Good morning, Family. Let me begin with this statement: “There is no greater honor on Earth than to be a part of God’s church.” Put another way, ultimate honor comes to those who live as the bride of Christ, in the spiritual house (Ephesians 2:19-22\*), the family (Galatians 6:10\*), in the household of faith , the body of Christ. *Everybody in the body of Christ is somebody*. The church is a means by which we have life and community. It is where we learn about the Gospel and learn of stewardship of our faith; learn to identify and be grateful for our gifts; learn to serve joyfully and carry each other’s burdens; learn how and commit to fulfillment of the Great Commission—all this in the blessed covenant relationship with Christ and one another. In church, we share a common mission and vision. Allow me to read to you the faith, purpose, and vision statements for our beloved Shepherd of the Mountains Church:

*Statement of Faith*:

We profess and live in the Christian Faith as presented in the New Testament, affirmed by the historic church, informed by the Reformation and shaped by pietism.

*Statement of Purpose*:

Our purpose is to glorify God, celebrate His love, lead people to salvation, bring people into a mature relationship with Christ and equip them for service

*Vision Statement*:

The vision of Shepherd of the Mountains Church is to work together under

the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scripture to produce fully

developing disciples and a growing congregation that are passionately

committed to a loving God and a loving people.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*Ephesians 2:19-22

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Galatians 6:10

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Family, listen. The church is a people to belong to, not a product to consume. It is not mere formality or casual affiliation. It is not a gym or Cosco membership. Believers are to embrace their roles and responsibilities within the body. I am convinced that we can’t love Jesus fully until we love His bride well. In Ephesians 2:13, Paul addresses believers by using the phrase “In Christ.” When we are in Christ, all that is true of Him changes what is true of us. Paul uses the phrase, “in Christ” or “in Him” more than one hundred times in his letters to the churches. And being “in Him” means for us what it meant for first century churches: “In Him” we share a common vision and mission. Our mission statement here at Shepherd is “Love God and Love People.”

The various missions inherent in serving the needs of the church are the responsibility of everyone. Each person is responsible for carrying out the church’s tasks on His behalf. In participating, we members of His church use the gifts He has given for the health of the church and to His and the Father’s glory. Each of us needs to ask, “What do I expect as a member and what is expected of me?” We can’t rejoice in our special gifts if we never use them. This use begins with Jesus’ own command: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). “Love one another.” This command appears sixteen times in the Gospels. The word used in this repeated statement is *agape*. *Agape* is an ancient Greek word that describes the highest form of love—the fatherly love of God for us and our reciprocal love for Him: Pure, selfless, sacrificial. *Agape* love doesn’t say, “I have to serve.” No. *Agape* love says, “I get to serve.” Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

By the blood of Jesus, I became worthy to be an active part of Christ’s church, joining others in eternal, Kingdom work—something sacred and awesome. When God saved me, I didn’t just join a gym or a country club but part of an eternal plan. With other believers, I fit together into a great mission, each of us having a part to play. We believers live life together with Christ at the center of all we do. This is church life and community.

“To be in Christ” is a matter of adoption by God; it is not a matter of attendance on Sundays and Wednesdays. It is *being* in Christ, loving Him, loving each other and those beyond the church doors for Him. This kind of living is an expectation of our place in the life of our church community. It is faith activated. It means giving of ourselves, our time, our tithes, our resources. This kind of living is the proper stewardship of our faith. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 20:28:

“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Now look with me at the Gospel of John 13:12-17:

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Imagine for a moment Jesus washing your feet. How would you feel? What would you do in response? One of our core beliefs as Christians is that Christ humbled Himself to die on a cross for our sins A call to stewardship or servanthood another. And I for one don’t want to miss the blessing—my working for others or their working for me. Service in the church community should not be viewed as a burden but as a blessing. What we do for Him is not works-based faith but faith-based works, about which Jesus says, “You are blessed if you do them.” The Word of God tells us that we have been given a supernatural ability to bless one

None of this is meant to burden the believer or make any believer feel bad—to elicit feelings of guilt—because we may have not participated in service to the church. No, it’s about awareness, about seeing the church through the proper lens. It’s a reminder of the biblical invitation to see and to participate as part of the body of Christ. Life together is a place where mercy happens. It is where Grace does its job: Believers as part of the “called out assembly,” learning together, forgiving,

encouraging, inviting others into the family. The church is life together with Christ at the center. In Ephesians 3:8-10\*, Paul tells us that Christ’s church provides unfathomable riches. How blessed are we to be part of this faith family at Shepherd of the Mountains Church and to be part of the Body of Christ universal—the redeemed of the Lord being drawn together, a source of joy, strength, accountability, and encouragement. In this, Christ’s church, we are a sacred, treasured, Heavenly community, celebrating Christ and each other. What a privilege that we get to be part of it all!

For the next two weeks, between services, you will be given opportunity to see where you can use your God-given gifts. Stop by the tables set up in the foyer. Sign up and join in God’s faith-based service!

PASSAGES IN SUPPORT OF THIS SERMON:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by[a] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Romans 12:1-13

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.