

It's All In The Connection

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What has leadership been doing around here you might be wondering?
What is going on behind the scenes on all those committees and boards?
I sure as heck don't want to be on one of those committees, but I sure as heck want to know what 's going on...

If you were here last week at the Congregational Meeting, you heard about many things that were going on. Wonderful things...exciting things...things that pave the way for a great future for WVPC.

All those things you heard about last week fit into a new vision that our Moving Forward Team, led by Kevin Pasquinelli came up with. It is a vision for the future that has the word "Connection" in it a lot.

The Moving Forward Team and Session have decided that we want to be a church of connection in this order...

Connected to God (That's our lifeline...pray, read scripture, practice the disciplines)

Connected to one another here at WVPC (walk with each other through peaks and valleys of life, we want to be present for one another)

Connected to the greater Cupertino community (want to know our neighbors, and notice, listen and pray for them as well as serve them)

Why do want to be a connectional church? *Because everyone needs God, everyone needs people, and no one should have to go through life alone.*

The last thing Jesus said to his disciples was not, "Hey, have fun while I am gone.", or "I know you can handle life on your own now because you know that I am Lord Savior so see you later. Good Luck with believing in me."

No. He said, "**I am with you always to the close of the age.**" Why do you think he said that? There are myriads of things he *could have said* as his last parting shot. But he said, "I am with you always."

Why was that what he chose to say?

Because we are so prone to believe in this life that we are all alone.

And Jesus knew that we would be prone to think that so the last thing he said, (that he knew we would remember best) was.

I am with you. I am with you. I am with you. You are not alone.

I can go through anything if I know I am not alone.

It is so important, to know that Jesus is with me; so important to just have one other person by my side.

It can mean the difference between life and death for me.

It can be the difference between success and failure.

I talk to a lot of people and I am just astonished how many people feel alone today I teach up at little Bible School in Oakland. And the students tell me, "We don't have anyone who will listen to us. We don't have anyone to talk to about our pain."

They don't have counseling services up there, and my heart just breaks – but I am there to teach – not counsel

I actually had to tell two of them that I simply did not have the time to speak with them after class

But one kid was ready to drop out of college.

And I said, "Don't you dare."

And he said, "I don't care anymore."

And I said, "Yes you do. You have one more year. Don't blow it." And he looked at me.

And we talked. And he decided to stay in school.

One person to talk to...in this case it was me on my way to the parking lot... can make such a difference...If I am not alone life is so much more bearable

So the Moving Forward Team and Session wants this church to be that body of believers that is the reality of Jesus with us always...that changes life from being a solo flight into being a family journey.

However if you are not connected here, if you just come and go and you don't participate in a small group, and you don't come to things like fellowship events (TT this Tuesday) that help us know who you are, you don't give yourself in mission or in service worship here, you are going to feel alone here...even if there are people all around.

So connection is key. Getting involved is so important bvt's all in the connection, right? If you aren't connected nothing else works...connection with God, connection with people...that's what turns the lights on!

How many of you know this just in practical ways...

If I am not connected to the Internet, what happens? I can't work, I can't get information I need, I can't communicate with anyone

I can't get the signal to get to the App that will get me the Uber car I need.

I was in Michigan recently trying to catch a plane out, and it was right after the U Mich football game...I had stayed too long at the game, and I was in a rush.

I needed an Uber car, to get me to the rental car, that was parked at the hotel, that I was supposed to drive to the airport...

I was sure I was going to miss my plane because I couldn't connect to the internet at all...

No matter how hard I tried

Finally, the connection was made, and everything went like clockwork, and I made my flight

But without that connection I could go nowhere..

It's like the couple who got on the passenger train

And they found a really nice comfortable seating arrangement with a little table between them.

They were right next to a window that looked out, and the seats had pillows on the headrests.

And they had some work to do so they took out their laptops and they got all settled with their papers around them...

And the woman said to her husband, "This is going to be a great trip! It's so comfortable here."

And her husband nodded.

Just as he did, they saw the conductor walk up to them.

And he said, "Excuse me sir, Ma'am, you are going to have to find another seat somewhere else."

The couple said, "Why? We are perfectly comfortable right here and we have everything we need."

