

McCabe United Methodist Church

WELCOME

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Welcome. It's a word we hear quite often. Welcome. It's easy enough to say it. It's more of a challenge to mean it. As Christians, it's something we should do every day. We should welcome those we encounter.

I first became a member of this church 25 years ago. I am still here for a variety of reasons. The main reason is how I came to be at McCabe in the first place AND how I was treated when I came here. In the late summer of 1989 I moved to Bismarck after having graduated from law school. I had a one-year clerkship with the North Dakota Supreme Court. I worked there with a woman named Lorraine who invited me to attend McCabe. She was married to a guy named Art or is it Ole, those personalities sometimes meld...

Being welcomed by the Scanson's and many of you led me to join this church. And almost 23 years ago now, I was standing right up here exchanging vows with my wonderful wife, Kory. We did leave for four years when I got a job in Fargo, but when Kory and I moved back to Bismarck in 1994, we came back to McCabe. In part because she was a third generation member of this church, but also because we felt welcome. And we still do. And we raised our kids in this church. Many of you have had a role in that. Whether it was teaching them in Sunday School or just simply being a friendly face, you have affected their lives. Lexi is 20 and will be starting her third year of college, transferring to the U of M this fall. Kyle is 18 and will start at NDSU this fall. So, I am grateful that I can ask you as our church family to pray for us. As Kory and I become empty nesters, we will need the prayers more than the kids will in their new adventures in life. Thank you for that.

As we, as McCabe's family take this opportunity to welcome a new pastor, we need to remind ourselves that we should welcome and treat all visitors the same way, the way that Jesus told his disciples to act at the Last Supper shortly before the ultimate sacrifice:

Jesus said: My children, my time here is brief. You will be searching for me and as I told the Jews, 'You cannot go where I am going'. So I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, deeply and fully, just as I have loved you. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. Everyone will know you as My followers if you *demonstrate* your love to others.

DEMONSTRATE. That's not always easy is it, to demonstrate that love to everyone, every day, to every person we encounter.

I want to thank Derrick for doing his song here again today. A marvelous song that

he wrote. He first did his song for us about a month ago and it moved me. I asked him to do it again today because I thought it fit into what I wanted to talk about. It is titled "Get it Right."

How do we know when we have it right? What do we need to do to prepare for the day that we leave this earth and go to meet our Maker? Or for the day that he returns?

I am a schedule and list kind of guy. At work, and even at home, I like to know exactly what I am doing that day and when I am doing it. I make a list of the things I need to do. And I cross those items off the list when I am done. For example, I am a trial attorney, a criminal prosecutor. So, when I have a trial coming up, I have a list of things I need to have done 2 weeks before the trial and one week before the trial and eventually I have done everything on my list and I can say I am ready. I'm done...nothing left to do to prepare.

But preparing to meet God is not the same is it? I mean, we can make a list of things to do as a Christian and specifically things to do to serve this church, can't we?

--teach Sunday School; --Sign up to be an usher; --make brownies for funeral
--going to make coffee for the month of August

We can make that list, but when we cross those items off the list, we can't just say DONE. OK, now I sit and wait. Right, there is no certain number of good deeds that God asks us to do and then says, that's it, you're good. You're done. No, we need to live our lives every day that way – the way that God wants us to – like he wanted the Disciples to, like welcoming visitors, strangers if you will.

As we heard in the Matthew scripture, there will come a time when Jesus Christ will return. I often wonder how will that happen? The sky better open up and He better walk through it or we might miss it.

One of my all-time favorite TV shows was MASH. There was one episode where a soldier came to be treated at the 4077th. When his physical wounds were treated he told the people there that he was not a soldier, that he was Jesus and he had returned. Well, even Father Mulkahey was skeptical and what did they do – they called for Dr. Sidney Friedman, a psychiatrist. Because they did not believe him. Of course, what did Jesus face when He was here the first time? What happened when He told people He was the Son of God? He was met with a lot of skepticism and ultimately, crucifixion

So, what about when he comes back? If He does not make a grand triumphant entrance, we might miss it. How will we know? It is unfortunate that in our world today we have to be wary of what people tell us; there are scams where people are trying to take advantage of others. That makes it harder for the people in our society who are legitimately trying to do good for others. It makes it harder to welcome people, strangers for sure, because of the actions of others, we just don't feel we can trust them until we get to know them. That is why I feel some security in doing good works for this church and through this church. Because there is a lot of good that this church does.

