

Title: If We Know Jesus

Text: Matthew 28.19-20; Ephesians 4.11-16

Theme: Cornerstone Baptist Church Ministry Plan

Series/Occasion: Sept. 2005 – Renewing our Purpose and Reviewing our Vision

Four years ago today, the relative calm and security of our nation was shattered by the attacks upon New York City and Washington D.C. The attacks of terrorism that we were used to hearing about in Belfast and Tel Aviv now came to our home. Large oceans no longer protected us, we were attacked from within. The terrorists came here and lived here in order to attack us. Life can change – quickly. The catastrophic consequences of a category 4 hurricane upon a low-lying area with a large urban population have only reinforced that truth. Life can change – quickly.

Life can and does change – quickly. We live with clear and present danger. We live in a world where evil people do evil things and where natural disasters can produce enormous consequences and tremendous devastation. A drunk driver can rip your family apart, a thief can steal your identity and reek havoc on your credit and financial world. A bully at school or an angry teacher can mess with your kid's life. The potential scenarios are endless, but the question I have for you is: Can you live with joy and confidence, purpose and direction in the midst of this unstable world? The answer from those who are followers of Christ has to be a resounding and deafening - YES!! That is what Ed did.

Ed and his wife sat in their home on the north side of Lake Ponchartrain. Their generator kept the lights going and also powered their TV which enabled them to see the destruction and the despair that was just to their south. Ed, who is an evangelical Christian said to his wife, "If we know Jesus, we have to do something." He powered up his boat and helped to rescue a number of people, many of whom he brought back to his home where his wife cooked for them and where they were able to find dry shelter.

That in a very real way is what this church is called to do. We, who know Jesus have to do something. We have to reach people with the gospel in order to rescue them from their sin and its hopelessness and rescue them to a community of believers so they can grow, serve, and reach. These are the marching orders that Christ Himself gave to His disciples in Matthew 28.18-20. Reaching People with the gospel of Christ and Bringing People into a new relationship is part of the Great Commission.

Hunter Thompson was a journalist for Rolling Stone magazine who on Feb.16 of this year wrote a note to his wife entitled, "Football Season is Over." Hunter often became depressed in February because the Super Bowl was done. It is sad, but at the age of 67, this man lived for the NFL. His note said, "No More Games. No More Bombs. No More Walking. No More Fun. No More Swimming. 67. That is 17 years past 50. 17 more than I needed or wanted. Boring. No Fun for anybody. 67. You are getting Greedy. Act your old age. Relax This won't hurt." Four days later he took his life. You may not know Hunter but you know someone like him. For example, take Larry.

Larry could be your neighbor. He just replaced his minivan with a pick-up truck because his youngest child recently moved out of the home, and he does not need a minivan anymore. Larry is looking at 10 more years until retirement. He is just hoping that his company stays afloat that long, because he really needs to beef up his retirement savings. But even if his job does last, Larry is wondering where life has gone, and what it really is all about. He recently remodeled his kitchen, then his landscaping, and is thinking about buying a bigger boat or moving further north. But in some of the quiet moments in his garage as he is about to cut his grass again – he wonders to himself, is this it?

Do you know Alexia? Alexia is probably taking a class with you at college. She is angry at herself. She knew better than to hang out with that guy at the bar last night, but she was bored and frankly looking to get even at her ex-boyfriend and now she is thinking about the possible consequences. STD's, or other related issues have a way of making a difficult life even more complicated. But another day and another regret are just added to her stack, like another note reminding her to return a phone call that she did not want to take. Today she sits in this class and wonders if life is one big game of people using each other? Right now it looks like to her that either you get used by someone, or you use someone.

Do you know Jason? Jason is on your soccer team. On Tuesday, Jason's mom brings him to the game, but on Saturday's sometimes it's his mom, sometimes his dad. Sometimes he is late. Sometimes he is really tired. Jason has a lot of friends who do the weekend shuttle between parents, but he still can't figure out why he has to have two bedrooms. His family fell apart after his older brother was diagnosed with a disease. Ever since that time he has wondered if he's next. People think it's good for him to play in a league, Jason would really like to be able to talk to someone, but he doesn't even know how to ask.

Larry, Alexia, Jason are part of the thousands and thousands of people who we see and speak with every week. They are people whose problems and struggles are occasions that God is using in their lives so that they will realize that they need an anchor for life, and a love that will not let them go. They need someone and something to really believe in that is true, someone to trust in, and someone to follow.

