

Outreach Sunday
Message Part 1 (Baptism)
January 5, 2014

PRELUDE – Today

Worship – Build Your Kingdom Here

Good morning, everyone. Thanks for braving the weather to be here today!

Today is a very special day here at NHCC for a couple of reasons.

1. First of all, as you can see, we're going to baptize some folks this morning (in our 9:30 and 11:00 services).
2. Secondly, we are just one week away from Outreach Season 2014. I've been telling you about that all throughout the month of December and, as part of this service, we have some fun things we're going to do to prepare for that. In fact, we're going to end a few minutes earlier than usual so everyone has time to fully participate. I'll say more about that in just a bit ... but for now, let's talk about baptism.

Why do we do it? Why do we baptize?

We do it because, bottom line, Jesus told us to.

"Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

Of course, God rarely tells us to do something without a good reason. God has a purpose in baptism although it's not what a lot of people think it is: *a lot of people think baptism is what washes away your sins*. But that can't be true because Jesus, who never sinned, was baptized.

The Gospel of Matthew also tells us that one day He went to see John the Baptist at the Jordan River and asked to be baptized.

John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him. Matthew 3:13-15 (NLT)

I think that phrase Jesus said to John, "we must carry out all that God requires," is very interesting.

Why would God the Father require that His sinless son, Jesus, be baptized ... as well as every single person in the future who had become His disciple (or follower) by receiving the saving grace He gives when they put their faith in Him as the Savior who died for their sins on the cross and rose from the grave three days later? What's the point? What's the commonality between Jesus and people like us?

Again, it's not washing away sin because even though we have sin, Jesus does not.

The commonality is this: Baptism is the outward physical sign which communicates to the world that Jesus and those who put their faith in Jesus are part of the same spiritual family; that He and we are both citizens of the Kingdom of God; that we belong to Him and He belongs to us.

It's kind of like the way a wedding ring symbolizes that a husband and wife belong to each other. The ring isn't what *makes* them married. They wear the ring because they *are* married.

So, when a person gets baptized, they don't do it because they *hope* to get their sins washed away; they do it because they have turned to Jesus in faith and He has *already* washed their sins away – past, present and future. They get baptized as a sign of something that has already taken place in their heart and soul.

In fact, as you'll see, the act of baptism itself visualizes what has happened to a person who has come to Christ.

- When a person stands in the water and then goes under the water, it's a way of visualizing the reality that they were spiritually dead because of their sinful nature – which, the Apostle Paul says, is true of every person who has ever been born - and that there is nothing they could do to save themselves; nothing they could do to make themselves right with God or nothing they could do to atone for even the least of their sins.
- And when a person comes up out of the water they're saying, "In the same way that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, he has made me spiritually alive. I have been made clean and holy and perfect in His sight by my faith in who Jesus is and in what He did. I have been given a new life that begins now and will continue for all of eternity."

Baptism is an amazing and beautiful picture when you understand why we do it and what it is that you're seeing.

Now, this morning we have several folks (in our 9:30 and 11:00 services) who have come to this point in their lives where they have made the decision to believe and receive Jesus as their savior and we are going to baptize them. And I'm very happy for them. You will be, too, when you see this.

But, every time we set up this baptism pool, I'm also conscious of the fact that there are *others* in this room who have *also* come to that same point and made that same decision *who have not been baptized* – at least, not of their own choosing. Maybe they were baptized as an infant. I was baptized as an infant. Maybe *you* were baptized as an infant – and that's a great thing ... but ... the value of *you* making the decision to be baptized (instead of your parents making it for you) cannot be overstated. It's a way of you personally solidifying your decision to say "yes" to Jesus. It's a "stake in the ground," a reminder that you can always look back on and say, "yes, I did come to the point of trusting Jesus as my savior."

Therefore, whenever we baptize these days, we always throw open the door at this point and say "if *you* need to be baptized, we've got the water; we've got extra towels and even some extra clothes to change into ... this is your

opportunity. You can be baptized this morning, too.”

<show example bag> We’ve got everything that you would need to be baptized this morning. The door, or the water, or the pool is open for you in this moment so you can be baptized, as well.

So, here’s the deal: if you feel God leading you to come and be baptized (along with these others), you come right away when we start singing. Don’t delay – we don’t have a lot of time this morning. If God is saying to you right now “you need to be baptized,” you come right way. Don’t worry about what you’re going to change into – we’ll help you figure that out. Some of you may need to say “yes” to that invitation this morning.

(9:30/11) Now, we do have one qualifier – if you’re younger than middle school and you haven’t signed up ahead of time, we want to ask you to wait until next time we have a baptism class later this spring. We’ve found it necessary to make sure one-on-one that our kids really understand what baptism is all about.

So, here we go ... let’s stand together and sing (while these folks are baptized).

Baptism / Worship Songs – Finding Who We Are / Come Thou Fount

Feature – Sunshine / Offering

Outreach Sunday *Message Part 2 (Outreach)* **January 5, 2014**

One of the great things about a baptism service for those who are *not* being baptized is that it reminds us of the fundamental reason why we exist as a church. See, a church can legitimately be many things:

- It can be a place of learning
- It can be a place of worship, and we did a little bit of that earlier;
- It can be a place of friendship and support. We heard about small groups and how that’s pretty big in our church, and many people have experienced that.
- It can be a place where people in financial need are helped (as many were by the “Christmas Blessing” last month).

But the one thing a church must *always be* is a lighthouse to its community. Church must always be a place where people who have not received Jesus and the grace and truth that is in Him are drawn and invited to do so. We’ve already read it this morning – the Great Commission that Jesus gave to his followers: “Spread the good news far and wide about who I am and what I’ve done for you. Invite others to know me like you know me.”

