



West Point United Methodist Church

N O V E M B E R 2 0 0 9

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:39

For the month of November we focus on our second core value: *We see ourselves as a church that, with God's help, loves, encourages, and accepts all people as children of God.* Based on my experience, I would guess that there is not a church in the United States of America that wouldn't embrace that as a core value. But it is one thing to say that you love, encourage and accept all people. It's an entirely other thing to live it out. The question for us here at West Point United Methodist Church is this: Which kind of church are we? I am reminded of the story of the conservative church that one particular Sunday found itself full to the brim. There was not a seat to be had in the entire sanctuary. As the service was just about to start, a young man came in. His clothing that day was quite out of place compared to the rest of the congregation all dressed up in their Sunday dress. The young man had on a Grateful Dead tee shirt, faded jeans with a hole in one knee. His sandals were old and scruffy looking and his hair, while clean, was shoulder length and tied in the back with a pony tail. He came into the sanctuary and after looking diligently, couldn't find a seat. So he simply sat down, cross legged, in the isle and awaited the start of the service. A church deacon who was ushering that day also happened to be one of the most respected members of the congregation. This man of eighty some years began walking down the isle toward the sitting young man, his cane tapping with each arthritic step. By their faces and body language, it was clear what many in the congregation were thinking that morning as they watched their fellow church member approach the stranger. They were thinking how inappropriate it was to come to church dressed like this. They were thinking how inappropriate it was for a person to sit in the isle of the church for crying out loud. They were silently waiting for this respected deacon to set this young man straight. They were completely unprepared for what actually happened. When the old man, stiff with arthritis but resplendent in his Sunday best suit arrived where the young man was sitting, he sat down on the floor with him, painfully bending his legs into the same cross legged position and laying his cane across his lap. He too then, awaited the start of the Sunday service with the young stranger. The pastor, who had been watching this drama unfold got up and addressed his congregation. He said: “My friends, in a few moments, you will hear the sermon I have prepared for you today. Most of you will soon forget it. But what you've just seen is one of the most powerful sermons I've ever experienced and my prayer for you is that you will never forget that.”

So we come back to the question: “what kind of church are we?” You see I think we are a church that walks its talk when it comes to this core value. I can think of any number of folks

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in our congregation who would do what this respected elder from our story did. I could easily see Jerry Harbath do it; I can see Larry Pearson doing it; Josh or Mandy Bridges would do it in a heart beat. I could see Jay Blessing or Ruth Buckner walking down the isle to have a seat despite what it may look like. I could go on and on as I see faces of others in our congregation that would demonstrate sacrificial love and radical hospitality as shown in this story. Maybe that's why God is blessing us so richly. I have a colleague in ministry who once said something like this: “Any church can grow, as long as they aren't too picky about who comes to their church.” The congregation in the story was being picky. The elderly deacon wasn't. I am proud to say that I serve a congregation that isn't too picky. That's why we are growing.

Blessings,

Pastor Jeff