**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 8-9-2020 – We Are Family**

This week our cat Calvina went on another one of her adventures. She is 14 years old, which means that she and her sister Callie have actually been a part of our family longer than even our oldest daughter Leah has.

On Wednesday she disappeared outside and today is day 4 of her not with us. I trust that she’s in the Lord’s hands whether we see her again soon or not until heaven.

And this is not the first time. She was out for nearly a day soon after we moved to Dillsburg. And 3 years ago, she actually was gone for 19 days.

I say all of this because as I sat down to write this message, it was more difficult for me to focus, with me not knowing the whereabouts of part of my family.

Family matters. It wasn’t just a neat television show with Steve Urkel from the 90’s when I was growing up.

This week was checking a website of a church that I have been blessed by over the years because I was curious if I would find anything about how they were dealing with the governmental restrictions. But when I went to their website, right on their homepage I found a quote from a man named Jim Elliot.

Have any of you heard of Jim Elliot? Elliot was an American missionary that felt the Lord lead me to share Jesus with an unreached people group in Ecuador.

On October 28, 1949 Jim Elliot wrote in his journal: **He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.**

**And on January 8th 1956, Elliot and four other missionary partners and friends gave up their physical lives, as they were speared by the native peoples. Elliot knew that those that are in Christ by faith, can never really lose their life.**

**He knew that no one could ever truly harm the essence of who he was and is, because he was a child of God.**

Elliot and the others were so consumed with others hearing the good news of Jesus that they were bold in letting the light of Christ within them shine to others.

**But the quote of Jim Elliot on that church’s homepage said this: “the light that shines furthest shines the brightest at home.”**

Sisters and Brothers, these words are so important. While the church is called to be the light of the world, we cannot really be the light of the world if we are not blazing for Christ at home with our family.

This spiritual reality was lived out in the earth days of the church. I would like for us to hear from Acts 2:42-47

**42They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

These words of Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, teach us that the church is meant to be a family. While we are called to love and support and provide for our family units, our truest family is meant to be the church.

So often today, the church is seen with other labels. Sometimes the church can feel like a corporation or business. The church can also be seen as a form of entertainment.

But the reality is, the church is a family. We are called to love one another. We are called to see ourselves as a spiritual family. We are called to do life together, as Christian leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught.

I think this is the reason I so often call Christians “brother” or “sister,” because well – we are family.

So sisters and brothers, we are called to blaze at home if we want to be like Jim Elliot and bring the light of Jesus to new people and places.

And I truly believe that we cannot help but bring the light of Christ wherever we go when we are blazing for Christ at home.

Luke highlights some of the key practices that enabled the early church to thrive or blaze for Christ.

First, in verse 42, Luke states that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The family of God is to be centered around these core things.

**To devote themselves to the apostles teaching speaks of being fully committed to the good news of Jesus and its implications**. In other words, the New Testament was to be something that the family of Christians were to be devoted to.

To be devoted to something is to be fully committed to. To be enthusiastic about. This is how they were about everything in the New Testament, which was still in the process of being inspired and recorded.

Now they did have an advantage over us in one way. They could have Peter or John speak directly to them about what they have seen and heard. They had the first-person testimony of the apostles themselves.

But in some ways, we have an advantage over them, because we have these apostles written words recorded for us in our Bible. And we can take these words everywhere we go. So even though we don’t have John and Peter and others physically standing with us, we have the books that God inspired them to write.

And we are called as a family to treasure all of God’s Word together. This is done not just through Sunday worship, but as we order our daily life. We have a Bible Book of the Month here, that even though we are not all physically together every day, we can all be devoting ourselves to the same part of God’s Word through the month.

But while we do this on our own or within our individual families, please encourage one another with what you’ve been reading. Share thoughts and insights and questions with one another. The more that we share with one another, the more natural it will be to share with those outside our fellowship.

Please know that you are invited to share testimonies of God speaking to you through His word. This can be done during the sharing of joys and concerns. And if you have a longer story, please just speak to me earlier in the week and I can arrange for that as well. And if you’d rather write something out for me to read, I would be happy to do that as well.

I am excited that after worship today there will be a meeting about children’s Sunday School and Junior Church as we discuss how this vital ministry at Chestnut Grove can encourage our children here in their faith. Truly, we are a family. We are meant to be a home for one another.

I also plan to lead a Bible Study during the Sunday School Hour through the month of October on the book of Philippians. This will be in the Fellowship Hall and I would love to have the room filled up to be in God’s Word together. It can be like us sitting around the kitchen table together, just gathered around God’s beautiful word as a family.

If you have a desire to teach adult Sunday School or lead a small group, please let me know. My hope as your pastor is to help equip teachers to teach God’s Word powerfully. God has blessed me with many resources and if you feel that this is one of your giftings, please speak to me about this.

**Luke also writes that they were not only devoted to the apostles’ teaching, but they were devoted to fellowship.**

Think about that for a moment. The church is to be devoted to fellowship. I know that these are strange times with masks and restrictions, but please do not let this impede you from being devoted to fellowship.

Fellowship is not an insignificant thing in the kingdom of God. We’ve been speaking about foundation of God’s kingdom. And prioritizing fellowship is one of them. Just being together. As the book of Proverbs says, **“as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”**

We were not meant to be alone. We can always do this creatively through the phone or email or texting or regular mail. Reach out to others if you’re not doing so. Spend time together, as much as possible. Encourage one another. Ask one another about how their walk with Christ is doing.

One of the things that John Wesley and the other leaders in the earth Methodist movement valued was practical holiness. But this, this thought that it was critically important to share with one another how our walk with Christ is going and hear from one another how their walk with Christ is going.

In fact, for about 100 years, it was REQUIRED that everyone in the Methodist Church participate in a small group that was devoted to simply sharing how each other’s walk with the Lord is going and to encourage one another.

Sadly, not only are these groups rare nowadays, but rarely to most Christians in America practice regularly sharing how their walk with Christ is going with one another. Our lives as Christians is meant to be lived out in community, as much as possible.

If this is resonating with any of you, please speak to me about it. At my previous church, we were able to get a few groups running, which we called Life Groups. And these groups were focused on practically sharing how our walk with Christ is going and encouraging one another. I would like to see these groups begin here at Chestnut Grove as well.

**But Luke doesn’t stop there. He says that they were also devoted to the breaking of bread. Most likely this is not just a reference to eating together, but also to regularly share Holy Communion with one another.** Even in these days with the virus going around, it was so meaningful to share Communion with you a couple of weeks ago. We did it differently, but I am so glad we did it. And we will continue to do it. We grow as a Christian family as we regularly celebrate Holy Communion together.

**And lastly, Luke writes that they were devoted to prayer**. We are to be people of prayer. We are to talk with the Lord about everything. Yesterday we have a Day to Prayer here at Chestnut Grove. We grow as a Christian family as we each grow in our prayer walk. We can pray for one another. We can ask one another, ‘how can I pray for you?’

And besides these things that these early Christians were devoted to, they cared for the needs of one another and for the needs of others outside the community of faith.

And as the church was focused on living as a family for Jesus, what does God do? The Lord adds daily to their number.

I believe that as the church lives as a family and cares for one another in each of these ways as also seeks to be a blessing to others, God will bring others into the community.

When His family seeks to live as the family of God, the Lord will often cause it to grow. He will bring others into that family.

So brothers and sisters, let’s practice being family each day! Let’s encourage one another. Let’s grow in God’s Word together. Let’s support and help one another and those in need around us. Let’s break bread together and value Holy Communion together. Let us pray together.

Church, we just have to be who we were created to be. Calvina was made to be out and about, enjoying God’s creation. And we were meant to be true family to one another. And as the light of Christ shines brightly within us as a family, we will bring that light the furthest.

So let’s blaze as the family of God right here at Chestnut Grove. That’s God’s desire for us. And I trust that as we grow in this way, the light of Christ within us will go further than ever before. Amen!

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/they-were-no-fools-60-years-ago-today-the-martyrdom-of-jim-elliot-and-four-other-missionaries/>

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<https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2125255.Jim_Elliot>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A42-47&version=NIV>

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