And the conductor said, "I am glad you are comfortable... and I am glad you have everything you need. But this car isn't connected to the rest of the train. *You aren't going to go anywhere if you stay here. You will never reach your destination.*"

If we aren't connected, nothing else works out

We need connection with God, with one another, and with our community to get where we need to go spiritually & as a church.

For the next few weeks until the end of November we are going to be doing this little book, which is a sequel to the "I am a church member" book...by the same author...Tom Rhainer...

This little book is called "Connected" (**IMAGE**) and it is based on the book of Ephesians, talking about what an honor it is to be able to connect to the church – the body of Christ – and how vital it is...

Here's a little intro video...(PLAY from YOUTUBE – 1:03)

We are doing this book Connected because it fits so perfectly with the vision of Connection that our vision team came up with
And we will be learning something very important as we do this study, and that is this...

That being a Christian is not just a Jesus and Me affair...we can't just come and go in church...we must commit to being the church together...
with other people and building the body of Christ

I know this song..."**Me and Jesus, we've got a good thing going...me and Jesus we've got it all worked out.**"

Friends, if its just me and Jesus...you don't have it all worked out

Being a Christian means that other people have to be involved..

In the West we have made Christianity into such an individualistic thing... cause we are an individualistic culture

A lot of people say, well I don't need church...I just worship by myself, on my own, in the trees or by the ocean...and once in awhile okay...

But when Paul writes to the Ephesians, it doesn't sound like its individualistic at all...**he's talking collectively and connectionally about being the church together**...in community...come what may. And the amazing thing about this is that he writes the letter even for those who before felt un-included – back then it was often the Gentiles – he does this great job as we'll see in a second about including them

I don't know how you are feeling today but, maybe you've felt not included here at WVPC –

that you have thought you aren't spiritual enough,
or schooled in the faith enough,
or young enough or old enough...
or popular enough...
or ontop of your game enough
for some reason you just haven't felt connected...

As I said, In the NT, The Gentiles often felt like that
They felt often as if they didn't count, they weren't schooled in the faith like the Jews
They didn't know enough, they couldn't always keep up with the religious rhetoric, the references to the law, the practices of the Jews
They would sometimes think...what is going on? They knew Jesus but
They felt like they were outsiders to the church...
Look how Paul writes to these Ephesians...to encourage them

Ephesians 2:18-22

19 So then you are no longer foreigners (non-citizens who are present for a short-term) **and strangers** (no longer even short-term – neither foreigners and strangers had any rights and were not citizens) , **but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household**, (he's validating them) **20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. 21 The whole building, being put together by Him, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. 22 You also are being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.**

He's affirming those who have felt left out saying, the church is for you!

Feeling left out is just a terrible feeling
You know the worst time I ever felt left out...it was in middle school? Everything horrible happened to me in middle school...
I still remember this...
I went to sit at a lunch table (middle school is the worst for feeling left out isn't it?) with some kids I thought were my friends
And it was one of those long benches...and I tried to sit down...and they all moved over and said to me...you can't sit here, this seat is taken...and so naively I went down to the other end of the bench and they all scooted the other way taking up the space down there...
Can't sit here, they said. This is taken!
It suddenly dawned on me. Oh my gosh...they don't want me to sit here. I felt so left out. I still remember thinking, I just don't belong.
I am not a popular kid. I don't know how to act popular or be cool. I'm never coming back to this table again.

And a lot of people feel that way about the church.
Bc a lot of people come to church – or don't come because at all – but if they do or don't they think, "I have no idea what is going on...I haven't been schooled in the faith...I don't know enough...I'm not good enough...My lifestyle is all wrong...I feel left out of the cliques in the church"...I don't understand the rhetoric...and they leave.

That's why its so important not to just stay in our own cliques
But move out, and connect in the community with other people
And let them know, by our going to them...that the church, faith, God, life in community... is for you too...cause no one should go through life alone
And we will be teaching you some ways to do that

But to get started I want to share with you what someone was talking to us about at a conference that Celeste and Bill and I went to this past Thursday, to learn more about how to do small groups

And the speaker, Hugh Halter, was talking about connection with others outside the community of faith...how we do that?...so this would be our third prong of the vision "connection to community" – the people who are out there...and that can be the hardest...

And in order to really open himself up to who God might want him to connect with (who was outside of his Christian groupies), he decided each morning to, as he put it “check in for duty” with God.

