

What's Up Weekly 8/18/2020

What's going on at the church?

Here at the church we continue to meet outside on Sherman Street, Sunday mornings at 10:00. Given the uncertainty surrounding COVID and school starting, church leadership has decided to continue meeting outside through the month of September, weather permitting.

As for the month of August, we still have a few things planned yet to help us focus on our families.

August 23rd: Warrior Day. Dress as your favorite warrior. Star Wars? Sure. Zelda? Why not. Zena? Hercules? You Bet. Steph Curry? Please don't. We will have a David and Goliath "Sling" zone set up afterward to try to use an old-fashioned sling to take out Goliath.

August 30th: Cookout Day. After service we are hoping to have a family, outdoors cookout with games set up like Kan-Jam, Cornhole, Bocci Ball and others!

In September, we won't have as many extra-curricular activities planned, but we will still make sure we are keeping our services a little shorter than normal, and we will be bringing back our Children's Ministry Moment each week.

That being said, we are planning on one very special Sunday in September. September 20th is the official "Back to Church" Sunday. It is a national day celebrated every year by churches all over the country. It's simply an opportunity for those that have been away from church for awhile to come back. That means it's also an excellent week to invite friends or family that may have been a little disconnected. I would encourage you to spend the next few weeks praying about who God would have you invite to come to church with you. We will try to get some promotional materials out in the next couple of weeks to make it a little easier to invite others to join you for church. We can promise you a well thought out and engaging service, so if you've enjoyed what we have been doing as a church family, invite someone to come and see for themselves!

As a part of Back to Church Sunday, we will also be having our annual church picnic on the same day, September 20th. We will use that time to reflect on our year so far, celebrate what God has been doing, and even announce some cool things that we hope to do for the rest of this year that we are already planning! We would love to have you invite your friends and family to join us for the picnic as well, it's for everyone! It will be at Hanging Rock Christian Camp, about 40 minutes away. This is a camp we support as one of our church missions and they have all kinds of fun activities like a Rope Swing, Climbing Wall, Fishing, Trails, Zip-line, etc. So mark off all day September 20th on your calendars, because it's going to be a great day!

What am I working on?

On top of my traditional workload, I'm also trying to get next years annual calendar planned out. I know it may sound a little early, but we are only a short month or so away from being in the fourth quarter of 2020 believe it or not!

I realize that even though we've been here awhile, we still haven't had a year together yet, and the time that we have had together, hasn't exactly been normal. That means that the church as a whole still isn't particularly familiar with how I envision a "normal" year looking for our congregation.

Well, one of the things that I love doing is having at least four major, annual church events. One for each season of the year. I like for these to be large-scale, repeatable, and community oriented events that are easy to invite friends and family to so that they can get to know our church in a fun, stress free environment.

Three of these events are pretty much spoken for in my mind.

- For the Spring, we anticipate making Good Friday and Easter Sunday services a pretty big deal. We will add in an outreach element each year and really promote a full three days of worship and community service (Friday, Saturday, Sunday).
- For the Summer, I'd love to bring back "Summer in the Streets" each year, where we bring a VBS vibe to our services and host them in Sherman street for a month each summer. I think we stumbled on something special thanks to Covid!
- For the Fall, each year I anticipate doing Back to Church Sunday and scheduling a great church picnic.
- For the winter... well, you're just going to have to wait! I have something that I believe is truly special that I am working on planning with the help of some special friends. My hope is to have the event ready to announce during our church picnic, so stay tuned!

Ministry can't be totally event driven. At their core though, events are just ways that we as a church are trying to make it easier for you to invite your friends to build relationships with our church family. And it's always good to have a little bit of fun while doing so!

What am I reading?

This morning I decided to read a little out of the book "Radical; Taking Your Faith Back from the American Dream." It's a great book by David Platt, and one that I go back to regularly when I need a jolt. This is what I read today:

"Imagine all the blinds closed on the windows of a dimly lit room. Twenty leaders from different churches in the area sat in a circle on the floor with their Bibles open. Some of them had sweat on their foreheads after walking for miles to get there. Others were dirty from the dust in the villages from which they had set out on bikes early that morning.

They had gathered in secret. They had intentionally come to this place at different times throughout the morning so as not to draw attention to the meeting that was occurring. They lived in a country in Asia where it is illegal for them to gather like this. If caught, they could lose their land, their jobs, their families, or their lives.