We know that they need Christ and we have to reach them. But yet we hesitate – why? Is it because we know that in our own lives, families and church that we have a long way to go? We know that we have confessed Christ as our Savior, and that we have a message that will change people's lives, but we also know that our own lives aren't completely changed yet. We can appreciate what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 1.8-9, "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you WILL BE blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." Do you realize what that means? That means that someday you will be like Christ. Some day I will be like Christ. Right now, we struggle, we feel as if for every two steps forward, we take three steps back. We wonder if we can ever deal with our issues and resolve our problems. We wonder if we will always live with a sense of frustration over our apparent inability to learn from our failures and make changes. And

because we tend to get stuck in the ruts of our own sinful thinking, we hesitate to reach out. Listen, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God is working in you to make you like Christ. The progress may be slow, but He is at work. It has been over a year since Joe Siler passed away and not long after Joe, my dad went to glory. We know that Joe loved to greet people at the doors and my dad loved to play the piano, so it natural for us to think that we will meet Joe at the door of heaven, and not too far into the city, we'll hear some pretty good piano playing. But there is a sense in which, if we went to heaven today and saw Joe, my dad and Jesus, we would have to ask them to show us their hands so that we could tell which one was Jesus. I know that the Spirit of God uses His Word and the church to make us like Christ. I also know that we have not arrived, but the fact that we have not arrived should never deter us from bringing other people along on the journey. Because we know that we will arrive – someday. And so will the ones who join with us. We hesitate to reach out sometimes to people who need Christ and sometimes to people who need to grow in Christ because we are not a perfect example yet. Listen, if you have come to faith in Christ, you are being changed and one day, you will be finally and fully changed. Therefore, based upon our confidence in Christ to finish what He started in us and in others, we have to carry out the mandate that Christ has given to this church.

Matthew 28.19-20 - Cornerstone Baptist Church has a divine mandate. We have to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ. We have to do that by going, baptizing those who come to faith in Christ and teaching them. This is the great commission. Ephesians 4.11-16 - Cornerstone Baptist Church also has a divine means to carry out the divine mandate. The means is this: God has given to the church leadership with a task. The task is to prepare God's people to work together in order to carry out the ministry of making disciples. Based upon these passages and others, we developed a statement of purpose many years ago and it states that; CBC exists to glorify God by leading believers to maturity. A maturing believer is a disciple of Christ. Since the leadership of the church is charged by God to prepare and train God's people for ministry, the question we have to answer is how are we going to do that? What is the plan for maturity? What is the plan for ministry? What is the plan for missions? How do we mature people up in Christ and equip them for ministry and serve as a launching pad for reaching others with the gospel?

The model that we use is designed like a baseball diamond. It does not work perfectly, but it does work pretty well. First base is...

1. **A Commitment to Christ and His People**

If you are trying to figure out what life is about, who you are, and why God has you here, this is where you need to start. You need to understand what it means to be a follower of Christ. You need to understand who Christ is, what He did, and what He offers to you. You need to see for yourself that God provided you with the only way for you to be forgiven of your sins and declared righteous in His sight. When you understand this truth that is called the gospel, it will literally change your life. You will then be in a position to see what the church is really about.

If you are not sure what that means, we teach a class on this. It is called Discovering God's People. And in this class, I explain what it means to be a follower of Christ and provide a good introduction to the purpose and ministry of the church. Now, if you are already a follower of Christ, and you are not real confident in your ability to share the gospel with someone else, you can invite them to come to this class. You can do that! Everyone can do that. As part of this class, I not only show from the Bible how to become a follower of Christ, but I also show that becoming a follower of Christ is just the beginning to your life with Christ and His people. A commitment to Christ and His people is connected to...

2. **A Life-long Commitment to Grow as a Follower of Christ.**

2nd base deals with growing and maturing as a follower of Christ. Keep in mind that growing and maturing as a follower of Christ is something that you never stop doing. Therefore, there is a sense in which we are always at second base. This is where the analogy of a baseball diamond is not perfect, but we can still make it work well enough to help us grasp the big idea. At second base we are focusing on maturity or Discovering God's Power to grow. Since this is something that we spend the rest of our life doing, there are many different ministries in this church that emphasize this.

There is an class that helps explain this and it is called, Discovering God's Power. You need to be a member, before you take this class, because God does not call you to be a lone ranger Christian. The call to Christ brings with it a call to grow as a His follower and that is done with the family of Christ. We want to help you grow in the way that God has intended. We want you to be able to take advantage of the means of grace that God has provided. Discovering God's Power is the main class for second base. But, what we teach in this class will help you understand the rightful place of everything else that we teach at second base.

We have many, many courses that we consider, 2nd base courses. That is because, we are always learning and growing. Some of the courses build on each other. But, what does God want you to do with what you are learning? God wants you to be serving. Do you remember Ephesians 4? Leadership is to prepare you to serve! Do you remember 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12? God has given every believer in the church a gift and a place of ministry for the church. You need to be Discovering God's plan for you in the ministry of the church.

