



The Link

WINTER 2016

Telling the Stories God is Writing at Little Falls Church

We
joyfully
PROCLAIM
the love
of God in
Jesus Christ,
GROW
in His truth,
and
SHARE
His Gospel
with our
neighbors.

*“For we are
HIS
workmanship,
created in
Christ Jesus for
good works,
which God
prepared
beforehand,
that we should
walk in them.”*

- Ephesians 2:10

Reflecting on Session

Norris Cochran, Elder

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run,
but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every
athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a
perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. - 1 Corinthians 9:24*

I am fortunate to be part of a high performing team where I work. The team is made up of smart, hardworking individuals who are knowledgeable in their areas of responsibility and bring a wealth of talents to each task. The team is not perfect, but it seeks to correct mistakes and strives to treat one another well. It is motivated not just by personal gain but by the fulfillment of the programmatic mission and a drive to be ones best self in order to support the institution and its senior leaders. These motivations are powerful and the outcome is positive.

While not every team shares these characteristics, you have probably been part of a high performing team united around a common cause at one point or another, and may be on one now. You may have experienced good things happening when competent people with varying perspectives work together toward a common purpose, and how decisions are strengthened when wisdom and insight are sharpened through questioning and discussion. Like me, you may also benefit personally from the experience itself, gaining humility and perspective while witnessing firsthand the skills and insights of others, and gaining confidence and encouragement while participating in the successes of the group.

My two terms on Session at Little Falls as elder of Family Ministry were that type of experience. What I have found most fulfilling is what makes Session at Little Falls different, what gives it a grounding and focus not found in most high performing teams, what distinguishes Session from other teams on which I have been fortunate to serve.

By way of a brief background, our Session is made up of nine people

selected by the congregation. The purpose is to partner with the pastor in guiding the church and to collaborate with the Deacons and Trustees and with the professional staff of Little Falls to carry out the functions of the church and provide support to the congregation. Many of the functions supported by Session are also found in government and industry: strategic direction, outreach, administration and finances, education, international and local charitable supports, hospitality and social gatherings.

As I look around the room at a meeting of the Session it is obvious the types of experience and talents held by our pastor and Session members are highly valued in other public and private organizations. Drawing from a congregation rich in talents and experiences like Little Falls, it should be no surprise the organizational competency of Session is strong. When I joined and got over my initial question of "Who let me in?", I settled in to enjoy the wealth of insight from the lawyers, developers, executives, writers, thinkers, planners, analysts and experts who make up the group. Given the right mandate and resources, this gathering could accomplish great things in any number of fields!

The opening that allows the form and outcome of the Session to be markedly different from those fields can be found in the source of its strength, inspiration, validation and purpose. Being rooted in the Gospel and in service to God enables the deliberations and accomplishments of a body like the Session at Little Falls to extend beyond the strengths and contributions of its participants.

A brief description of the operations of Session may be helpful. At the monthly meetings Session does not dive straight into its pending business. Time is first spent sharing praise and concern from our families, friends and communities and then entering into a period of communal prayer. Session then turns to a period of book study that enables a deeper dive into the Biblical principles around a challenging topic facing our church or perhaps a commentary on how organizations fit within the reality of Jesus. (Humor, kindness and sometimes a jumbo bag of M&M's are also present.)

Many evenings I arrive at the Session meeting straight from work where I have typically cranked through five to eight meetings that day, moving from one topic and group to the next. It can be a bit of an adjustment to slow down and embrace a more contemplative pace. Deliberations of the Session are purposeful and focused, but not rushed. Discussion is worked through the lens of the Gospel and sometimes halted all together for a period of prayer to guide the deliberations. Tasks advanced between meetings are also to be framed by the Gospel and grounded in prayer.

That the Session is made up of an impressive collection of smart and effective individuals is great. Personally I found it to be a wonderful experience to have time with such a group! But Session is made up of individuals serving best when: they accept that Jesus already earned their worth; they see service as a means to show appreciation and not earn approval; they accept that God has a plan for Little Falls; they embrace prayer as a foundational element to successful service; and when they seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and not turning just to personal experience.

