

Monday, September 14, 2009

With the summer behind us, we step together into a busy fall and new school year. We, Calvary Church, are a growing family of more than 1000 people representing almost every slice of Walworth County and a few surrounding counties. When we come together at Calvary, have you noticed our differences fade and our shared spiritual journey joins us? Why? Why is God bringing us together, what does God want to accomplish IN us and THROUGH us as a 'church'? You'll recall the word 'church' used in the New Testament means "called out people" . . . consider 1 Peter 2:9,10 as one example of what it means.

As we transition from summer 2009 to fall, I feel strongly led by the Holy Spirit to present us with a "mandate" Calvary is receiving from God. This "mandate" defines who God wants us to BE and what God wants us to DO in this our 89th year of existence. Perhaps you'll recall Calvary was birthed in 1921 as the Swedish Mission Church, then changed it's name to "The Gospel Tabernacle" the following year as worship services were changed from Swedish to English, right here in Williams Bay! The name Calvary Community Church was adopted in 1961 and the move from "downtown" Williams Bay to our present location occurred in July 1973.

"Helping People Engage With God" is a simple, easy to remember statement. It is the first of four parts to the "mandate" I will share with you this month. Consider this: because we are born with a sinful nature (Romans 5), God desires that all humanity come to an AWARENESS of God (2 Peter 3:9), then move toward an ENCOUNTER with God and finally begin living life ENGAGED with God.

Romans 1:20 says all mankind has "no excuse" for an "awareness" of God is evident all around us. Easily we conclude we didn't create ourselves, 'Someone' much more intelligent and powerful than us creates life. Our universe didn't just happen, that same "Someone" created and sustains our vast universe. (Psalm 19:1-4; Isaiah 40:25,26). Each generation has a responsibility to teach their children about God (Psalm 78). So how have you become "aware" of God?? Who is God? (Isaiah 46)

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

Daily our children spend hours in school with a purpose . . . learning information upon which the rest of their lives will be built. Expanding knowledge of Math, Science, History, Geography, reading, writing, and of course much more, moves them from illiterate children to educated men and women able to assume their responsible position in society. Have you noticed God has designed us with a hunger for more learning than "school" can provide? You and I have a deep, God-given need for spiritual development too, for we have a natural hunger to discover God, grow in knowing God, and the development of a relationship with God!

The "Calvary mandate" I am sharing with you this week begins with our "awareness" of God. Perhaps that happened in your family, or through attending Sunday School or AWANA as a child, or through your study of Science or maybe you simply found your mind and heart searching for God. God has countless ways to draw people to an awareness of Him, but simple awareness of God's existence is not enough. Awareness needs to move to an encounter with God!

The Bible is filled with people having "encounters" with God. Consider the Gospel of John: In chapter 1 Andrew, John, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathaniel all "encounter" Jesus for the first time. In chapter 2, a wedding gathering "encounters" Jesus through his first miracle. In chapter 3 Nicodemus "encounters" Jesus at night and they have a world famous conversation. In chapter 4 it's a Samaritan woman drawing water at a well, and in chapter 5 a cripple who'd been in that condition 38 years! So, when, where and how have you encountered God? What was the result in your life? *At Calvary Church, everything we do each time the doors of our building are open, we aim to help people encounter God!!* Think about that . . . our building, our programs, our finances, our efforts . . . everything we have and do is for the purpose of drawing people into ENCOUNTERS with God!

WHY would we spend all we are and have for this? Consider Romans 1:20; Matthew 28:18-20; John 5:24; John 17:3 . . . so anyone who contacts Calvary can know Jesus and be saved for all eternity, that's why! Nothing is more important!

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

Ever wished you could "time travel" to a certain event in history. Oh, there are hundreds of Biblical events I would love to go back and experience . . . how about you? Acts 11 is one of those as the city of Antioch experienced a dramatic change affected by some "refugees" who moved and brought God with them!

