

Outsiders
Standing by the Door
November 13, 2018

**Worship Song – Jesus Paid It All / Reckless
Love / T&G**

Announcements – Shannon

Feature – Home / Offering

Good morning everyone. Would you
pray with me?

Father in Heaven, thank you so
much that you sent Jesus to bring us
home to You. We're grateful that He
gave His life on the cross to make
that possible for us.

Help us to always remember the

people around us who have not yet found *their* way home; the many who are still searching for You – maybe without even knowing it.

Use us as You will in Your great mission of searching for and rescuing those who are lost.

Amen.

In January of 1786, a group of friends met at a tavern in Boston, Massachusetts to discuss how they might solve a very serious problem:

The deadly shipwrecks that were becoming more and more commonplace off the Northeast coast of the United States.

Obviously, with no radar or radio technology available back then, it

wasn't possible to do anything about *preventing* shipwrecks, so their focus was on rescuing those whose ships *had been wrecked*.

Out of that meeting *The Humane Society of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* was formed ...

... with the honorable James (Boe'-du-in) Bowdoin serving as its President.

Soon after, Bowdoin and his little band of followers set about recruiting anyone and everyone who might be able to help in their mission.

For instance, they constructed "Huts of Refuge" ...

.. all along the coast of Massachusetts (and eventually the entire Northeast) so

that shipwrecked persons who washed ashore might, by chance, find shelter.ⁱ

They offered cash prizes to anyone who could develop a technique for reviving persons “near death” by drowning or overcome by smoke or gases.

As time went on, the sophistication – and daring – of their methodology increased.

They began to build surfboats ...

... and they equipped many of the huts with the surfboats to be used in rescue missions.

Whenever blizzards and storms hit the coast, Society volunteers would walk the shoreline between the huts,

scanning the horizons for ships in trouble or going down. If one was sighted, *those* volunteers would then call out all the *other* volunteers and together they would devote everything they had to the rescue of passengers and crew.

Their motto was, “You *have* to go out; but you *don’t* have to come back.”ⁱⁱ

How about that for a recruiting slogan?

And “go out” they did, regardless of danger. And because they did, thousands of people were saved from certain death.

“It would be impossible to exaggerate their bravery,” writes one historian. “A winter beach on Cape Cod is fearsome

[enough] all by itself, but the idea of launching a heavy, wooden boat through pounding surf [during a storm] is more than most rational men or women can imagine.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Over time, however, things changed.

The U.S. Coast Guard was formed and *it* took over the task of patrolling the shoreline in search of ships in distress.

Eventually, among the societies, the idea became “let the professionals do it – after all, they get paid and they’re better equipped to do it.”

So the volunteers ...

- Stopped manning the huts.
- Stopped searching for shipwrecks during storms.

- Stopped sending out teams to rescue the perishing.

And it made sense to stop because there was no longer a need for *them* to accomplish the original mission.

But, do you know what's amazing? They didn't shut down. They didn't disband. Many of the Societies still exist *to this day*, still owning and maintaining former huts of refuge.

In fact, you can find them all up and down the Eastern Seaboard ...

... only now they're a lot fancier and they serve as museums, restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts.

Furthermore ...

- Many of the societies still hold regular meetings of their members.
- They have dinners and awards banquets.
- Some even have surfboat races just for the fun of it.

They're actually very busy these days.

They're just no longer in the lifesaving business.

Our Mission

Now, I tell you this story for a very simple reason: *the same thing can happen and has happened to many well-meaning and sincere followers of Jesus and even entire churches.* They have also

gotten out of the lifesaving – the *spiritual* lifesaving – business.

And like those Humane Societies that are still in existence, most of those congregations haven't shut down nor have they disbanded. Many still have very nice buildings where they hold wonderful meetings each week (called worship services) and they sponsor great activities and regular get-togethers of their members (called small groups). They're actually very busy these days.

They're just not in the lifesaving business anymore.

But *unlike* those Societies whose efforts no longer *needed* to be directed towards the mission of its founders,

the need for *us* (if we're Christians) ...
the need for *us* to carry out the mission
of *our* Founder – Jesus of Nazareth – *is*
as urgent as ever because ...

- So many people in this world are still flailing about in the storms of life.
- So many are still perishing in the shipwreck of their mind, body and soul.
- So many are still lost and bound for an eternity without the grace of God.

And they all still matter to Jesus who came and gave His life because “God so loved the world” and He wants no one to perish.

They matter to Jesus who would often say things like ...

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?” Luke 15:4 (NIV)

“Won’t members of the Humane Society who see the ship going down leave the safety of the shore and enter the water so they can rescue as many as possible?”

Of course they will! That’s why the Society exists in the first place.

And it’s also why – metaphorically

speaking – we exist in the first place. And by “we” I mean North Heartland.

25 years ago (almost to the day), when we began recruiting the core group that would launch this church in October of 1994, our intention was *not* to create a new and better church for people who already knew Jesus; for people who were already “safe on the shore” so to speak.

At the time – and even now – there were many great churches for “insiders” and there was no need for another one.

Instead, we believed God was calling us to create a church where success isn’t ultimately measured by ...

- How many people show up each

week for services or small groups.

- Or how many volunteers who serve
- Or how good the music or sermon is
- Or how nice the place looks
- Or how much money is given
- Or how wonderful the children's and youth programs are
- Or how many Impact Partners are supported.

Those things *are* important but, we believed God was calling us to create a church where ...

Success is ultimately measured by how well we do at “spiritual lifesaving” – bringing “outsiders” to the faith into a relationship with Jesus and His church.

In fact, throughout our history, I have said repeatedly that *the one thing* that absolutely has to happen and keep on

happening through the ministry of NHCC is that we regularly see *spiritually drowning people in our local community spiritually rescued and brought into the spiritual family of Jesus.*

In other words, the “outsiders to the faith” ...

- Who live next door to us
- Whose kids go to school with our kids
- Who sit next to us in Math class (or on the bus)
- Who play pickleball, volleyball, wallyball, softball or whatever-ball with us

If all the time, energy and money we invest in this project called North Heartland doesn't lead some of those

folks to accept Christ and join with us in following Him, then *we are failing*.

And if we are failing in that way, it's time to make some radical changes or even close the doors because this is the reason God put us here.

Now, fortunately, that's never happened to us. But it easily could.

See, very few Christians or churches ever make an intentional choice to get out of the spiritual lifesaving business. They just sort of drift away from it. They get distracted and let other things – sometimes really good things – take the place of the fundamental mission ...

... which is why, from time-to-time we need to remember as a church why

we're here; that we're in the spiritual lifesaving business.

“Help Me”

Now, at this point, some of you are thinking, “well, Rick, all of this is good to know *about North Heartland*. Thank you very much. But how is it supposed to help *me, personally?*”

Very good question. Two answers.

First, if you're not a Christian – if you're not a believer in Jesus – I hope this helps you understand how much you matter not only to Him but to us. If it wasn't for you and people like you, we wouldn't be here. If it wasn't for people like you, I would have never considered doing this

job.

So maybe it helps you to know that somebody cares about you; that we feel like you're worth the effort that it took and still takes to grow and manage this little venture.

Second answer ... if you're a Christian and you call NHCC "home", you have the great fortune of being part of a church that can actually *help you* maximize your impact as an ambassador - a representative - of Jesus to the "outsiders" in your world ... which, as you know if you've been here or watching online, is what we've been talking about for the past four weeks.

Not every Christ-follower can say that because a lot of churches aren't called

by God to do what we're called to do at NHCC. That's not meant to imply that we're "better" than any other church in this area. We're just very clear on why we exist and what makes us different.

So, let me illustrate why I say you are fortunate to be part of this church. Remember that little equation we've been using throughout this series?

$$\mathbf{MI = HP + CP + CC}$$

Maximum Impact (MI) with the "outsiders" in your life happens when you combine ...

- "High Potency" with ...
- "Close Proximity" with ...
- "Clear Communication"

But that's not exactly true. There's still something missing. Here's why.

- Let's say your relationship with Jesus is really strong and it's apparent to others that it's influencing your life. That's what we mean by high potency.
- And let's say that instead of avoiding outsiders, you pursue and engage them. You love and serve them. You build meaningful relationships with them just like Jesus did. That's close proximity (or CP).
- And let's say that you're explaining (*with words!*) who Jesus is and what He has done for the world and for you. Your communication is

clear.

You're hitting the mark on all three factors! You're "letting your light shine" as Jesus Himself once put it. You're a great ambassador for Him. The Holy Spirit is using you to influence people who are not Christians to consider what it would be like to believe in and follow Jesus.

And some of them are very interested. They want to know more.

The problem is ... *where do you go next with those folks?*

That question was what finally convinced me to step out and plant this church.

I know I tell this story every couple of years and I'll probably tell it a dozen more times before I'm done, but I keep telling it because it still applies in my life even today, 25 years later.

When I was a youth pastor at Park Hill Baptist Church over on Highway 9 in the early 90s, we made friends with our neighbors and parents of kids who went to school with our kids. And we began to have spiritual conversations with them. All three of the factors in the equation were in play.

But, one day it occurred to me that because our church was set up for *insiders* – it measured success primarily by how well they were taken care of (and I mean that in the best possible way: Park Hill Baptist was really *great*

at pastoral care, way better than we've ever been) ...

Because our church was set up for insiders, it occurred to me if any of those outsiders with whom we were building friendships were ever going to really know and follow Jesus, I was going to have to create a *separate environment* - a separate offline Bible study in my house so they could understand the gospel.

And if any of them actually decided to become Christians, I was going to have to figure out some way - again, offline - to teach them what Jesus said about life and how He wants us to live.

And if more than a few made that decision, we'd have to figure out how to

run a children's ministry in our basement!

Now, there's nothing wrong with doing those things. In fact, I had a leader in a national Christian organization challenge me that that was exactly what I should do.

But it all seemed so inefficient to me. And I had a lot of questions running through my mind.

- Shouldn't my church *help me* with this? And not just me: what about the average Christian – someone who wasn't in full-time ministry like I was – what are *they* going to do?
- Why is it all up to me – or any other

follower of Jesus who wants their non-Christian friends and families to be able to get up close and personal to Jesus?

- Shouldn't there be *at least a few churches* set up where *insiders* can bring *outsiders* and be confident that that those folks will experience something that feels like it might have been designed with them in mind (because it was)?

After all, that pattern of insiders inviting outsiders runs all through the story of Jesus' ministry.

For instance, in John's telling of the story, we read that one day Jesus decided to visit the hometown of Peter and Andrew. While he was there he said

to Philip: “Come, follow me.”

And Philip did.

But John tells us that Philip also did something else.

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”
John 1:45 (NLT)

“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for

*yourself,” Philip replied.
John 1:46 (NLT)*

And Nathanael did. And he, too, believed and began to follow Jesus.

By the way, this same principle shows up almost 20 years later when the Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Corinth about their worship services. Paul realizes that insiders are going to invite outsiders so he cautions them about becoming “too spiritual” in what they do in that service.

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say

*that you are out of your
minds?*

*1 Corinthians
14:23 (ESV)*

*How can anyone in the
position of an outsider say
“Amen” to your
thanksgiving when he does
not know what you are
saying? 1 Corinthians
14:16 (ESV)*

Obviously, in this case, Paul is specifically referring to “speaking in tongues” but I think the principle applies to everything we do.

In other words, churches ought to expect that insiders will invite outsiders and plan services accordingly.

Now a lot of Christians get really nervous whenever they hear that kind of talk because they immediately think “oh, you’re just going to dumb everything down for seekers. You’re not interested in worship or talking about truth. You just want to entertain and make people feel good.”

So let me be really clear.

Being a church that plans on outsiders being in the room doesn’t mean you don’t worship.

- It means you do it in a way that an outsider can follow and understand. You avoid speaking or singing in “Christianese.”
- And it also means if you’re a

Christian, you subordinate your personal need for 30 minutes of praise and worship to the needs of those who can't engage in that.

And being a church that expects outsiders to be present doesn't mean you water down the truths that are hard to hear (like sin and judgment and the reality of Jesus perfect life, atoning death and miraculous resurrection).

- Instead, it means you don't assume that they know all of that or believe it.
- And it means you don't spend weeks talking about "foolish controversies and genealogies" that have nothing to do with the main thing, which, as we've seen over and over again in

this series is *Jesus*: who He was, what He did and how He taught us to live.

- It means you don't get so deep in biblical data and theology that people can't apply it to everyday life. (Note to self)

Anyway ... to make a long story short, through all of those questions I had and a series of divine appointments and miraculous movements of the Holy Spirit, 25 years ago God said, "Rick, I want you to gather a group of people who will start a church that every Sunday creates an environment that helps *insiders* reach the *outsiders* in their lives; a church that *outsiders*

would love to attend because it was designed with them in mind.”

So that’s what we did ... because that’s what’s missing in that “maximum impact” equation.

$$\text{MI} = \text{HP} + \text{CP} + \text{CC} + \underline{\text{IC}}$$

In reality, Maximum Impact (MI) with the “outsiders” in your life happens when you combine ...

- “High Potency” with ...
- “Close Proximity” with ...
- “Clear Communication” ... AND ...
- An “Irresistible Church” (or IC).

And that is our goal at NHCC – to be a church that outsiders find hard to resist even if they don’t believe. They think,

“I’m not sure it’s God but have to admit, there’s something special here.”

So ... if you’re a Christian and this is your church, you’re very fortunate because ...

... our goal is to be an irresistible church but not just to reach “generic outsiders.” It’s to help *you* reach *your* outsiders and me reach mine.

And, over the years, Jetta and I have seen that happen again and again with people God has brought into our lives. And it’s still happening even today.

Implications

Now, having explained the fundamental calling of NHCC – the centrality of our “spiritual lifesaving mission” – I want to

get really practical about some of the implications if this is your church home or you're thinking about making this your church home.

Four things, very briefly.

1. Because our mission is different (not better) you need to go to the *Introduction to North Heartland* class.

You need to get the “big picture” because what we do *and why* probably isn't like the church you came from or grew up in.

BTW, the class is running today from 11-3 and includes a free lunch. If you can't do that, you need to watch for the next one.

2. Because our mission is different (not

better) you need to have a burden for outsiders or you will be frustrated.

What we do won't inspire you. You won't understand it. Doesn't mean you're a bad person, bad Christian, etc. You just won't be happy here for very long. I've seen it over and over through the years.

People will say to me "I really think we should do more of this or more of that in our services." And I try to listen because I know I don't know everything and maybe someone has a good idea, maybe God's trying to tell me something.

But the question that's always in the back of my mind (and sometimes comes out of my mouth) is "do you have any non-church distant-from-God people

that you care about? That you're praying will somehow come to Jesus and this church? Have you ever invited them to come with you?"

And the reason I think that is because *I do* and *I have*. And so have a bunch of other folks who call NHCC "home." And I have an *obligation* to make sure that what we do here helps them and helps me.

Now again, not every church needs to think like that. But this one does.

3. Because it's risky to invite an outsider, we must be engaging and excellent in what we do.

Whenever I talk about this it's usually to leaders and volunteers but I'm going to let everyone in on it today.

Whenever I talk about it to them, I describe of it in terms of an unwritten contract between those of us who produce whatever happens here on any given Sunday and those who have taken the risk of bringing an outsider or are thinking about it.

I usually say “If the people in the seats are going to invite someone who isn’t a Christian to what happens here, they need to be able to *trust* that what will happen (from the parking lot to the Well to the music to the sermon) will be engaging and excellent.

“If it’s not, *they* look bad. Instead of getting to talk about the message that was communicated in the sermon or the songs, they’re stuck having to explain

why it wasn't engaging or excellent.”

“And that experience – having to do that – discourages them from inviting anyone else” ...

... which, if you've been paying attention, *just kills us* when it comes to fulfilling the unique mission for which God put us here in the first place! If insiders don't feel good about inviting outsiders, game over.

It's that simple.

So let me be very clear about this contract. There are two parts to it.

1. When I (or anyone else) stands up to speak, my contract with you is that I will be *engaging* which means

understandable, useful, and authentic. I rarely talk about something unless it personally applies to me in some way.

2. When I stand up to speak ... or music or drama comes off this stage ... or when we run sound or lights or video or slides or children's ministry or student ministry or the coffee bar ... it will be excellent.

By excellence, I don't mean perfection because no one can be perfect except for Jesus. 😊 By excellence I mean not cringing when something happens.

- Cringing happens when the preacher isn't prepared and he does a lot of hand waving instead of making his point in a clear and

engaging manner.

- Cringing happens when we ask our singers and musicians to do things they're not gifted to do.
- Cringing happens when the coffee we're using isn't very good.
- Cringing happens when we don't give enough lead time for singers and musicians to prepare well.
- Cringing happens when equipment doesn't work right – the lights just flash on and off for no reason or the sound goes funky for a moment or my laptop freezes.

Some of you see me react when those things happen because I don't hide

frustration very well.

But my frustration isn't because I'm a perfectionist or a jerk (though sometimes I am). It's because we're violating the contract with the people who take the risk of inviting an outsider.

And truth be told, we need to do better. That's part of the reason why some changes are taking place around here.

Enough said. Final implication ...

4. Because outsider-focused ministry requires playing the "long game" it's easy to get discouraged. But, instead of giving up, keep praying and do what you can to *help others reach their outsiders.*

It takes all of us working together to

create the kind of church that outsiders love to attend.

“The Door”

As we come to the end of this series, I’m aware that we’ve used lots of different metaphors to describe what it looks like when insiders to the faith care about outsiders and reach out to them.

- We’ve talked about how it’s like searching for lost coins and lost sheep and lost sons.
- We’ve talked about fishing for people – for men and women – instead of perch.
- We’ve talked about finding the

stockpile of an enemy army and feeling the burden to share it with others.

- We've talked about The Humane Society and their commitment to the lifesaving business.

But a year or so before we got the vision for North Heartland, I came across another metaphor one that still grabs my heart because it truly describes what North Heartland is all about.

It's a poem called *I Stand By the Door*. It was written many years ago by Samuel Moor Shoemaker, the pastor who started Alcoholics Anonymous.

Shoemaker understood that most people who were addicted to alcohol we're

really searching for something else – God. And, so he devoted his life to helping them find God as he had found God and he wrote this poem to explain why.

As you leave this morning you can pick up a copy on the way out, but here's how it goes:

I stand by the door. I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.

The “door” is the most important door in the world – it is the door through which people walk when they find God. There's no use my going way inside and staying there when so many are still outside and they, as much as I, crave to know where the door is.

All that many ever find is only the wall where a door ought to be. They creep along the wall like blind men, with outstretched, groping hands, feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door, yet they never find it . . . so I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world is for people to find that door – the door to God. The most important thing anyone can *do* is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands, and put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks and opens to the person’s own touch.

Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die on cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter

- die for want of what is within their grasp. They live on the other side of it because they have not found it ... and opened it, and walked in, and found Him . . . So I stand by the door.

There is another reason why I stand there. Some people get part way in and become afraid, for God is so very great, and asks of us our all. Somebody must be by the door to tell them that they are spoiled for the old life - they have seen too much of the new!

“Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any more.”

Somebody must be watching for the frightened who seek to sneak out

just where they came in, to tell them how much better it is inside. So for them, too, I stand by the door.

It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is. I admire the people who go way in ... who inhabit those inner rooms, and know the depth and heights of God and call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is. *But I wish they would not forget how it was before they got in.*

Then they would be able to help the people who have not yet even found the door. Or the people who want to run away again from God.

You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long and forget the people

outside the door.

So, as for me, I shall take my old accustomed place. Near enough to God to hear him and know He is there, but not so far from people as not to hear them and remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door - thousands of them; millions of them. But - more important for me - one of them, two of them, ten of them whose hands *I* am intended to put on the latch.

For those I shall stand by the door and wait for those who seek it. I would rather be a doorkeeper. So I stand by the door.^{iv}

Friends, if you want to know what North Heartland is all about ... we're a door-keeper church. And we will continue to take our old accustomed place; near enough to God to hear him and know He is there, but not so far from people as not to hear them and remember they are there, too.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this series, at the end of the first message, I invited everyone to write on the response card in the seat backs the names of the outsiders to faith that we personally care about. And then we collected them as everyone left and our staff prayed over those names that week.

Here's the stack of cards which represents over 1,200 people - outsiders who matter to us.

If you weren't here that day, as the band does this next song, I invite you to do that as well. Take a card and write the name or names.

And then you're welcome to bring that card down to me and I'll do with it what I'm going to do with the rest of these. So, here we go ...

Feature – Prayer for a Friend

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Speaking of inviting outsiders ...

Christmas at the Movies begins two weeks from today.

2. Before then, next Sunday, we'll look at the idea of being thankful from a new perspective in a message called "The Entitlement Cure."

3. Let's stand for a blessing.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May His face shine upon you.

May your heart be as compassionate towards outsiders

As His heart is towards you.

Amen. Happy Thanksgiving!

Endnotes

i. www.uslife-savingservice.org/chronology.html

ii. Ibid.

iii. www.capecodtoday.com/features/brg/232.shtml

iv See www.aabibliography.com/dickbhtml/article10.html