

Break Open the Church

General Board 2/26/17
Rev Susan Gonzales Dewey

Greetings to Dr. Watkins, Moderators, General Board members
Privilege to bring the word this morning
Pray with me please

Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSV)

14 *"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Tom Bob Carr died last month
He was 93
He was raised by the woman who started all of the social service and justice programs for women in Ventura
He was an eagle scout
And a Navy lieutenant in WW2
And he was a Crusty Old guy.

He was on the search committee that called us to FCC Ventura in the late 1990's
And he attended every board meeting, whether he held an office or not.
He was always the one who would ask the detail questions when we brought a new idea.

How will this work?
How much money will this cost?
Where is the money going to come from?
How will it change things?

For the first 5 years I thought, this is just a crusty old guy questioning anything these new young pastors wanted to try!

But one day that crusty old surface broke open and inside what we found
(I guess it was always there,)

But what we found was a thoughtful,
faithful man of God
who just wanted to know where he would fit in.

He asked questions to know how he could help,
did he have the funds to support the project
and *would* what he had to offer,
help move things forward.

AND the day we thanked him for his leadership and told him we would be leaving to go
to fill Regional Ministers position, there were tears in his eyes and in ours.

Underneath that crusty old exterior was something beautiful and rich and powerful.

Once that crusty old exterior was opened up
his spirit began to shine, at least for me.

Some people see the church as a crusty old entity with outdated structures
and practices
and archaic language
..... *is there truth to that?*

My friends it is time to break open this church!

It is time to break open this church!

You heard the Matthew 5 passage read earlier, so hear it again in the Message:

Matthew 5:14-16 (MSG)

*"Here's another way to put it:
You're here to be light,
bringing out the God-colors in the world.
God is not a secret to be kept.
We're going public with this,
as public as a city on a hill.
If I make you light-bearers,
you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you?
I'm putting you on a light stand.*

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—SHINE!

*Keep open house;
be generous with your lives.*

*By opening up to others,
you'll prompt people to open up with God,
this generous God in heaven.*

You might have wondered what those dusty, crusty rocks on your table are, what they are for?

These are Geodes, and there is one for each of you to open sometime today.

When you break open a Geode you will find interesting crystals, colors and designs.

Something very different than the dusty crust exterior.

Like these! (Susan Open your Geode!)

Friends, it is time to break open this church!

When we risk breaking open the church we find the core values and deep truths of our faith, and they are beautiful and life changing and we are called to let them shine!

Friends, when we break open our Disciples church we will again see those beautiful colors and designs that are our Core values:

Like no creed but Christ

Centrality of the table

All are welcome

Freedom of thought and interpretation balanced with a firm foundation in Christ.

In the PSWR most of the candidates who come to the region seeking Standing or Ordination, particularly those coming from other faith traditions, start with me and what I hear regularly is:

“I have found the church I needed”

I heard it last week from a former Lutheran Army Chaplain.... He grew up Missouri Synod but was always in trouble for asking too many questions.

He talked about finding his way into FCC Ventura and that’s what he said (arms raised high) I found a home.

People are looking for a home

A welcome

A place where they can bring their whole selves

A place that welcomes questions

A place that celebrates unity in diversity

A place that honors both head and heart as a means to faith

And friends, we have it!

That’s who we are!

Lets break open this church and let who we really are shine like a light on a mountaintop.

Lets let our Core values shine as God's beloved community!

Christian unity has been a value since we began

**"That the Church of Christ upon earth
is essentially,
intentionally,
and constitutionally one;"**

We know how to hold that place of tension between various perspectives,
giving one another permission to hold different views
and it is a beautiful part of who we are!

"In essentials unity
Nonessential liberty
In all things love"

Having a firm foundation in Christ but having the freedom to talk and question and
sometimes disagree and yet still know we all have a place at the Table is a core value for
us!

I love that Campbell was accused of Latitudinarianism !
Isn't that a great word!?

Last year Don and I were privileged to travel around China with the Week of Compassion
leadership
and meet with our partners in China.

Partnership in mission is a core value.
Working together in Christ, all around the world, taking the love of God to the ends of
the earth and helping the church grow is a core value.

And let me tell you when people say the church is dying, you can remind them that the
Church in China has 40 million Christians who fill the pews every week and they can't
train their pastors fast enough for the growth of the church.
Partnership in Mission is one of our core values.

Ahh but what does it look like to let our light shine?

Isn't that what Mission First is all about?

Isn't that what we are here to talk about as the General board?

The light!
Love
Hospitality
Welcome
Compassion
Justice
Inclusion

These things are at the heart of our faith that we hear over and over again in scriptures,
from the prophets to Jesus
and seen in those early disciples!

How do we let our light shine?

Think about what is that bright crystal in the center of our faith,
what is the design in the center of our faith life.

What are the colors that illuminate our Disciple witness?

How do we let it shine?

Yeah, we all have our daily lives to live,
and for the pastors in the room
we have all the details of Lent and Easter
just around the corner to work on,
But is that the light?

Yes we have the details of our local church, region and denomination's finances
And care for our buildings to deal with,
But is that the light?

Friends, people are hurting in our world,

Immigrants; documented or undocumented are frightened and hurting
How do we let our light shine?

Transgender and LGBT communities are frightened and hurting
How do we let our light shine?

The financially vulnerable and the elderly fear about their healthcare
How do we let our light shine?

The worth and dignity of women and persons of color is again at risk
How do we let our light shine?

Sometimes it feels like we are stuck
when we just try to use our established structures
to address the challenges of today

To tell you the truth,
I am struggling to know what to say to the powers that be
and what to do for the vulnerable members of our community

I am hearing their stories of fear and uncertainty
And I don't know *all* we need to do
But I know we need to do it.

What is hiding our light?
Is it our crusty outside,
our structures,
our habits,
our established practices,
by-laws,
the safety of the familiar
our fears?

Are our *fears* hiding our light?
Fears of what will be the consequence of speaking out for justice, for compassion?
Or what will people think if we *act* on the streets for the vulnerable?

Or maybe it is our *doubts* that hides our light!
Our doubts, can we really do anything that will make a difference in this political world,
this economic world, this world that seems obsessed with fear.

Our *fears* and *doubts* and *insecurities* can hide our light and keep us from acting out
the love
justice
hospitality
and compassion
we know our God calls us to share.

We, the leadership of this denomination need to step out of business as usual
and let the light of our faith shine in the world!

We are to bring out the God-colors in the world.

We need to go public

God has made us light bearers to be out there on a hilltop, on a light stand and shine,
yes SHINE!

I often have heard from folks new to Disciples that we are the best kept secret!

Friends, the good news we know in Jesus Christ is not meant to be a secret!
We are commanded to let our light shine!

Look around this room, there are almost 120 people who love Jesus,
we are talented and experienced people
with gifts and skills
and full of the light of Christ.

There is power in this room.
There is POWER in this room.
Do you see it?
Do you believe it?
Do you know it?
What we can do together!!!!

Turn to one another and say,
“Let your light SHINE!”
Say it again, and say it one more time!

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heaven.*

Let’s break open this church and let our light shine!

Amen?

Amen!