

“The Details Matter”

Dear Friends, Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus and welcome (once again) to our “Maker Fun Factory.” (This is quite the setting.) Those involved with making this all happen, my hat is off to you for doing such a tremendous job.

Full disclosure, it feels a bit strange to be up here in the midst of this decoration and (I hope not) distraction. It was suggested that I wear Joseph’s “Coat of many colors,” but I was afraid I’d blend in and you wouldn’t even see me. (Maybe that’s why they suggested it?)

At the same time, it feels wonderful to be part of what’s happening and what’s (going to be happening) on this same altar/stage area where, beginning tomorrow, this place will become a platform for helping some of God’s youngest followers to become more aware of what he has done and is doing for (all of us) in Jesus.

My hope and prayer has been and will continue to be, (during this week), that God will use what’s happening in this place to grow his kingdom. This isn’t, as we all know, just another creative way to fill a week of summer vacation. It’s a God-created way to fill lives with the things (in life) that finally matter.

Again, thanks to all who have been working behind the scenes to get (all of this) ready and to the many who will be part of what’s happening in this place in the days ahead. Let’s join in prayer.

Lord God, we thank you for the work you are doing in this place to grow your kingdom, and for the work you are doing in us to grow us as followers of Jesus. As we turn now to your Word and to what you have to say to us, open our hearts to be receptive to your voice and your will. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

It’s probably not a good idea to speed-read your way through the Bible. (Have you noticed that?) Like anything in life, if you move through it too quickly, you end up missing a lot of the detail.

Now, sometimes the detail doesn’t matter, it’s nothing more than detail, it can (easily) distract and get in the way. And yet oftentimes, in the Bible (as in life), it’s in the detail that we find what truly matters.

In today’s story, (in the big picture), Jesus is preparing his followers for what’s to come. He’s getting them ready for what he has chosen them and is soon to be calling them to do. More specifically, Jesus is modeling for them what he wants. He’s giving to them an example (in his own life) of what he wants to see and to find in theirs.

Matthew tells us that “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness.”

In other words, his ministry was to the entire world. His reason for being (and doing) what he was (and what he did) was for the sake of those for whom (later on) he would eventually offer up his life.

This is nothing new. Jesus came to save. Jesus came to serve. Jesus came to address not just the spiritual needs of the people and not just the physical challenges (in life) they faced, but the fact that apart from God’s call into the kingdom (and his call on their lives), their lives (at best) would be nothing more than a daily challenge.

Don’t miss the point. As a church family, (in the big picture), the same is true for us. As members of this church family, (in your big picture), it’s the same thing (in your life) for you.

It’s not enough (for us) to speak about the love of Jesus and to find ways to share our faith, if we’re not also finding real and tangible ways to express that love (and live out our faith) by meeting the physical needs of those with whom we share. At the same time, it’s not enough to hand out food and to give out clothing and to

do (whatever else we do) to care for those around us, if our caring and our sharing and our (handing out) and doing fails to include the message of Christ.

In the big picture, Jesus was modeling for his followers, who and what he wanted them to be and to become. In the same way, he's modeling for us what he wants to see happen in us. Now, (again), that's all in the big picture. Let's look (a bit closer) at the detail.

Did you notice Jesus' summary statement of what he saw? When he looked at the crowds and watched what they were doing, do remember (how Matthew describes) what Jesus sees? Matthew says, "When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Literally (it says), they were "limping" their way through life, because they were making their way through life, moving through life, like sheep wandering (through life) without the care and the guidance of a shepherd who could lead. (That's interesting.)

I was talking with Pastor Brian/Pastor Jonna this past week about what's happening today in our culture; two statistics that have recently come out that say worlds about what's going on around us. Did you know (in this valley) we are number one in two religious categories? (It's true.) We are number one in two distinct and differing religious ways.

The first is the percentage of "unchurched people" who live in this valley. (We've said this before.) We are number one in the nation (among major cities) in the percentage of unchurched people; those who are not connected (in any way) to a congregation of believers.

Now, less than 10% actually get up on a Sunday morning and go to church - that's a different topic - but in terms of the truly "unchurched," 60% in this valley have no connection (whatsoever) to a family of faith; six out of ten who are not connected (in any way) to any Christian church. In that "unchurched" area (or category), we are number one.

The second area (or category) where we're number one is the percentage of "de-churched people" in this valley. The "de-churched", (according to Barna), are those who, at one point in their life, were active in the church and who no longer are. At one point, their involvement in the church was an important part of their life and (today) it no longer is. As a result, they have become "de-churched."

Of the top 20 major cities in the country, San Jose (tied with San Francisco) is number one. According to Barna, 47 % (in this valley) of those who used to be involved and active in the church no longer are: 47%. That's nearly one out of two who have stopped going to church. One out of two who, (for whatever reason), are no longer connected (in any real way) to the body of Christ.

Now, again, don't miss the detail. I look at the world today and nothing has changed. I look at what's happening around us today, and it's the same thing Jesus saw when he looked at the crowds. Our world is filled with people, going through life, wandering around, trying to figure it out, and it's not happening.

Just look at what's happening and some of the numbers. The number of broken homes that exist in our country, the percentage of fatherless children that we have, the rate of divorce, the increase in violent and sexually abusive crime...to say nothing of the way in which (people today) define success, thinking they're getting ahead, seeking to make it to the top...but ahead of what, and to the top of what, and for what purpose and for what meaningful (and lasting) goal?