What makes a great Session is not the absence of mistakes. Missteps happen and we should assume the best of intentions and be patient with one another when we err. What makes a great Session is when its decisions and outcomes could only be possible if guided by the Gospel and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As I cycle off, I am assured the person who takes my seat will be an addition to the already impressive talents of the Session. But I can rest more fully in knowing the deliberations will be centered on the Gospel and guided by the Holy Spirit. An impressive collection of skills and talents on Session is a gift that comes with serving within a community like Little Falls. Having that collection be grounded in the Gospel and led by the Holy Spirit is an even greater gift that comes with serving in God's Kingdom.

So please pray for your Session. Pray that their inner workings and outward actions will remain grounded in the Gospel and led by the Holy Spirit. Pray that they will lean not on their own understanding, regardless of the skills they have been given. Pray that they will turn continually to God for guidance. It is under those conditions Session serves Little Falls and God's Kingdom best.

"The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve."

– John Stott



Senior High Retreat – November 2016

Church Family News

Promoted to Glory:

Damon Apperson - Oct 19

Betty Grinnell - Oct 26

Jennifer Lawrence Braverman -
Nov 15

John Glenn – Dec 8

So teach us to
number
our days
that
we may get a
heart of
wisdom.

– Psalm 90:12

How Will You Spend Your Time?

Deb Schueren

Several years ago, I heard a statement that changed the way I live my life. I can't recall where I heard it or who said it, but it was profound to me and it drives nearly everything I do, especially as my children grow and I become increasingly aware of how brief their childhood is. The statement went something like this—"Whatever is most important to you is where you will spend most of your time." While not particularly scholarly, it has huge meaning. Three years ago, my family attended our first Little Falls All Church Retreat. Because it was so life changing for us, each year thereafter when the sign-ups were announced, I didn't even question whether or not I wanted to go. I can't think of a better investment than spending a weekend with your family that revolves around deepening your relationship with Jesus and modeling for your children the importance of dedicated *time* to your faith.

As a child, I grew up with the notion that time "required" for the Lord was an hour or so on Sunday morning and maybe a few minutes of reading the Bible and a prayer before bedtime, of which I rarely did. I absolutely believed in God, but He clearly wasn't the most important thing to me, based on the time I gave Him! He was simply an obligation I had to fulfill in order to hopefully secure my salvation.

Over the years, my spiritual journey progressed at a very steady, but slow pace. Perhaps this was because I hadn't valued my relationship with God enough to devote dedicated time to Him because I *wanted* to. If your children are important to you, and I know they are, then you want to spend time with them. If you want to be fit, you know you have to spend time exercising and paying attention to how you nourish your body. It stands to reason that if you want a relationship with God, then you have to spend time with Him because you want to, not because you have to.

Since becoming a member of Little Falls Presbyterian Church, I've come to look forward to church and long for those times when I get to be with the Lord and my fellow brothers and sisters who seek Him, as well. These days, I can't wait for Sunday mornings, feeling like I *need* those sermons to feed my soul. I hang on every word; sometimes wishing the lesson were longer. That's how I feel about the All Church Family Retreat. It's like a 24-hour visit with the most important people in my life—Jesus, and my family, both immediate and extended church family. Time seems to stand still for a while as I spend it with those I love, with a focus on experiencing the love Christ has for us. I love the prayer time, the praise and worship, and the small group activities that allow deeper connections with others in the congregation. There is time for laughter and time for letting the walls down. Sometimes there is sharing that moves us to tears, but only if you want to go there. After three years at the retreat, the most memorable fun to me has been playing human foosball, gaga ball, and nine-square with both the youth and the adults. This year, as the weekend drew to an end and everyone was departing, a few families lingered for over an hour longer playing an aggressive, but light-hearted game of nine-square—no one wanted to go home, but alas, our time was up... until next year and another match, that is!

What else do I love about church retreat? Well, without a doubt, it's that sense I get on the following Sunday at church when I feel like our church family has gotten a little bigger and my family is more part of the whole. Join us next year! I promise you, you'll come back changed, with a better appreciation for how important your family time is in your walk with the Lord. It will be time well spent.



The first and chief need of
our Christian life is
fellowship with God.
— Andrew Murray

Little Falls
All Church
Retreat

~
October
2016



*"For I do not do the good I want,
but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." – Romans 7:19*

Don't Hit Your Sister

Grace Merrill, Link Editor

I am fixing dinner in the kitchen and hear a cry from the next room followed by "Mom! She hit me!" I sigh and roll my eyes. Now I must stop what I am doing, yet again, to go see what is going on and mediate a dispute. There will probably be some denial. Perhaps outright lying. Blame shifting. Feigned apologies. Someone will end up in time out. This is a familiar dance. Why can't they just play nicely for a few minutes? Everyone in that room already knows hitting is wrong. Why do I have to keep reminding them? I am trying to fix dinner FOR THEM for crying out loud!