And he prayed, “Lord, bring to mind someone you want me to pray for today.” He hadn’t been doing this in awhile...and it was like the third day he did this...and this person that he hadn’t seen in a long time – Jason - came to mind. His face just appeared before him.

So....Hugh said okay...Lord I pray for Jason. And he prays, and then he says, *Lord let me know next steps. If there is something more you want me to do, just lead the way.*

So that same day he goes to Jamba Juice and two people ahead of him in the line he sees...guess who? Jason! Jason is not a church going person. Jason is full of tattoos and all kinds of language just pour out of him, good and bad...He sees Hugh.....and he lets out an expletive – and expletive of joy....And they exchange greetings and talk for a little bit.

Ok God. That was spooky, thinks Hugh. Not sure what that was about, but clearly you are doing something here. Thanks for the confirmation. I’ll keep praying for Jason.

That weekend, on the other side of town, Hug is with his wife. They are in an out of the way antique shop. And who should walk in? Jason! Wow. Okay...now Hughs starting to get the message. Thrilled to see Hugh yet again, Jason let’s out another expletive of joy...s

“It’s funny how we keep seeing each other lately”, isn’t Jason says.

“Well,” says Hugh, “Why don’t we decide to meet together...Instead of it happening randomly, let’s meet together weekly...have coffee...and be best friends” So that’s what they have been doing for the past 2 years, having coffee, talking...and yes, conversations about Jesus have come up...all kinds of spiritual questions have come up because....Hugh is a pastor...he’s very cool looking...but he is a pastor

\. Right now Jason, at this point thinks Jesus is just awesome...but the Lordship of Christ hasn’t quite sunk in...what it means to follow Jesus. But there is this friendship, this connection by a pastor, with someone who would never darken the doors of the church...So God worked it out so that the church by God’s grace...could come to Jason through Hugh...isn’t that the way God always works?

So the openness in us, to check in for duty in the morning...might be something you want to try...to open your hearts to who it might be that God wants you to pray for that’s outside of the usual people...

Lord bring to mind someone you want me to pray for...And when that happens and you pray for them...you can then pray...Lord show me next steps...

That’s why when Paul writes this letter to Gentile Christians...the Ephesians...Non Jews...he is telling them The Gentiles who felt so left out, you are with us! You too are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household...*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...God cares about you! I am sending this letter for you..to you...you are not left out..* God is for you, not against you...

I was recently driving in an area where there was a lot of construction... so two lanes had to merge into a single lane. There was "us" in my lane and there was "them" in that lane, and "we" had to get into their lane.

And I couldn't seem to find a place where I could merge in...so finally I looked over at the person who was in that car, in "their" lane... everybody was cranky and it was really crowded. And I just raised my eyebrows, and made a connection with this guy face to face and my eyes just said, "Is there room in your lane for me?"

It was a great moment. He gestured like this with his hands and gave me a big smile, like, "Come on in. You're not one of them. You're one of us. Come on over to my lane. There is room in my lane for you." I suddenly felt accepted and healed from middle school trauma.

It's all in the connection – which means really its all in the relationships that we make - If you are not connected today here at WVPC please speak to me after the service; I will do my best to follow up with you

But also there are some things you can do too, not just for yourself but for all the Jasons out there who need to know God...

The ushers have given you a connection card today (IMAGE) which offers you the opportunity to work towards connecting in each of the three ways outlined in the vision statement...**to God, to people here at WV and to the community at large.** We were supposed to do this at the congregational meeting but the cards weren't ready yet

And I got to thinking maybe its because we are meant to fill out these cards as an act of worship – not so much as an act of business...(check in for duty...not all will be the same)

So I'd like you to take a look at them and...after we spend a couple minutes in prayer... fill them out and bring them forward and put them here...

This is a chance for you to contribute to the Vision of Connection that we are implementing here WVPC -

So here is your chance to pray and then become a part of the vision as the Holy Spirit leads...

Again, **why are we so keen on the vision of connection here at WVPC? Because no one should go through life alone.**

And many people are doing just that...

If I have one other person whom I connect with it might be the difference between life and death

So don't take this lightly...

Let's prayerfully consider how to fill out this card...

Fill out both sides of the connection card with your commitment and then the other side will be mailed to you in a little while to remind you of the vision, and your part in it...

When () starts to sing please come forward...and put your cards here

Lets prayerfully reflect on the vision of connection, with God, with one another here, and with all the Jasons...lets pray..