Acts 8:1 helps us understand why people were forced to flee Jerusalem, leaving homes and jobs behind, to escape the persecution. Some settled in Antioch, and "some" were courageous enough to begin sharing with new Antioch friends, their "awareness" of and "encounters" with God. Greeks tended to be highly philosophical and loved to discuss/debate religion. Consider Acts 17 and what Paul found in Athens. As the displaced Jewish followers of Jesus Christ began speaking of Jesus in Antioch, the miracle of "spiritual engagement" began happening! That is what "missions" is all about. Missionaries move to a new place and begin "engaging" the truth about Jesus Christ into that new culture, and as they do, the culture is affected with new thought, new attitudes, and of course the new Presence of God! Dawn and I have lived that as Calvary sent us to Haiti more than 20 years ago, and hundreds of people came to know Jesus because we "engaged" them and their culture with Jesus!

You understand "engagement" . . . the difference between your car sitting at a stop light idling, and stepping on the gas so your engine "engages" the drive shaft and your car moves forward. It also happens when an athlete moves from sitting on the bench to getting in the game on the field. Or when a young couple moves from dating to a commitment to marriage . . . that's engagement.

So do you understand the "mandate" I'm bringing to Calvary this September? God wants us to move from "awareness" of God, to "encounters" with God, and then beyond that to living our lives "engaged" with God. We get in the game of life with God's truth permeating our minds, God's Spirit active in our emotions and attitudes. God leads us and we follow Him as He "engages" us in the cultures in which we live and work . . . just like Antioch! Read Acts 11:19-26 carefully. Look closely . . . have you moved from encounter to engagement with God?

Thursday, September 17, 2009

How do you recognize when God is present and doing something significant? The Bible is filled with such stories, but what about at your workplace or in your school or neighborhood? What about Calvary and how God is using Calvary in Walworth County? Do you see evidence that God is “engaging” our county through His strategic Presence and Power in Calvary Church?

Consider Acts 11:19-30. Look at the transformation in the town of Antioch when people “engaged” with God moved there and began living normal life in that town. We can assume the business climate changed as men and women “engaged” with Jesus insisted business be done honorably. The crime rate probably dropped and school truancy went down, and the taverns started closing earlier due to lack of business, and people became more respectful of each other, etc. Why? Because people had moved into Antioch who knew and loved Jesus Christ and lived their lives to honor God!

Notice the description of Barnabas. You meet him first in Acts 4:36, and of course he is Paul’s first traveling companion (Acts 13-15). Do you know anyone who is “a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith”? Clearly Barnabas was a man living his life “engaged with God”. His visit to Antioch fanned the flame of passion these displaced refugees had for Jesus Christ and their desire to affect change in Antioch as they engaged the Antioch culture. Now consider this carefully my friends. What difference does it make that YOU live in the neighborhood you do, or that your children attend the school they do or that you work in the organization you do? Your mandate and mine is that our engagement with God must make a difference, right? But notice in Antioch, it wasn’t a contrived or forced thing. No picket lines, no boisterous crowds, no demonstrations demanding change . . . it was the “engage with God” living of these refugees from Jerusalem who were believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, that affected Antioch!

Do you see what the people of Antioch did in response to the influence of these “Jesus followers”? They came up with a name for them . . . Christians (Acts 11:26)!! Men, women and children living so “engaged” with God, they earned a new name!

Friday, September 18, 2009

We’ve been hearing about “swine flu” and how contagious it is, and what a ‘pandemic’ might be like in the world. What would a “pandemic” of Christianity look like around the world?

