

Invitation

After a few weeks of talking about storms, I felt we were to celebrate communion this morning. Thursday evening as I prayed and studied, I just couldn't get things to come together for this message. Finally I laid my notes down and just asked again, "Lord, what is it you want me to say?" I sensed the Holy Spirit whisper into my heart what I felt was an invitation, hence the title of this message. This isn't much of a sermon, but I feel this is a word from the Lord for us, for someone today. Jesus extends an invitation to all of us. As I prayed I sensed the Holy Spirit whisper these four invitations to my heart.

Come participate in the life of God. God wants us to be in relationship, in fellowship with him. This isn't about joining a church or getting our names on the membership roll. It's not about hanging out with friends on Sunday or eating dinner together on Wednesday night. It's not an invitation to turn over a new leaf, to get yourself together by going to church, this is about participating in the life of God! This is about a life changing, transforming encounter with the living God! This is about a new relationship with God, becoming a new person in Christ. It's about accepting his offer to come and be made spiritually alive. It's spiritual transformation. Come participate in the life of God.

Jesus said, **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."** **John 10:10.** He has come so you can have life. As long as you are living without God, without his forgiveness, without his salvation, his life in you, you are destined for destruction and death. Not just physical death, but eternal death, eternal separation from God. That's not what Jesus wants. He has come to give you life.

The bible says **"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world...following its desires and thoughts...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."** **Ephesians 2:1-10.** You were dead but through Christ and his saving grace, you can be made spiritually alive. You can have eternal life. The provision is there. God is extending to you His invitation: Come participate in the life of God.

Jesus said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."** **Matthew 11:28.** The invitation is extended to come to him and find rest. The burden of sin you've been carrying, it's too much. Jesus invites you to stop dragging that sin and guilt

around with you. You can give it all to Jesus and in exchange for your sin, he will give you new life. It's not just a change in status. He invites you to come participate in the life of God.

How? What am I saying? How can I participate in the life of God? First of all, we have to admit and acknowledge that apart from life in Christ as the Scripture said, we are dead in our transgressions and sin. We have all sinned and as a result we are spiritually dead, cut off from the life of God. We need a Savior because we can't save ourselves. What we can't do God has done for us by sending Jesus to die on the cross, taking our place. He bore the just penalty for sin that should have been placed on us, dying in our place. God then raised Jesus from the dead in triumph over sin and its' penalty. The bible says if we will believe in Jesus, that he died on the cross for us and rose again, if we will believe that, repent of our sin and ask him to save us, he will do it. He will save us, forgive our sins and give us new life. When we do that, the bible says it's like we are born again. We are made alive in Christ! Everything is made new!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 We are born again into a new life as new creations in Christ. And look at this -- from the Message Paraphrase. Through this salvation, **“Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. The best invitation we ever received! We were also given absolutely terrific promises to pass on to you – your tickets to participation in the life of God after you turned your back on a world corrupted by lust.” 2 Peter 1:3-4**

He saves us so we can become partakers of his divine nature, we can participate in the very life of God. This is his invitation: Come experience real life. Abundant life. His invitation is for you. It's not too late to participate in the very life of God!

Here is the second invitation I heard the Holy Spirit whisper to my heart. **Turn away from sin and be holy.** If you have to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ; you have repented of your sins and made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, then he expects you to live the life to which he calls you – to live a holy life. We talk about living a separated life, meaning separated from the world, from the culture that disobeys God and his word, and separated or set apart to God. We belong to him and that means we choose to be like him.

