

Reclaiming Lost Values
A Faith That's Real
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(Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 NRSV) What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? {2} For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. {3} For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." {4} Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. {5} But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. {13} For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. {14} If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. {15} For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. {16} For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, {17} as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

This morning we are continuing our series looking at the values that should be shaping our lives as Christians, and how we can reclaim them. This morning we will look at faith, next week — confirmation Sunday — Jeff will talk about hope, and then I will finish up with generosity followed by thankfulness.

I have thought a lot about faith this week, and I think I want to try to look at this from a different angle. Normally, when we talk about faith, we talk about WHAT we believe and so we talk about doctrine and dogma and concepts. But this morning I want to do something else — I want to talk about why we call Ridge United Methodist Church home.

Two Protestants (one a clergy, the other a layperson) were talking — what they were talking about were their different ways of understanding God. They had a wonderful conversation, and it was time for one to leave. The clergy said to the layperson:

Yes, we both worship the same God.
You in your way. And I in his!

Too often that is the way we look at God — I have it right and you have it

wrong.

Why do you come to Ridge Church, if you think about it you could go to any of a multitude of churches this morning. In a town of around 22,000 people, there are some 22 churches and 2 synagogues in town. And if we were to throw in the surrounding communities — WOW, there are a lot of choices that you have each Sunday.

Bishop Coyner in his weekly e-pistle wrote a couple weeks ago:

Indiana is a highly-churched state, although that percentage has been steadily dropping, until now most estimates agree that less than 50% of Hoosiers belong to any religious organization and on any given Sunday less than 20% of the population actually attends worship anywhere.

If the Bishop's statistics are correct — less than 5,000 people in Munster are in worship this weekend.

But you are here. Of all the choices in our area, you have chosen Ridge Church. And I am glad that you have, but have you ever though WHY. Why do I call Ridge Church home?

My hunch is that you are here for a number of reasons,

- 1) because you grew up in a Methodist Church
traditionally this was a major factor in the type of church you attended — but not anymore
- 2) because your family attends here
- 3) because it is convenient
- 4) because of what we do
- 5) because of what we believe

Think about it for a second . . .
Any other reasons?

Look at the list again — what's your number one reason.

I have no doubt, but that some of you choose Ridge Church because of what we believe, but my bet is that is not the number one reason for many of you.

What does that mean?

If belief isn't our primary motivator — what is?

What is it about Ridge Church that we are willing to participate in it, and make it our home?

- That we are willing to take our hard earned time and money to invest in Ridge Church

This past week has been another difficult one for our country.

T.S. Eliot said in *The Wasteland* that
 APRIL is the cruellest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.

It would appear he's right.

The tragedy at Virginia Tech occurred within days of the 8th anniversary of the horror of Columbine.

Earlier this week, someone said to me — “you know, if the right person had a gun, this tragedy would never have happened.”

What is going on in our society?

Maybe I am naive — or maybe just plain stupid — but there has got to be a better way.

GK Chesterton once said that as a Christian “we have one foot on earth, and one foot in fairyland.”

I think he is right — because as a Christian, we are always looking for a better way.

There's a scene from the Oscar-nominated film of last year, *Blood Diamond* that's provocative.

The movie is set in 1999 Sierra Leone while a civil war rages fueled by conflict over diamonds which are sold to pay for weapons.

Leonardo DeCaprio plays Danny Archer, the anti-hero, a mercenary with something of a conscience, who-along with good guys and bad guys-is

hunting for this huge pink diamond.

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) meanwhile, is leveling entire villages, — chopping off the hands of some people so they can't vote in the coming elections, and snatching young boys to force them to become soldiers in the rebel army.

In a quiet moment of reflection while mayhem explodes around them, Danny Archer chats with a journalist, Maddy Bowen, and reveals that his

"Mum was raped and shot and Dad was decapitated and hung from a hook in the barn. Sometimes I wonder, will God ever forgive us for what we've done to each other? Then I look around and I realize. God left this place a long time ago."

Is that the problem?

Has God left this place long ago?

Every few months it seems that there is another tragedy

University of Texas

Luby's

Jonesboro

Columbine

Paducah

Amish killings

Postal workers

Violence at the workplace

Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox speculates that the increasing popularity of workplace killings, and public shootings generally, may be partly due to decreasing economic security and increasing inequality.

America increasingly rewards its winners with a disproportionate share of wealth and adoration, while treating its losers to a heaping helping of public shame.

"We ridicule them. We vote them off the island. We laugh at them on 'American Idol,'" Fox said.

But there has also been an erosion of community in America over the past half-century, and many scholars believe it has contributed to the rise in mass shootings.

"One would think that there's some new component to alienation or isolation," said Jeffrey S. Adler, a professor of history and criminology at the

University of Florida.

Let me go back to my original question.

Why do you come to church?
Why do you come to Ridge Church?

To get into heaven?

I don't think so, you are all too sophisticated to be lured by a religion that is about pie in the sky rewards — if that was what you were looking for, you would not be at Ridge — you would be at another church.

To get “blessed by God?”

So that you can increase in your material wealth

No, most of you don't believe in a “santa claus” god.

You come to church so that you can walk closer with God — to learn more about the way of Jesus.

And you have chosen Ridge Church because the ministries that we are doing have the potential to change the world.

Think of the things that we are doing that make a difference.

Work team on way to Louisiana right now

Soup Kitchen on Mondays

State Street Center on Saturdays

Youth programs

Winning At Life

Open Gym

When I look at the tragedies that have devastated our country — there is always a common theme.

The people who do the terrible acts were alienated from their brothers and sisters.

The felt alone in the world

We acknowledge at Ridge Church that we are never alone — that God is always with us — in our good decisions and in our bad decisions

We also recognize that relationship with God is not something that is for us alone — we know that God invites everyone to be in a relationship with God and we, as the church, are invited to help facilitate that.

You don't get it by knowing the right words — you get it by walking the walk every day.

That's why we are in the midst of this REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE campaign.

We built that fellowship hall so that we could reach people that we were not reaching without it.

Because it is not words that bring people into relationship with Jesus — it is our action as God's children.

Are we a people of love?
 Are we a people of hope?
 Are we a people of generosity and thanksgiving?

Remember what James says:

(James 2:14-24 NRSV) What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? {15} If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, {16} and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? {17} So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. {18} But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. {19} You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder. {20} Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? {21} Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? {22} You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. {23} Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. {24} You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Will our ministries stop a tragedy like Virginia Tech?

I think so — by showing love, unconditional love, we create a new climate, a new environment.

I will never forget this story —

Squeaky Fromm, one of the women in Charles Manson's gang, she was the one who attempted to assassinate President Ford. After she was arrested she was evaluated by mental health professionals and they made the following comment.

They said that if Squeaky Fromm had been invited to become a part of a Christian community, rather than Charles Manson's family that she probably would have become a dynamic leader in the community.

Laurie Beth Jones, author of Jesus CEO, The Path, and Jesus Life Coach has created a ministry in El Paso, Texas in which she provides coaching to at risk youth.

One group of youth that she coached were young people who had a choice, attend the coaching experience or go to jail.

Instead of continuing to give the same old negative prophecies that they had heard

- you are gonna end up in prison just like your dad
- your good for nothing

Instead of those messages, she helped the youth write personal mission statements — what do you want to do with your life.

Which is the message of Jesus?

We have a great opportunity here at Ridge Church. I hope that you will have the courage and the faith to join me on the journey as we invite others to experience and love God, just as we have.