothing held back.

Love God passionately.

There are lots of ways to express love for God.

But there is one thing we do as a church that is absolutely focused on pouring out our love for God,
and that is worship.

What we do on Sunday mornings may have lots of positive effects.

We may come away feeling renewed and refreshed,

glad to have spent time with our church family,

or maybe we learned something new.

But the main point of worship is to connect with God and express our love for him.

It is not a spectator sport.

It is a participatory activity where we, together,

tell God we love him and why we love him.

The word "worship" comes from the Old English "worth-scipe."

It means "to proclaim worth."

It is to give an appraisal, praise.

We come to say how wonderful and good and great is our God,

giving all the reasons we love God.

Let's hear from a few people who have been involved in helping worship happen at NWH.

VIDEO: WORSHIP (Keith Carr, Crystal Moczygamba, Steve and Diane Smith, Vickie Squires)

Worship is one of the core activities of the church,
 helping to give orientation to everything else we do.
 It is a weekly reminder that life is not about me.

It's not about you.

It's about God.

And in some wonderful ways,

getting caught up in worship can thin the veil between heaven and earth,
 and we feel ourselves being caught up in the realm of the Spirit,
 closer to God than in ordinary life.

Of course, theologically speaking God is everywhere all the time.

That is called omni-presence, all present.

But the Bible says God shows up in a special way when his people worship him.

In the Psalms we read,

“You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” (Ps.22:3)

God is enthroned on the praises of his people.

When we worship, he is with us in

The Bible promises that God is with us and in us.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth,

“Do you not know that you are a temple of God
 and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16)

We, the church, are the temple of God filled with the Spirit of God.

And so the things we do together,

especially when we worship together,
 are times and places where God's presence is...

How to say it?...

Thicker? More tangible? More self-evident?

When we sing his praises,
 sometimes you can sense his smile.

When we confess our sins,
 we experience anew his forgiveness.

When we are baptized,
 we are baptized into Christ, and adopted into the body of Christ,
 which is the Church.

When we receive communion,
 there is the bread and cup, the body and blood,
 and we encounter Christ.

There are moments in worship when you just know
 there's more going on than just us in this room doing our thing.

The Lord is enthroned on the praises of his people.

In worship we are connected with God in a very special way.

Connections with God and with each other.

That's a big part of what the church helps us do:

Love God and love people.

Get us connected in a web of relationships.

In one Peanuts cartoon,

Lucy comes into the living room to find Linus in control of the TV.

She demands he change the channel.

Linus asks, "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?"

She says, "These five fingers."

Individually they're nothing,
but when I curl them together like this into a single unit,
they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

And Linus says, "Which channel do you want?"

Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says,

"Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

Individually our lives are valuable.

But we're so much more when we're together with God, together with each other.

And your financial giving provides

the place and resources that we use in making those connections.

So celebrate it as YOUR ministry!