I listened as they began sharing stories of what God was doing in their churches. One man sat in the corner. He had a strong frame, and he served as the head of security, so to speak. Whenever a knock was heard at the door or a noise was made outside the window, everyone in the room would freeze in tension as this brother would go to make sure everything was okay. As he spoke, his tough appearance soon revealed a tender heart.

“Some of the people in my church have been pulled away by a cult,” he said. This particular cult is known for kidnapping believers, taking them to isolated locations, and torturing them. Brothers and sisters having their tongues cut out of their mouths is not uncommon.

As he shared about the dangers his church members were facing, tears welled up in his eyes. “I am hurting,” he said, “and I need God’s grace to lead my church through these attacks.”

A woman on the other side of the room spoke up next. “Some of the members in my church were recently confronted by government officials.” She continued, “They threatened their families, saying that if they did not stop gathering to study the Bible, they were going to lose everything they had.” She asked for prayer, saying, “I need to know how to lead my church to follow Christ even when it cost them everything.”

As I looked around the room, I saw that everyone was now in tears. The struggles expressed by this brother and sister were not isolated. They all looked at one another and said, “We need to pray.” Immediately they went to their knees, and with their faces on the ground, they began to cry out to God. Their prayers were marked less by grandiose theological language and more by heartfelt praise and Pleading.

“O God, thank you for loving us.”

“O God, we need you.”

“Jesus, we give our lives to you and for you.”

“Jesus we trust in you.”

They audibly wept before God as one leader after another prayed. After about an hour, the room drew to silence, and they rose from the floor. Humbled by what I had just been a part of, I saw puddles of tears in a circle around the room.”

I never imagined my first year as your pastor would look like this. And many times I have asked God for wisdom in helping to lead you through this difficult time. I’m not the only Pastor that has felt mounting pressure amid the Pandemic and the way our churches “used to look” before Covid. Many have felt the same way. This is not something Bible College prepared any of us for.

Well, yesterday one of the Twitter accounts I follow shared a Podcast about how American Churches are struggling right now. Attendance continues to be way down, giving and service in the church too. But what caught my attention most was that there are many, many churches out there right now experiencing heightened levels of disunity about the issue of “coming back” to church, or more specifically “coming back to the church building.”

When I heard that, it hurt my heart. But here are two things we can take away from this. First, thank you for the unity and commitment you have all showed, as a church body, through this difficult time. We haven’t been without our bumps in the road, but overall I am just so grateful to serve such an understanding congregation. We haven’t done anything perfect, and we never will. But I believe our recent attendance growth is in part, because of the unity and flexibility you have all displayed throughout this time.

Second though, is that we really don’t have it that bad. In our case, we get to meet outside, in comfy chairs, under a “tree awning” in the middle of the street, with full permission from our local government to do so. We can sing as loud as we want, we all show up at the same time without fear, and we can mingle as much as we want. Even at our worst we could “only” watch our services online, and plaster them all over Facebook for friends and family to see.

I’m not sure what things look like two months from now, or even two weeks from now If I’m honest. But what I do know is that every single time we gather we should praise God for the freedom that we have to do so, and we should never, ever, get so comfortable that we forget about those all over the world that risk their lives to share communion with just a few other believers. You are not at risk for having your tongue cut out to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. So please, share the good news of Jesus Christ. Share His love with your neighbors, speak freely of his grace. Invite your friends to church. And cherish every moment we have together; even if they don’t look like our super comfortable, rarely challenging, normal.

What am I excited about?

I’m really excited to be planning our church picnic and our Back to Church Sunday. We have so much to celebrate, and we really haven’t had the time to sit down together and do that. God has been so faithful to us this whole year and it does our hearts good to praise Him for His faithfulness and provision.

What am I thinking about?

Krista and I officially had our mortgage approved on our new home, so we should be moving in by the end of September. We haven’t packed a single thing yet. Thankfully we didn’t unpack everything from our move here from Colorado so it should be easier than before, but I’m so tired of moving. We told our cat that we promise this is the last move for awhile. Not sure he believed us, but it’s true!

Silent Servants:

This week I want to say a huge thank you to Ruth Smith for what she does behind the scenes. She shows up (it seems like every day!) and makes sure all of our plants both inside and outside of the building are taken care of. Those are the types of things that nobody notices until someone isn't doing the work, so I want to take this space to make sure we all stop and "smell the roses" next time we are at the church. Knowing that our plants look nice every week and that we will have guests driving by and attending our outside services makes it so much easier on me, so thanks for your service Ruth!