

From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

Well, the deed is done. Office renovations begin at The Meeting House tomorrow morning, and I've moved out of my office entirely . . . as have Peggy and Neville. Some of the things went to climate-controlled storage; some went to the PODS in the parking lot; and a great quantity of office stuff will now reside on and around my table for about two months. I'm trying to be grateful. Really!

Last Sunday we began a consideration of *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*,¹ the first of which is **Radical Hospitality**. Robert Schnase, the author of the book, had a few things to say about Radical Hospitality that didn't really fit into the sermon, but were so good that I wanted you to have them:

"Many of us approach the spiritual life the way we would an interesting hobby or constructive pastime, like fishing, gardening, golfing, or belonging to a book club. Being Christian comprises a small part of our identity. We attend church when it's convenient, we pick up some helpful insights and enjoy the people, and we serve on committees to help the organization run smoothly. Church, religion, and the spiritual life provide some benefit; but we remain puzzlingly remote from real interior work, mystery, or notions of grace.

"Practicing religion in this way *confirms* something about ourselves rather than *transforming* the nature of who we are. Religion is not really a power for living; it is an appendage to an otherwise harried and hectic schedule. Religion is more about attending church than following Christ. For many of us, personal prayer is incidental to the flow of life; serving others is something we do to be a faithful part of the team; contributing money involves doing our fair share. **It's not that we close the door on God; we just haven't made much effort to seriously receive God fully into our lives.**

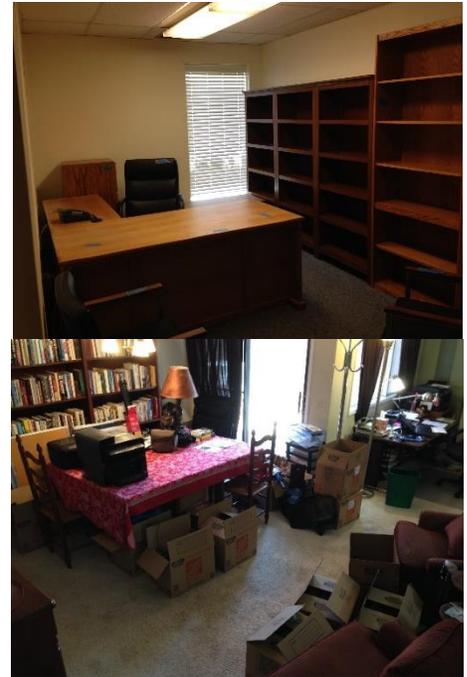
"Those people we admire because they display a depth, passion, integrity, and wisdom forged by a dynamic and vibrant faith have not taken the spiritual life so casually. At some fundamental point, **they decided to receive God, to offer a hospitality that goes the second mile—an uncommon, radical hospitality toward God.** Instead of going to visit God for an hour each week they bring God home with them, giving God place, priority, and devotion."² I hope that becomes more and more true of my life, your life, and our life together.

Bishop Schnase's two books are well worth reading. What we'll do together will only touch the high spots. Here are some more nuggets on the subject of Radical Hospitality. They all come from *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*:

- "In most communities, 40 to 60 percent of people have no church relationship. A majority of our neighbors on the streets where we live do not know the name of a pastor to call when they face unexpected grief. Most of our co-workers have a few close friends and a circle of acquaintances but do not know the sustaining

¹ Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

² Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), pp. 38-39.



grace that a church offers. Most of the families with whom we travel to our children's soccer tournaments and band concerts, most of the fine students we meet from the university, and most of the people who repair our cars and serve us in restaurants do not have a forum where they learn about the essentials of peace, justice, genuine repentance, forgiveness, love, and unmerited grace" (pp. 19-20).

- "People need to know that God loves them, that they are of supreme value, and that their life has significance. People need to know that they are not alone; that when they face life's difficulties, they are surrounded by a community of grace; and that they do not have to figure out entirely for themselves how to cope with family tensions, self-doubts, periods of despair, economic reversal, and the temptations that hurt themselves or others.

"People need to know the peace that runs deeper than an absence of conflict, the hope that sustains them even through the most painful periods of grief, the sense of belonging that blesses them and stretches them and lifts them out of their own preoccupations. People need to learn how to offer and accept forgiveness and how to serve and be served.

"As a school for love, the church becomes a congregation where people learn from one another how to love. People need to know that life is not having something to live on but something to live for, that life comes not from taking for oneself but by giving of oneself. People need a sustaining sense of purpose" (p. 18).

- "Unfortunately, church members often love each other so much that their lives are so intertwined and their interests so interwoven that church groups become impenetrable to new people. Closeness closes out new people who feel like outsiders looking in, and those on the inside don't even notice. Church members feel content because their own needs are met" (p. 20).
- "Hospitality means we pray, plan, prepare, and work toward the purpose of helping others receive what we have received in Christ. . . . Hospitality is a quality of spiritual initiative, the practice of an active and genuine love, a graciousness unaffected by self-interest, an opening of ourselves and our faith community to receive others" (p. 20).
- "A congregation marked by such hospitality adopts an invitational posture that changes everything it does. Members work with a heightened awareness of the person who is not present, the neighbors, friends, and co-workers who have no church home. With every ministry, they consider how to reach those who are not yet present" (pp. 21-22).
- "Churches practicing Radical Hospitality offer a surprising and unexpected quality of depth and authenticity in their caring for the stranger. Newcomers intuitively sense that" (p. 21).

I'd say we do a good job of hospitality at CBF . . . but what might happen if we did a *RADICAL* job?

Dave

Postscript: While “following our noses” yesterday, Jill and I found ourselves spending the afternoon walking around the battlefields of Gettysburg. That felt like an appropriate way to spend Memorial Day. While you’ve probably been there yourself, I’ve attached a short handout that summarizes the events of those momentous days.

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week twenty-one: GONE FISHING

“Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (Mark 1:17).

It has always been of peculiar interest to me that, when it came time to pick His team, whom He would train and then send out with a commission to reach entire nations, Jesus picked rough, callous-handed men who had spent their lives in the fishing business. He did not go to the institutions of higher learning looking for the best and the brightest. He did not go to the halls of government looking for those with gifted persuasive powers. He did not go to the yeshivas and pick those most knowledgeable in the Torah. He went to Galilee, to a bunch of ragtag fishermen, and called them to follow Him with the promise that He would make them become “fishers of men.” Why them? Why fishermen?

A REAL FISHERMAN IS POSITIVE

Jesus is after those who are positive, those who see an answer in every problem, not those who look for problems in every answer.

A REAL FISHERMAN IS PERSISTENT

Jesus goes after those who are not simply positive but persistent. He calls folks who have a “never give up” attitude, who keep on keeping on, regardless of the circumstances or situation.

A REAL FISHERMAN IS PATIENT

Jesus knew when He called those fishermen to follow Him that one of their common characteristics was patience. They could not have spent their lives at this trade without it. He knew that those who followed Him would have to be patient in future times when the situation would appear hopeless. Jesus is still looking for men and women who are not locked into one way of doing things. He desires us to be willing to try different methods as we fish for souls.

A REAL FISHERMAN IS PASSIONATE

I once fought a large bonefish for almost half an hour. Finally, when it was within ten feet of the boat and a few hours from the taxidermist, it jumped out of the water, spit the hook in our direction, and swam away. Sam, my guide, had a fisherman’s fit. He hates to lose one!

As you memorize this verse, meditate on the wonder that the Lord Jesus still uses ordinary people like you and me to do extraordinary things for His glory. Be positive; start looking for an answer in every problem. Be persistent; never give up. Be patient; try some different methods. And be passionate; always hate to lose one! Jesus said, *“Follow Me, and I will send you out to fish for people.”*