There is none. It's all superficial. It's all for this life only. There's no lasting purpose and goal...and that's why (Jesus says) they're wandering and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And, (as if that's not enough), the trouble is that if you're a shepherd-less sheep, you're wandering and you're lost, "limping your way through life", and you don't even know it. You don't even see it. You think you have it all together (in life), when (in reality) you don't.

Don't miss the detail. What does Jesus do? He does two things when he sees the wandering and lost sheep. One, he has compassion for them. He hurts for them. Literally, he "feels it in his gut." It goes deep. It pains him to see what's happening.

And, two, the second thing he does, what he does is (instead of becoming discouraged and giving up), when he looks at how harassed and helpless the people are, what he does is, he looks at the harvest.

He says, "Look at the harvest!" (He says), "Just look at the opportunity we have! It's all around us. There are people (all around us), a world around us, that doesn't know that it's lost, but it is."

That's what Jesus sees. He sees "a harvest that is plentiful", (a great opportunity), and (along with that) he sees "laborers that are few." And so, what does he do? Well, he starts handing out time and talent forms to see who might want to step up. He puts a table out in the back (of the church) and encourages his followers to stop by and sign-up if they'd like to help.

No, that's not what he does. What he does is, (don't miss the detail), he tells his followers to pray. He instructs his disciples to get down on their knees and to start asking "the Lord of the Harvest" to send out laborers "into" the harvest. That's what he does. That's what he wants them to do...and that's what he wants you and me to do.

Now, let's stop for a moment and ask ourselves the hard question. (It's not hard to figure out.) How much time are we spending (on our knees), praying for the Lord of the Harvest to raise up people willing to go into the harvest fields and do the work? How much time are we praying (in this number one harvest field in the nation) for the one we call "our Lord" to inspire and encourage and to ultimately send workers to gather in the harvest he so desperately wants? (It's a hard question, but it's one we need to ask.)

Jesus didn't tell his followers to go do it. What he told them was to pray. What he commanded them to do was to get down on their knees and ask the Lord to raise up workers. And he did it, because of what happens when we pray. He did it because of what happens (to us) when we pray. When we pray, not only are we spending time with the Lord and bringing to him our needs and requests, but we're also allowing him (in our prayers) to align our hearts with his.

My friends, here's where it becomes real. Until your heart is aligned with God's, you will never be effective as his worker. Until we feel in our guts (as a church) the same compassion and pain that Jesus felt (when he looked out at the world), even the best of our efforts (in the world and for the world) will come up short. Ask yourself the hard question. Ask yourself (in your heart of hearts) if you're spending enough time.

And, then, look at the detail of what happens. After modeling what he wants to see happen, after noticing how harassed and helpless the people are, after feeling a deep compassion and hurt for those he loves, and after asking his disciples to pray, what does Jesus do? He calls them together, he gives them his authority, and then he sends them out. He calls them together, he gives them his authority, and then he sends them out...after they pray, after they spend time aligning their hearts with his.

Look at who he sends. These are the names of the twelve apostles: "first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

Do you know who these men were? (Do you know who they were?) They were nobodies. These twelve men, before they met Jesus, they were nothing. And even after they met Jesus, they were still nothing. Nobody in the world knew who they were, and nobody in the world (ever would have known) or cared who they were, apart from Christ.

But when they met Jesus and they were called by Jesus, and when they watched him and listened to him, and when they fell down on their knees and prayed, and their hearts became aligned with his, and (from there), he sent them out?

Do you think the same could happen today? Do you think the same impact could take place in the midst of such a harassed and helpless world like ours?

It won't happen, (any longer), through Peter the fisherman, or Matthew the tax collector, or James the son of Alphaeus, or Simon the Zealot. But it might happen through Bob the computer programmer, or Michael the engineer, or Nancy the nurse, or Tammie the teacher, or Sarah or Suzie or Sammie who are just trying to be faithful and follow Jesus. It might happen through them. It may well happen through you.

But not without prayer; not without a heart aligned with our Lord's; and not without a willingness to not only pray for the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into the harvest, but to be willing to respond in faith when he calls.

We're talking today about detail. Let me close today with two details I don't want us to miss. The first, on this Father's Day, to all of the Dads who are here and (to all of the Moms as well), don't ever think that what you do and model (as parents) for your kids doesn't matter. It does matter. It matters more than you might think; even as you grow older; even as they grow older.

The example you set, the integrity you have, your character; the way you deal with and treat people. Your willingness to forgive; your readiness to admit when you're wrong.

Your kids watch what you do, all throughout life. They see how you live. They learn from your example, right and wrong. The pattern and priorities you set (for them) in your own life, will become (in some very real ways) what they end up living in theirs. The details of what we do as parents do matter. We cannot and we should not live as if they don't.

And, second, on this day before our Vacation Bible School, starting tomorrow with more than 250 kids, (before it begins), let's each commit ourselves (today) to spending time in prayer. I don't care how long or how much, just the fact that we do.

Pray for the leaders, prayer for the volunteers, pray for the kids who will be coming to this place; pray for the (week ahead) to have an impact for Jesus in the lives of these little ones for whom he died. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest would bring forth a huge harvest from this coming week. Let's each spend time today in prayer.

And (as we do) don't miss the detail of what this week is all about. "Maker Fun Factory?" That's the title, that's the banner, that's the big picture theme we see. Did you notice the small print (underneath)? It says, "Created by God. Built for a purpose." (Created by God. Built for a purpose.)

Guess what? That's not just the kids. It's all of us. It's not just for them. It's for you. That's the detail, and details do matter, even to God. Amen.