It’s very easy as a church to forget that and lose sight of that. In fact, back in December, I told you the story of how, a couple of years ago, we *had* lost sight of that. We were doing a lot of good things as a church but we had drifted away from that “one thing.” It wasn’t intentional, but we were not seeing people outside of NHCC come to NHCC and become followers of Jesus.

So, we made some changes that brought that “one thing” back to the center of our focus ... changes that ultimately led us to not only remodel and expand our facility but also *to take the first five months of last year* – from January through May – and intentionally target our Sunday morning programming for people who do not go to church.

And we did that and the results were amazing. I’ve already told you that we added about 150 folks total to our congregation over the last year, and last August, when we did baptisms, we baptized 30 people – mostly adults. And this morning, we’ve seen even more “results” of that effort. I recently spent some time with one of the guys who was baptized this morning (Vance) and found out he started coming to NHCC during the grace series and he accepted Christ as part of that! So, it’s very exciting to see this happening in our church this year.

So, because what we did the first five months of last year was so successful (and, quite frankly, just a heck of a lot of fun!) we decided to do it again this year. We’re going to take the first five months of *this year* and focus even more on connecting with people who are not going to church anywhere.

Now, we’re going to do this in four phases. There will be four major attempts to get the word out and invite people to come and experience NHCC. Each phase will match up with a specific message series that I think will be of value not only to us but to people who may think that church doesn’t really have anything to say about real life.

Here are the phases:

Phase 1 (runs from next Sunday thru first week of February): “Why Your Life Sucks (and what you can do about it)” is also going to serve as sort of a re-gathering and momentum-building phase. I’ll explain what I mean by that in just a minute.

Phase 2 (February into first week of March): “At the Movies” series (discovering God and the message of Christ and how it is embedded in those movies)

Phase 3: (March into Easter - April) “Rational Faith in an Irrational World” (why does it make sense to believe?)

Phase 4: (April/May): Relational/ Family series (how to live well with others)

That’s where we’re going over the next five months. I’m excited about it! I hope you’re excited as well.

Now, about Phase One which begins next week. In addition to inviting people who are not yet part of NHCC, we are also going to use this time as something of a re-gathering phase. Between the holidays and the winter weather we tend to lose a little momentum. In addition, there are always a bunch of folks who visit once or twice and then stop coming for whatever reason.

So, what we’re going to do this week is to send a series card to every person who showed up at some point during the last year, 2013.

(pic) Here’s the front side which shows off our wonderful facility as well as some of the cool people who are part of NHCC ... plus notice that we’ll be having hot coffee and “breakfast treats” during the series “Your life sucks” - we at least ought to give you something to eat.

(pic) And here's the back side, which promotes the series.

And, as I said, everyone who showed up last year at some point will get one but we're also going to have ways for us to get the word out to our community, which Shannon will share with us in a few minutes.

But as cool as this slick little invitation is and the ones that follow it will be (some will be mailed to 20,000 homes), this is going to take a lot more than just intentionally targeting our programming and message series. It is going to take the people of NHCC getting into the game at whatever level they can.

For us to be successful in this, everyone who says "NHCC is my church" needs to answer these three questions in some way ...

- Where will I serve over the next 5 months so that new people who come to NHCC are made to feel welcome (like we were expecting them to show up)? As you see every Sunday morning when you come in we've got the people wearing the purple shirts. They are part of our hospitality team, our first impressions team, and we can always use help with that. We can always use help in Children's ministry and in Student Ministry ... Small group leaders. We need to have more people who will help/volunteer to be able to handle larger crowds of people. If you have any interest in that you can talk to me, to Mica, Kitti or any of our staff members and we'll help you get linked up to the right place.
- The second question is: What will I give financially in support of the ministry of NHCC over the next year? It costs money to have a staff and a building and programs and marketing, especially at the size of our congregation and our community.
- The third question is: Who will I invite during Outreach Season 2014?

And I hope, if NHCC is your church, you will seek answers to those questions and that you will act on them in whatever way you're able to and in whatever way God leads you to. In particular, and I just need to say this, we need more people to get in the game financially. This has been kind of a tough winter. We've talked a lot about how to do that via our website and if you haven't yet signed up to regularly contribute, we need you.

However, even more than the people of NHCC getting involved, we need for God to be involved.

As Jesus once told his disciples ...

*"The Spirit gives life ... No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."
John 6:63,65 (NLT)*

... which is why part of what we need to do this morning is to ask God to empower our efforts.

So, here's how we're going to close out our time this morning.

1. We're going to do a guided prayer walk through this building.

- a. Grouped by section.
 - b. You won't have to pray out loud
 - c. 10 minutes to complete
2. Final instructions about next week.
 3. Dismiss for a guided prayer experience which you can do on your own.

Activities / Prayer

8:45/10:00/11:30

1. Divide into three groups – “follow your hosts” - go and pray over each area
(shannon, julie, michele in each area)
2. Come back to aud – pray over auditorium
3. Shannon – outreach project packet / bag stuffing stations (stuff your own bags, give to friends, family or put in random place)

4. Shannon “For Next Sunday”

Next week and throughout this season, a little reminder to:

1. Show up a little earlier than normal.
2. Do not park on the street or front of the upper lot (please leave the close spots for our guests).
3. Please smile and say “hello” to new visitors; It's important for new people to receive a warm welcome from people who are not on church staff or in an official capacity wearing a purple shirt. Introduce yourself, and a great opening question is “how long have you been attending NHCC?” You may find that you're shaking hands with someone who has been attending NHCC for 18 years.
4. Please “move to the middle” seats or the sides. Leave the aisle seats open for guests.
5. Pray for Rick to give a great message!

Endnotes