So why am I so frustrated and surprised? This is humanity after all. I am this way myself. I continue to do things I know are wrong. Sometimes unintentionally. Other times, I know full well what I am doing and I choose the wrong option. Because I am lazy or selfish or proud. We all do. Naturally, my kids will do the same. Over and over. That is our sin nature. And this side of Heaven we will all continue to wrestle with it. I tend to think my objective in parenting is to have perfectly well-behaved children. The kind who look adults in the eye and greet them respectfully. The kind who put dirty socks in the hamper and finish their homework without being reminded 237 times. The kind who don't punch their siblings. Of course. But I don't know anyone who has kids like that. We have to keep correcting, teaching, reminding. Over and over. That is our job as parents. It is a beautiful thing when we get a glimmer that something we are teaching them might be sticking. If someone makes their bed without being reminded or shares spontaneously, I am delighted. But I am realizing there is more to my job than teaching rules and enforcing them. Because no matter how hard they try, they will not be perfect. They will not follow the rules all the time.

The Biblical law points to our need for a Savior. God wants us to strive for it. He knows we won't make it. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we will never even get close. The Law is like a mirror reflecting our depravity back to us. It makes us aware of our sin and our helplessness. It shows us our need for a Savior. ("*...Yet if it had not been for the Law, I would not have known my sin...*" Rom 7:7.)

"Thou shalt not jump on the sofa" is not one of the Ten Commandments. I would not presume to think my rules are Biblical Law. But there is a similarity. They will not ever meet the rules perfectly. They are going to need to be reminded over and over. They are sometimes just going to run headlong in the wrong direction because their little sinful hearts will get the best of them. Because they are sinful humans just like me. I need to remember that. I need to work with that. Each of us needs to recognize our sinfulness and our helplessness to escape it. If we don't, we won't see our need for a Savior.

WHEN they mess up, I want them to learn to recognize it and run to their Father in repentance. To not deceive themselves into thinking that what they are doing is good or conversely that it is so bad there is no hope for them. I want to teach them not to hide from their Creator. To know that they are broken sinners in need of grace. That they are, as Tim Keller puts it, "both more sinful than they ever dared imagine and at the same time, more loved than they ever dared hope." To recognize that in others so they treat them with compassion and respect. To recognize it in themselves so they are humble and continually looking to their loving Heavenly Father for grace, wisdom and help. This is something that takes continual practice. We must be reminded. I know first hand because I have to keep reminding and practicing myself.

Only with the Holy Spirit's intervention will we learn to love God and others above everything else. As we fall more in love with our Lord, sin will become less appealing. He will change our hearts and thus our actions. But it is only with His help. In this life, we will never completely be free from the hold sin has on us. It is my job to start teaching them this now. When they miss the mark it is an opportunity to remind them of the Gospel. If they never messed up they might start to think they were good enough to earn God's approval on their own merit and grow up thinking they do not need Jesus.

So I can view that incident as an interruption to my plans (cooking dinner in peace) or I can view it as an opportunity to help those kids practice failing into grace. If I step back and think about it, it is FAR more important to me that my children get to know their Heavenly Father than that they sit politely and eat a peacefully prepared meal. My anger at being interrupted reflects the short-sighted, selfishness in my own heart. If I am honest with myself, a good portion of my desire for my kids to do things correctly is more about me than them anyway. It would make my life simpler (feeding my idol of ease) and also make me look like a "good parent" (feeding my idol of pride) if they did not require repeated corrections.

Yes, not sharing the princess crown was wrong but hitting your sister to get it from her was just as wrong. And my own impatience with the situation is likewise wrong. We are all broken sinners in need of grace. You are. Your sister is. I am. Now let's look to Jesus, our Redeemer, for forgiveness and help. Again.

"...For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by HIS GRACE as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

– Romans 3:23-24

"If my sinfulness appears to me in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all."

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

To give light
to those who
sit in
darkness
and in the
shadow of
death,
to guide
our feet
into the way
of peace.

– Luke 1:79



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