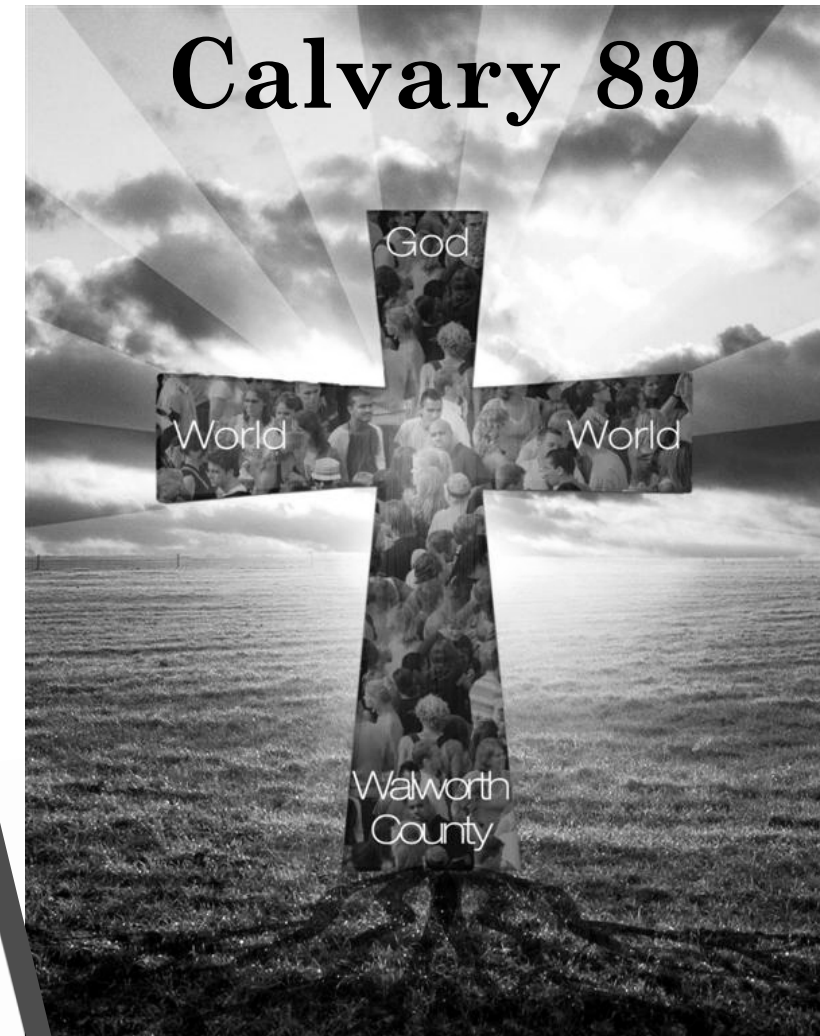
This week I’m challenging us to consider moving from “awareness” of God to “encounters” with God, but as wonderful as it is, don’t settle for that. I’m inviting you to not settle for anything less than living your life “engaged” with God. Your mind filled regularly with God’s truth so you THINK like God thinks (Romans 8:5-9; 1 Corinthians 2). Your heart so filled with a deep love and respect for God that your ATTITUDES reflect an intimacy with God (Romans 8:10-17; Ephesians 4:17-5:8; Colossians 3). Finally, your spirit so in tune with the Spirit of God that your DECISIONS and ACTIONS are simply as Jesus would behave (Galatians 5; Philippians 4; Ephesians 6).

Think back through the Bible . . . Abraham moved his family and trusted God for a miracle son, because he lived “engaged with God”. Joseph was able to experience rejection from his family, seduction by his boss’ wife yet remain confident in and available to God because he lived “engaged with God”. Noah took years to build an ark ridiculed by his neighbors because he lived “engaged with God”. Daniel lived as a prisoner of war, yet advised kings because he lived “engaged with God”. Samuel grew up in a terribly hypocritical environment, away from his family, yet led Israel faithfully for more than 40 years because from childhood he lived “engaged with God”. Moses led 2 million grumbling slaves for 40 years, because he lived “engaged with God”. Each of the Apostles lived difficult lives and died as martyrs because they lived “engaged with God.” So . . . what does living “engaged with God” look like in YOUR life?

In Acts 11 we saw how God worked in His people as they lived “engaged with Him” in Antioch. Notice Acts 13 and how God led a church who was “engaged with God” to launch the missionary movement. It happened in worship, do you see that? Be careful in worship . . . as worship engages you with God, God will engage Himself with you . . . it’s life transforming!

Pastor Doug Anderson

September 14 - 18, 2009



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Engaging With God

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