



247 Broad Street | Red Bank NJ 0770
(732) 747-0446 | www.umcredbank.org

April 15, 2018

News Worth Sharing

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 (CEB)

16 So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. 17 So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

18 All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. 19 In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.

20 So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"

Romans 8¹⁵⁻¹⁷ (The Message)

This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!

Happy Easter! Yes, I know that Easter Sunday was two weeks ago, but Easter is more than a day, a single moment to celebrate Christ's resurrection... rather it is a season that leads us into a way of being! It's a lifestyle of hope that impacts how we live, the choices we make, and the relationships we develop. We are truly called to be Easter People who live resurrection each moment, looking with anticipation for the way God is at work in our midst, inviting us into deeper relationship, and calling us into action.

Over the past few months, I've been really reflecting on how I see the spirit of resurrection at work in and through our church. The way we are constantly asking the question, "What's the next right answer?" "Where is God calling us now?" Ours is a living and active faith community, never willing to settle with "good enough", but always seeking to push into the new places God is calling us. We are willing to rise up against injustice and oppression, inviting people into the hard conversations about race, sexuality, immigration, environmental stewardship, economic justice, and more! Through our active outreach ministries, I have witnessed lives transformed and hope reborn in our community. We are a community of hope and transformation, seeking to build up God's kingdom here in Red Bank and beyond.

As I've been reflecting on all we are doing right, living out God's heart of justice and peace, I've tried to keep an open mind to where we might be called to grow as a community of faith. One of the things I've noticed – that is not unique to our church, but is a trend in many churches today – is that we have not done a good job in helping everyone to think and talk about their own faith, especially not with people outside the church. We reserve that for the pastors and the Sunday school teachers, rather than talking to our own children about faith, or sharing our spiritual journeys and faith convictions with our friends or colleagues. We've followed the trend of our society, relegating God talk to the church and the "experts", unintentionally leaving a vacuum, where God is no longer aloud in the public sphere. It has become awkward to talk about church or Jesus or faith in our non-Sunday lives, and so we perpetuate the divide between the sacred and the secular... keeping God in a box and missing opportunities to have deep and meaningful talk about faith outside the church.

Whenever the missional statement that Jesus sent his disciples out with is read, we (particularly in the progressive church) tend to brush it off and explain it away... "Go and make disciples of all nations" --- Oh, that's for someone else to do. I don't feel comfortable talking with people about faith... I don't want to bother them, I don't know what their religious beliefs are, and I wouldn't want to offend them. Evangelism has become a bad word – brining up images of people standing on a street corner with a bullhorn and tracks telling people they'll burn in hell for all eternity unless they confess Jesus Christ as their Savior... I've got to be honest, that makes me uncomfortable too, and I would not call that evangelism... at least not in any healthy sense of the word.

Evangelism – at its heart – means simply proclaiming God's good news... So I ask you to think in basic terms about what you would say God's good news is?

What is the good news that Jesus came to share with the world?

Love, Hope, Peace, You are not alone, Acceptance, Tolerance, Salvation, Forgiveness

Now how do we as a church and as individuals proclaim that Good News?

We are doing some amazing things here... we are a place of open invitation where ALL are welcome to know and experience the love of God – without being judged for who they are or what label they bear. We are inviting people to experience transformation of heart and life as they live in response to God's love for us, loving our neighbors and working to see God's justice and kingdom become a reality here and now. We create an opportunity to learn together how we can lead resurrected lives, creating the kingdom of God here on earth.

We share our witness by the way we live our lives, but also through conversations. I came across a statistic this week that blew my mind... The Institute of American Church Growth which says that over 80% of persons who come to faith in Christ do so because a friend or acquaintance personally shares their own faith story and the Good News with them one-on-one. Fewer than 2 of every 10 persons will come to faith in Christ through large gatherings such as Sunday worship services, musical programs, dramas, concerts, films and other major events. One on one faith and life sharing, as well as relationship building are what draws people into a journey of faith.

Maybe living into the call of Jesus to “make disciples of all nations” is as simple as realizing what the good news really is, celebrating how we are living into that in our church, and reaching out to others and developing a deep enough relationship that others want to join with us.

We might ask ourselves: In what ways do I need to be more intentional in inviting others—family members, friends, co-workers—to come and see? How might I wet their appetite for the light made visible in Jesus of Nazareth? What can I do to invite others to discover the beauty, power, goodness, and love I have discovered by walking in the way of Jesus and being part of his faith community?

We might ask ourselves: Do we live our lives as disciples of Jesus in such a way that others might be curious about where our passion and commitment to truth, goodness, beauty, and justice comes from?