The bible speaks clearly of the difference between how we used to live before we were made alive in Christ and how we are to live now. **“As obedient children, do not conform to the**

evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:14-15

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light... and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness...” Ephesians 5:8-10

He made us alive in Christ and then he tells us “don’t go back to a life of sin and death.” How can we live a holy life in a sin filled culture like ours? It’s not just about will power. Understand, we are made holy by his mercy and grace. Our standing before God is that we are clean, righteous and holy in Christ, but what about our practice on a daily basis? How do we live a holy life? As a new creation in Christ, as a partaker of his divine nature, you have the power and freedom to make new, redeemed choices. “Find out what pleases the Lord” Paul said, then focus on those things. Learn to desire what God desires for you and your life. The bible says, **“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:1-2.**

The bible goes on to tell us to “Put to death” things like sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, anger, rage, slander and filthy language, lying. All of those things are part of how you used to live – part of your old life. But that’s not who you are! Not anymore. You are a new creation in Christ so live like it. Treat those things as though they are dead, or as though you are dead to them. That way of living is no longer an option for you, not as a child of God. Ask God to show you what pleases him and then live that way. Stay focused on Jesus and living for him. Make your life about pleasing God. Love what God loves and reject what God rejects. Live that holy life that God has called you to.

The third invitation I heard the Lord whisper was **Take up your cross and follow Me.** A life surrendered to Jesus isn’t easy. I apologize if preachers have tried to make this sound easy. “Just repeat this prayer and you’ll be saved and then just go ahead and live as you please.” That’s not the gospel. He calls us to participate in his life and that means to turn from sin and live a holy life by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. He calls us to participate in His life and that means to take up a cross and follow him. I’ve got news for you, that cross isn’t jewelry around your neck, it’s a means of death. It means dying to yourself. It means saying “I choose Jesus instead of the pleasure of this world.” It means saying “I choose obedience to Jesus

and his word rather than doing what I want, rather than doing what pleases me, rather than living how I want to live.” It means following him and obeying him, regardless of the cost. Jesus said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” Luke 9:23-24** This is what the Christian life is all about. It’s about following Jesus in obedience. Come participate in the very life of God. How? By being born again through faith in Christ. By turning away from sin and setting your heart, your affection, on heaven and the life of God. By taking up your cross each day and following him in obedience. And how do we do that?

How did Jesus say to do it? Daily. It is a daily choice, a daily surrender of our lives and our choices in devotion to God. “I will live for you. I will follow you. I will say no to sin. I will say yes to You. Today.” It’s about daily accepting the call to a bold and courageous life of faith. Daily accepting the challenge to live counter-culturally. Dare to obey Jesus regardless of what everyone else says or thinks about it.

Here is the last invitation I heard the Lord whisper to my heart. **Come feast at my table.** I love coming to the table of the Lord. We call this communion. Some call it the Lord’s supper. Some call it the Eucharist a word which means thanksgiving or gratitude. This is a table of gratitude. A table of bread that is his body given for us as a sacrifice, taking our place on the cross, and the cup which is his blood spilled for us for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus said to eat the bread and drink from the cup and as often as we did this we were proclaiming his death. We were testifying of the power of his death and resurrection to save us from our sins, to give us this new life we’ve been talking about. There is spiritual strength that comes as we eat the bread and drink the cup with gratitude and thanksgiving. We participate in the life of God as we come with thanksgiving to his table.

I’m reminded of a great story Bob Benson told about another table, another invitation. (*See You At The House* page 68).

Will you accept his invitation, to come participate in the life of God; to turn away from sin and live a holy life; to take up your cross and follow Jesus; to feast at his table? How will you answer? How will you respond?

You that are going to help us serve, if you will come. You don't have to be a member of our church to receive communion, but all those who have been to the cross, who have made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, you are welcome to receive communion. Hold the cups until all have been served and we will take communion together.

The apostle Paul declared, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" Take and eat this bread in remembrance that Christ died for you and feast upon him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

In the same way after supper Jesus took the cup and according to Matthew's gospel, said, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Drink this cup in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful.

On the authority of God's word I declare to you that those sins you have confessed and for which you have repented before the Lord, those sins have been covered by the blood of Christ. You have been washed clean by his grace. Hear and believe the good news. In Christ you are forgiven. Your name is recorded in the book of life by his grace and through his mercy. Freely you have received his forgiveness, now go and sin no more. Instead, walk in that mercy and walk in forgiveness toward others.

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen."