

I want to begin this morning by saying that I believe in you as disciples of Jesus Christ!

I also believe that together as a church we are poised to do great things for the kingdom of God and to make an impact upon this community!

I believe that God is right now birthing some great opportunities for Linglestown Life.

One opportunity emerged from a conversation that took place recently about Vacation Bible School. What thrilled my soul was hearing people who wanted to make certain that we were investing in kid's lives in ways that would truly make a difference. The individuals gathered around that table didn't just want to have a week of fun; they wanted to create an environment that fostered spiritual growth. They were willing to think outside the box- outside the traditional VBS program that you pull out of the box- and think about a unique opportunity that involved not just kids but whole families and extended our reach beyond our kids to children and families in our community.

That is why I believe in you as a church!

And this past Tuesday was the first Dad's Event which launched out of our LAHMBs ministry. Several young dads from Linglestown Life and their kids met with a teen dad who has full custody of his child. Add that to the expanding impact of the LAMBs ministry and suddenly an idea that was birthed in the hearts of two disciples is beginning to make a lift-changing impact on more and more lives!

That is why I believe in you as a church!

And these are just a few examples of people in this church who are reaching out to others.

I believe in this church; but...

But the reality is that while God can give us the dreams and visions that God has for bringing hope to our community; the reality is that believing it is not enough!

The fact that you are here today says that you believe in this church. But as we learned through this last sermon series, what we believe is not always consistent with how we live.

I believe in this church, but...

So how do we close the gap that exists between what we believe and how we live?

One word: Priority!

We need to take a serious look at our priorities. If we are going to close the gap between what we say we believe and how we live it means examining our priorities and taking the steps necessary to get them right.

And we are not the first disciples or church to need reminded about our priorities. In the book of Revelation John records Jesus words to seven churches. Each of those admonitions to the disciples in those churches begins with a good word. But there is also a challenge; a challenge

to look deeply at how one lives out their faith and if these disciples have abandoned their first priority.

Listen to a few of the things Jesus said. To the church in Ephesus, “You have forsaken your first love.” To the church in Thyatira Jesus challenges their “toleration of immoral practices that draw them away from the faith.” And to the church at Laodicea Jesus says “you are neither cold nor hot- you are lukewarm.”

The last thing we want as a church and as disciples is to be ‘lukewarm’ or to be described as having forsaken our first love. And the way we avoid those traps is by regularly examining our priorities- ours individually, as a family, and as a church.

Simply put, the church is not a priority for many people today. We allow our schedule to be overwhelmed by other good things which crowd out the best. And every time we place something in front of the church we tell others around us (including our children) that the church is not a priority.

One reason I think we fail to make the church a priority in our lives is because we see the church as something we ‘add’ to our lives. But the church, and more importantly our faith, is not something that gets added to our calendar like another appointment. Our faith is not something we add-on; and going to church isn’t just another obligation in an already crowded week. Our faith, and our commitment to the church, should be as much a part of our daily life as breathing is to our everyday existence. (And if some of you needed to schedule time to breath I fear that I’d be performing a lot more funerals.)

Let me challenge you on one priority; that being regular time for spiritual growth. And let me explain it this way. (Pull out a highchair) For the first few years of our life we fully depend on someone to feed us. Like an infant we open up and someone spoons in something that is good for us.

Highchairs are ok for infants and toddlers but there comes a time when we need to start feeding ourselves. And if we are going to eat right it means making a priority out of reading and experiencing God’s word. How we do that will be unique to each of us; but several ways include: making Bible reading and prayer a regular discipline in your life; finding brothers and sisters with whom you can do life together like in a small group; and serving the needs of others.

That is just some of what we’re going to be doing at the beginning of the year when we start Experiencing God. You’ll have an opportunity for daily time in God’s word and learning together in a small community.

You know I love to hear your compliments each week when you tell me the sermon was meaningful to you; but do you know what really fills my heart with joy? It’s when you tell me how you’ve gone home and applied what I spoke about; how you read scripture and prayed and lived out the opportunities that God placed before you. Those things tell me that the church and your faith are a priority in your life and not just an add-on.

We need to take individual responsibility for our spiritual growth. The church is the place where that is facilitated; but it becomes a priority when we take the initiative to not just believe it, but live it!

There is one other way that we demonstrate that the church is a priority in our life; investing in the church and in one another. For some people the church is a fountain from which they drink. They are always drinking deeply from the outflow, but never replenishing the well.

One way that we make the church a priority is by investing in it with our lives, our time, our service and our finances.

The challenge is to not just say we believe in the church, but to make it a priority. That means that we are not just takers, but givers. And not just givers of what is left over or of what I can afford to give, or serving when I have a little free time; but really stepping up and investing in one another and the ministry of Jesus Christ expressed through Linglestown Life.

How many of you believe that having a strong children's ministry and youth ministry is vital to the church? If you believe it then how are you invested in it? Do you throw a few dollars in the offering? That's good, but have you invested your life? (And no saying, I've put in my time! Investing in what you believe is a priority means that you are never done, never too old; there is always a place to serve!)

How many of you believe that having an excellent music ministry is vital to the church?

How many of you believe that having a facility for outreach and ministry is vital to the church?

We could go on and on, but I think you get the point! We believe that all those things are important, we believe in the church, but we don't always make it a priority.

To this whole issue of investing I want to invite Ron Estep to come up and share with you one aspect of our investing which demonstrates that we believe Linglestown Life is a priority in our lives.

RON (Steps, Investment Card, etc)

"What's in your hand?"

I can imagine Jesus asking the disciples that question while they were pleading with him to send the crowd away. Five thousand plus had followed Jesus into a remote place and now the disciples wanted Jesus to send the crowd away to find something to eat.

Then Jesus said, "You give them something to eat."

I can imagine Peter looking at his hands and saying under his breathe, 'I'm a fisherman, not a miracle worker!'"

Then Peter's brother Andrew comes up with a boy's lunch- five loaves and two fish. (Think biscuits and sardines!)

"Nice try, brother," Peter says, "but how does that feed 5,000 plus?"

Jesus held up the 5 loaves and 2 fish and blessed them and began handing the pieces to the disciples.

Imagine Peter with this little piece of bread in his hands. He walks up to the first group of 50 and he's got to be thinking, "This isn't going to feed all these people, why it won't even feed me!"

Peter walks up to the first person and says, "Don't take too much!" Meanwhile, can you imagine what's going through his head?

Why did Jesus send me out here with this little piece of bread? What's this guy at the end of the line thinking? There's not going to be enough when I get to him and he's going to pound on me!

So Peter steps to the next person and says, "Just a little, remember there are a lot of people to feed." Then as he continues down the line repeating the same thing over and over again he begins to realize, "Now wait a second, this bread should be all gone by now! But it's not!"

And suddenly Peter looks down at the next person and says, "No, take a little more, really!" And as Peter steps to each person he begins to see that the bread which Jesus blessed is multiplying in his hands.

Peter's face turns from worried to joyful as he realizes that he is part of a miracle- a miracle that is happening in his own hands. Now he's practically beside himself as he goes back and forth feeding the multitude, shouting "Eat! Eat up everyone! There's more than enough!"

And when everyone had had enough the disciples gathered up 12 basketfuls of leftovers. One basket for each of them to carry as a reminder that the miracle is your hands.

What's in your hand this morning?

A miracle? A blessing?

Actually it is all of that and more. It is changed lives, it is needs met, it is relationships restored, it is hope and healing and so much more. And it is in your hand if you'll take what God has blessed and begin to give it away. Think of it as an investment in your faith; and investment in others; an investment in this church.

I believe in this Church. I believe in you. And, I believe that if we get our priorities right God is going to do some great things!

What's in your hand?