

“The Church We Want to Be: Fellowship”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – September 19, 2021

Mark 9:30-37

Family Feud is a game show that pits one family against another with the hopes of figuring out what answers were given to some goofy survey. It has humorous overtones with Steve Harvey as the host. He keeps it moving and entertaining. The family must work together in order to figure out the answers of the survey.

As they say, nothing is more important than family. Family must stick together through thick and thin. They are to love you and support you and hopefully help you with being a better you. You can pick your friends, but you are stuck with the people who God has placed you with. Now that can be good or that can be bad. It all depends on if you play nice or not.

The church family is much like your biological family. There is always that cranky uncle, the aunt that likes kisses, the brother that can be a jerk and sometimes leads you on the greatest adventures and the sister you seek to always protect. The church family is the family you are stuck with as we gather to worship and serve God.

Last week we started this little adventure of talking about the church we have always longed for and talk about worship. The primary calling of the church in most people’s minds will always be to gather in the sanctuary, sing songs, hear scripture and doodle in the bulletin when the preacher speaks. Seriously, we gather because God has called us here to grow our faith and to worship God who is audience to our worship.

Today, I wanted to expand that idea. We gather to worship, but we also gather for fellowship. That is a churchy word for making people part of the family of God and treating them like you treat your own family. Fellowship looks like coffee between the services. It looks like potluck dinners and game nights. It looks like youth group gatherings. It looks

like the fun we have as we are doing the *Agape Feast!* It looks like just sitting around a table and talking with each other.

Why is this so important? It is important because it is the glue that holds us together and it is the discipline that holds us accountable. Without fellowship opportunities, we all would come and just do our own thing. We wouldn't get to ministry and mission that is central to the life of the church. We wouldn't get to know anyone else. Church would be so lonesome and boring.

When I first started going to the YMCA back in Ashtabula, I hated it. I hated just going through the motions of lifting weights, riding the stationary bike or walking on the treadmill. You could watch TV on the wall and that would distract you from doing the task at hand. It never made it easier.

But then, you start seeing the same people day after day, week after week. You start up conversations and then you make friends. If you missed a few days in a row, you got a phone call, "Hey, where have you been? Are you on vacation? Are you sick? You better get back here, or I am coming over to get you!"

The other advantage was when you were exercising wrong, there was a more experienced person who offered suggestions on how not to hurt yourself and do the exercise that maximized your effort. It was a great opportunity to support one another. The more experienced helped the least.

Now if I wanted to take that lesson and apply it to the church you can see the accountability is part of being a part of the family of God. When you are not here then you are missed. But too many people think, "they will never miss me. I don't matter. They don't even know my name."

That is so not true. You are missed. Even if you only participate online, your presence is noticed. I can see the numbers; I can see where people are watching from. But even in the sanctuary, the common lament is

that many of the folks that used to be here are missed. I think that is where we fail as a church in not contacting people who have missed a few Sundays. We are afraid that we are interfering in their lives, and it is their choice if they want to come to church or not. Rather, the opposite is true. Most people want to know that they matter. That they are remembered and that their presence is noticed. I promise you that if you missed two Sundays in a row and then you got 40 phone calls about how you were missed, you would never miss another Sunday again. That is where we have failed to be the church. We figure it is always someone else's job. When we see a need, that means we need to step up.

The second thing we notice from the YMCA example is that the more experienced helps the least. We could say in the church, the more spiritually mature should be helping the least. Here is our opportunity to mentor someone. To take someone under our wing and show them how to do a Bible Study, how to be a lay reader, a deacon, an elder, or do the mission of the church. Again, we have failed to be the church when we take the attitude that we have nothing to offer someone else. Your life experiences alone are enough to teach a multitude of lessons, if not on what to do, you can show them what not to do.

The church grows in faith and service when we work with one another to bring people to a point where they feel comfortable to do the same with someone else. Just as Jesus said, "WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL." The key word here is SERVANT. The church is called to be leaders who serve others. Everyone needs a mentor. I have mentors and I mentor other pastors even today. I may look like I have everything together, but you would be surprised. We all need someone who can help us, and we need to be helping others along the way. If we are not doing this, then we have failed to be the church that allows it to grow past us. We need to always be training our replacements.

So, there you go. The church you have always longed for is a church that worships and a church that fellowships. Our family of faith is only as strong as we make it. You are family, and in being family, we have a responsibility to each other to hold each other accountable -- but also, we are called to help each other grow. A church is more than one person. Together we are the church. Amen.