I have an example of someone doing a good thing and how we can help. Some of

you have the pleasure of knowing a young lady named Elly Steckler. Elly is 15 years old. She has hereditary pancreatitis and suffers chronic pain. She has endured a lot in her short life. And now she is going to make someone else's life better by running 5K's this summer to raise money for the Foundation for Childhood Pancreatitis. The money she raises goes to this foundation for education and also for assisting families to get the care they need. Anyone can sponsor her by writing a check to the Foundation for Childhood Pancreatitis and sending it to Elly or her mother Beth Steckler at 3236 Crocus Avenue in Bismarck. Elly is also attempting to get a website up and running about childhood pancreatitis and the foundation.

I also think of people like the Karen Workman's of the world. A true missionary with her work on the Haiti Solar oven project. I know her, I trust her. These are just a couple examples of the truly good things that people in this church are doing to make other people's lives better.

And there are so many of you out there. You know who you are. You make this church a wonderful place. As we transition to a new Pastor we are entering a wonderful, exciting new time in this church. And we need each and every one of you to continue your great works. In fact let's do even more.

I will admit that sometimes I have done things in this church out of a sense of responsibility, maybe even guilt. When I get that call from the nominating committee to serve on a committee or I get that call from Floramay about doing a skit or helping with VBS, sometimes I am busy and it feels like an inconvenience. But ultimately, after seeing the excitement and wonder on the face of a 7-year old after you have told them the story of Saul or The Good Samaritan, the feeling of satisfaction makes it all worthwhile.

I have to admit, I have not had the Moses burning bush moment. But, I feel God speaking to me through people in this church, right here in our midst. How does God speak to you? Do you think about that? It happens and sometimes we just don't realize it.

I have a challenging day job – I am a federal prosecutor, which means a lot of people I encounter end up in prison. There are days when I feel conflicted based upon my Christian upbringing to forgive others of their sins. But most of the time, the people I deal with have made choices, bad choices. But they will have the opportunity to make better choices in the future. To have a positive effect on someone's life rather than a negative.

I hope you all heard the message that Chris Chase shared with us a few Sunday's ago. Chris shared his struggles with drug addiction. But he has turned his life around and is now making good choices. That's inspiring.

Choices – as members of this church, as members of God's church we have to make choices. And even though it isn't always easy or convenient, we need to make choices that are motivated by what God would want us to do.

I am sure you have all heard the phrase “pay it forward.” I found the following on a website after googling “pay it forward.”

Selflessness is the sincere concern for the well-being of others. It’s about love. It’s about compassion. It’s about kindness and faith. It’s about making a difference in the world. Sure, you are only one, but you are one. You cannot do everything, but you can do something. Smile and enjoy the fact that you have the ability to make a difference – one you’ll likely remember forever.

It can be so simple, yet so rewarding. One day this past winter, I was at the grocery store. It had snowed an inch or two, enough to make it hard to push a full shopping cart through the parking lot. I was at my car and had finished loading my groceries, when I saw a woman who was struggling to get through the snow. In fact, she was stuck, so I went over and offered to help. I grabbed the front of the cart and pulled and she pushed and we were able to get to her car. She was so thankful. It was so simple and took two minutes. But I guarantee you that I felt better than she did.

As I close today, I want to leave you with something I shared at Pastor Rick’s retirement gathering. It is from a book called QS written by Tony Dungy. Tony Dungy is a retired professional football coach. He was an assistant coach with the MV and later became the head coach of the Indianapolis Colts where he won a Super Bowl. But, as you can see from this excerpt from his book, he gets it right.

*Tony Dungy, Quiet Strength

Society tends to define success in terms of accomplishments and awards, material possessions, and profit margins. In the football business, winning is the only thing that matters.

God’s Word, however, presents a different definition of success—one centered on a relationship with Jesus Christ and a love for God that allows us to love and serve others. God gives each one of us unique gifts, abilities, and passions. How well we use those qualities to have an impact on the world around us determines how “successful” we really are.

If we get caught up in chasing what the world defines as success, we can use our time and talent to do some great things. We might even become famous. But in the end, what will it mean? What will people remember us for? Are other people’s lives better because we lived? Did we make a difference? Did we use to the fullest the gifts and abilities God gave us? Did we give our best effort, and did we do it for the right reasons?

God’s definition of success is really one of *significance*—the significant difference our lives can make in the lives of others. The significance doesn’t show up in win-loss records, long resumes, or the trophies gathering dust on our mantels. It’s found in the hearts and lives of those we’ve come across who are in some way better because of the way we lived.

Think about what a great world this would be if everyone took that attitude and actually lived it out – that we all lived our lives and actually made someone else's life better. It would come back to us ten-fold. And we wouldn't have to worry about making a list of good things that we have to do by the end of the day, by the end of the year, by the end of our life. We would be living it every single day.

Let's strive to do that in our lives as we welcome Pastor Jenny to McCabe UMC.
AMEN.