3. **A Life-long Commitment to Ministry.**

There is no greater place for you to invest your time and your passions than in the ministry of this church. Jesus did not die for pick-up trucks, golf clubs and Longeberger baskets. He died for the church. You need to get involved in ministry. Your ministry may be going through Children's rooms on Saturdays, emptying waste baskets and praying for the teachers and children. You may come to the office and help answer phones or give tours. You may serve in the parking lot and greet people. You may serve on an advertising and marketing team or a spiritual hospice team, or serve as a children's

mentor, graphics designer, video-grapher, data entry, missionary care team, library volunteer, set design and construction, Adult Bible Fellowship Teacher, Leader, Youth Staff member, orchestra or choir member, usher, counselor, deacon, deaconess, or elder. You may be equipped to interview potential members of the church, and serve as a spiritual coach. You may work in the sports ministry, softball, basketball, volleyball, or golf. You may want to help people in the church with job placements and employment needs. You may want to serve on the Men's ministry, Ladies ministry, or Conference ministry. You may want to serve as a member of the 3rd base team helping people find a ministry in the church. But this much is clear, every member of this church needs to be serving in a ministry of the church. But that brings with it some very big risks because when you are involved in ministry, you are serving with people, and this is where it gets frustrating – doesn't it? This is where you find out that people are not perfect and where they find out that you are not perfect. But, when people who are not perfect, love each other, work together, understand and appreciate each others gifts, learn how to solve problems as they come up in a God-honoring way, then that is not only a powerful statement of the life-changing effect of the gospel, that also provides tremendous momentum for that ministry in people's lives.

Again, we have a class that helps you understand these things and deals with them, because we have to be a body who ministers with and to each other. The class is called Discovering God's plan because it deals with God's plan for how His church is supposed to function.

God wants some of you to go the next level. Some of you need to be prepared to be involved in a deeper level of evangelism and ministry. That is why we are working on developing the home plate part of this so that people are being sent into this community and into our world (missions) in order to reach, bring, then build and send as well.

4. **A Growing Passion for Reaching People with the gospel**

We need to continue to work on being as intentional and focused as we can in reaching people here with the gospel and reaching people groups around the world in what we call missions. Some of you need to consider vocational ministry and missions. We need to help prepare you for that. We need to start the planning phase of planting another church. But our base here needs to be on a little stronger footing before we formally launch that process.

What is the task of the youth ministry? It is to help students run the bases. What is the task of the children's ministry? It is to help prepare the kids to run the bases and in some cases to start running. What is the task of the Adult Bible Fellowships? The task of each ABF is to help each person in the class run the bases. What is the task of the Men's ministry, Women's ministry, athletic activities, bookstore, library, music ministry, ushers, greeters, tech crew, custodians, grass cutters, window washers, secretaries, volunteers, grounds crew, counselors, follow-up teams, membership teams, finance team, missions team, elder board, nursery workers, youth staff? Every person in this church and every ministry in this church has to be involved either directly or in a support capacity of

moving people around the bases. Why do we counsel and minister to people whose personal relationships are struggling? Because that is part of helping them grow and serve, which is part of them moving around the bases.

A few observations that a baseball diamond doesn't show:

- 1) We never stop growing, serving or reaching (2nd base – home are a reflection of our faith in Christ and commitment to the church).
- 2) We never run alone. In the coming months, we are going to be developing as part of our ABF's a very intentional ministry of small groups. One of the things that is critical to helping each other move around the bases, is the urgent need of community. We have to be a community of believers to each other. Classes can help with instruction and are very important in providing information. But relationships are where that instruction is embraced, and carried out.
- 3) There are no stadium seats. Everyone is a player.

What do you do?

1. Ask yourself – Where am I? Am I on the outside looking in? Have I found my place of ministry? Am I helping others get around the bases?
2. Ask yourself - What do I need to work on?
3. Sign up and follow through. You can sign up for these in the gathering space, because we have just started a brand new round of these classes, and you can still be part of it.

You may have some specific questions. What if you are unable? Health, responsibilities with a family member, job schedule, etc. Please let us know so that we can bring the ministry to you and we have and we will. We have people out in the gathering space at the sign-up tables who can answer those questions. If you do not want to join the church and serve, then figure out what the problem is. If you have a problem with the church or with yourself, get it resolved. Life is way too short to live controlled by past disappointments or present day excuses. If you are a follower of Christ, you have a commission from God to carry out. The leadership in this church has a divine mandate to call you to do that. We are pursuing that mandate with joy and with intensity because we have a dream that one day, when we are all together in heaven, that we will look at each other and say, show me your hands, because I want to know, which one of you is Jesus, you all look so much like Him.

“To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Eph 3.21