

June Newsletter

“⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

After our softball game last Wednesday, a few of us went out to the Grumpy Goat for some post-game refreshments. The waitress came up, looked at our shirts and asked, “The Gate-what’s that?” “It’s a church that I am the pastor of,” I said. She said, “Oh!” and walked away. A woman whose husband plays on the team said, “You’re a pastor? You don’t look old enough to be a pastor.” “Yep,” I said, “I’m a pastor.” That opened up the door for me to have a spiritual conversation so I jumped through it, “Tell me about your spiritual background.” She said, “well, I’ve been doing a lot of yoga lately and kind of like Buddhism, but I haven’t really studied it. I am a big fan of karma though.” “Ah, very interesting,” I said. She then added, “I was baptized Catholic and raised Methodist. I was really active in my youth group at our church but then my parents got divorced and I was physically and emotionally abused by my boyfriend at the time. I couldn’t understand why God would let so much bad stuff happen to me-you know-I was active in church and all. So, I stopped going to church for a while and things started to go better. Later on, I got back involved in church but then bad things started happening again and I stopped again.” I listened to her talk for while on this point and said, “Wow, I am really sorry to hear all that. Am I hearing you say that you, a good person, had a problem reconciling your personal suffering with a good and all-powerful God?” “Well, ya, I guess,” she said. “Ya, that is tough to understand. But let me ask you this, do you think Jesus was a good person?” “Well, ya,” she replied. “I would agree; and he also experienced a tremendous amount of suffering.” She nodded. I then asked, “What about Martin Luther King Jr., would you consider him to have been a good person?” “Ya,” She said. “Me too. He was assassinated. You see, spiritual maturity is about becoming more and more comfortable with uncertainty and suffering because of the certainty you have in Christ and God’s love for you.” I think she was getting where I was going with this, so she changed the subject.

“I have a question for you,” She said. “Shoot,” I said. “So, you’re a pastor but here you are drinking a beer-isn’t that like, off limits?” “Everything in moderation,” I said. Then she asked, “What do you think about weed?” “Well,” I said, “St. Paul says that ‘all things are permissible but not all things are beneficial.’ For one, smoking recreational weed is against the law in Iowa, for now, and we as Christians submit to the governing authorities. I think it is interesting how we demonize a substance like weed but our country runs on other mind-altering substances like caffeine and sugar. The important thing is that we as Christians do not want to be a slave to any earthly substance. We are slaves to Christ. He is our master-nothing should take his place in our minds and hearts.”

Then she asked, “Ok, what about homosexual marriage? How do you feel about that?” I felt like she was just tossing grenades at me and I was constantly trying to put pins back in them. “Well,” I said, “what is *your* authority on matters of morality? How do *you* decide what is right and what is wrong? Are you your own moral authority? Is it the prevailing culture and your favorite political party or politician? Is it Carl Marx? Hitler? Buddha? The Quran? You see, I look to the one true God and his revealed will in the Old and New Testaments for moral authority. God’s Word judges what is right and what is wrong-not me. So, until we agree on a moral authority, it will be hard for us to understand one another concerning our judgments concerning homosexuality.” She didn’t have any more questions about that but then turned to the Bible.

“Do you believe EVERYTHING in the Bible-I mean, do you take it literally?” She asked. I said, “Well, it depends on what you’re talking about-do you have an example?” “Like when Jesus feeds the 5,000 with 5 loaves of bread and two fish.” “Oh yes,” I said. “I certainly believe Jesus could have done that. Here’s the thing that if you can believe it, makes all those miracles easier to believe-the Resurrection of Jesus. If you can believe that Jesus, true God and true man, came from the Father, lived, died, and actually,

physically, bodily rose from the dead-all the other miracles of the Bible suddenly become a lot more believable. You see, it all hinges on the resurrection of the Jesus. His followers all went to their graves refusing to deny this point of doctrine. They could not help but to share what they had seen and heard. Either you can dismiss all this as folklore and claim that Jesus and his followers pulled off the greatest hoax of all time, or Jesus really was who he said he was and came to save mankind.” At this I could start to see some tears welling up in her eyes.

“Ok, ok,” she said. “But what really matters is that you’re a good person, right?-and God will accept you?” “Well, that’s not exactly how it works. That’s how it works in every other world religion. Let’s take hinduism, for example. You need to fulfill your calling in life-your place in the caste-appropriately so you can be reincarnated to a better being. If you do this well enough after so many reincarnations, you might be able to become one with the Brahman. Or let’s take Buddhism. If you follow the counsel and rules of the Buddha well enough-deny pleasure and avoid suffering-you might be able to reach Nirvana. Or Islam, if you are a good Muslim, pray the prayers, give alms, take a pilgrimage to Mecca, etc., perhaps Allah will welcome you into heaven. Christianity is different from all those religions in the sense that man disobeyed God and plunged the race into sin. God knew man could not mend this broken relationship but loved his human creatures so much that he became one in order to save them. Christianity is all about what God has done for man to reconcile him to God-not about what man has to do to please God. You see, it’s all by God’s grace and mercy.” “So,” she said, “what about the good behavior, you still have to be good, right?” “As far salvation and eternity are concerned, it has nothing to do with your moral behavior. Tell me this, what will you offer God for him to accept you into heaven, your good deeds, or Christ and what he did not he cross?” She said, “My good deeds.” I was flabbergasted. This woman had never actually heard the gospel before. I thought, “Man, this woman is in her mid 30’s, spent years going to church, and she might have just heard the gospel for the first time in her life. And she would need to hear it over and over again for it to really stick with her. If I hadn’t just shared it with her, from whom would she hear it?”

FOLKS! There are people all around us who are lost and disconnected from Christ. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few,” Jesus said in Matthew 9:37, and then he commanded to pray for something. Do you remember what that was? Was it, “Pray earnestly that God would miraculously make people show up in your churches”? NO! He said, “pray earnestly for workers.” Will you be a worker? Will you develop relationships with the lost? Will you welcome them into your home and into your life? Evangelism is about becoming friends with the lost-not only that-but BEST friends with the lost. They need to not only hear about God’s grace and love but actually see it in your life. Will you join Jesus as he seeks and saves the lost?

Joy in Jesus!

Aaron Hannemann

Prayer Requests

- Thanksgiving for our first and only confirmand, Ethan Jacobs, confirmed May 6th. Pray that God would continue to cause Ethan to grow in his faith and walk with Christ.
- For courage as we seek to build relationships with the lost and wait for opportunities to proclaim the gospel.
- Thanksgiving for our partnership with St. Paul and the Iowa District West and that God would continue to strengthen us as we continue to work together to bring the kingdom to Ankeny and beyond.
- For our rec softball team-that God would continue to bless this outreach ministry.
- For the ice cream social outreach event that we are hosting at the apartments across the street from where we worship.

- For God to continue to work in us generous hearts and good stewardship.
- For God to bless our new ministry, “Theology On Tap,” that God might use our efforts to provide a space for open conversations about spiritual matters to lead people closer to Jesus.





