

40th Anniversary

Why Faith Community Church?

Good morning church! Happy 40th birthday. That's exciting, isn't it? This morning I want to answer the question "Why FCC" but I thought it would be interesting to start off with this question:

I don't want to embarrass anybody about "age" questions but could you do this for me... If your 39 years old or younger, please raise your hand and keep it up. I asked Amy and she told me that we have 221 "active" Children's Ministry children from nursery-5th grade.

Now add that to the number of hands you see and remember, this is only one of two services.

Those who study such things tell us that 1000 churches start up every year, but between 4 and 7 thousand churches close their doors every year. Over half the churches in the US are 100 people or less.

We may not be a mega church but I believe there's something going on here that's exciting. There's spiritual life here.

I was digging around in my desk drawers and came up some interesting artifacts from the very beginning of Faith Community Church.

On that first Sunday, September 10, 1978, we put a sign that we had painted out in front of what was then Saint John's Chapel, waited for the elderly Episcopalian congregation who met there at 10 AM to finish their service, and at 11 AM we held our first service.

We had no idea who would show up outside of the small group who had committed themselves to this fledgling church. That morning 39 people showed up and Faith Community Church was officially launched. Our offering that day was \$230.

In the coming weeks attendance moved up into the 40s. It even hit 54 one Sunday. And then to humble us and show us that it wasn't going to happen without a lot of hard work and prayer we had a Sunday where the service attendance was a record 18 people! I don't know how many of those were adults but it probably represented about 6 families.

That first year we gave \$855 to missions and paid me an average of \$118 per week!

That building had no AC, no insulation, hard pews, and one back room. We stretched wire across and made 4 classrooms by hanging bed sheets.

The nursery was a little vestibule that led to the restrooms.

Can you believe people came and actually stayed!

From there we moved to Arundel Senior High and met in the band room along with a few classrooms.

There was no AC back then and there were no windows and only one door to the outside. You can only imagine how hot it got in the summer. We ran 10 box fans to move the air around.

The skylight leaked when it rained. The band director came in a number of times and banged around in the room where instruments were stored. That was right behind me and he did it while I was preaching. We even had the band come in during a couple of our services to pick up instruments.

Well, an interesting thing happened after one of our services. A couple who had attended for a while at the little white church visited the band room and as they were leaving the husband said to me, "Call us when you get a real church!"

I didn't say the first thing that came to mind because it wasn't very pastoral. But what I thought was, "Look around you. See these people? They're the real church!"

Well, things have come a long way in 40 years. Here we are today a vibrant church filled with people who worship and serve God. There are so many volunteers serving in so many areas I don't know how to even count them all.

And yet it would be easy for someone who's not really familiar with the Bible to ask, why?

Why all the money, the activity, the time, the effort? What's it all about?

We've been doing this for 40 years now. It would be easy to say, "Well, we just do it. It's what we do. It's who we are." And if we're not careful we could easily find that we've lost our sense of purpose.

And so I'd like us to think for a few minutes about this question: *Why Faith Community Church?*

To answer that question, I'd like us to start in one of the most remarkable books in the Bible, the book of Hosea.

Hosea was a Jewish prophet who lived and wrote in the 8th century BC. At that time Israel was split into a northern and southern kingdom. Hosea spoke to those in the northern kingdom which was called Israel or Ephraim.

The book of Hosea covers about 40 years of his ministry to a people who were stuck in a spiritual stupor. They had lost their sense of purpose and direction. And here's why. They had lost their sense of the holiness and wonder of God Himself.

I. Faith Community Church Exists Because God loves Us With An Astonishing Love

Read verses 2-3

Here's what happens.

God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute who continues to ply her trade after the wedding.

This is a book of the Bible that makes us ask all kinds of questions, right? We're like, "What?"

Why did God tell Hosea to marry an immoral woman? Isn't God the one who devised marriage to be a committed lifetime union between a husband and wife? Isn't marriage supposed to be a reflection of Christ and the church?

Those questions are exactly the point of Hosea. None of us would choose to marry someone like Gomer. (First of all who'd even want to go out with a girl named Gomer. Could you imagine saying to your buddies, "I'd like you to meet my girlfriend Gomer"?)

But beyond that, there wasn't anything attractive about her life. She might have been good looking. We don't know. But there wasn't anything about her character that was appealing. But God commanded His godly prophet to marry this ugly woman. And here's why.

This was the way that Hosea was going to get a glimpse of the heart of God. Here's how we're given a window into the heart of God.

Ed Welch writes, God was saying to Hosea, in effect, "You and I are both going to give our heart completely to someone who will utterly reject us. We will give all of our hearts, energy, and time in pursuit of them.

By doing this, you, Hosea, will understand my faithful love for you and your people. You see, I, myself, am the husband. Your life will be about my love. Your pain will point to my own. Your faithfulness will replicate mine."

This was Hosea's ordination to the ministry. What would you do if you were him?

His contemporary, Isaiah, who was a prophet used by God in the southern kingdom, had a much different inauguration. He got called into the ministry by being given a vision of the throne room of God. He was just blown away by the majesty and purity of the Holy One.

That we can understand. God is holy and His holiness compels us to serve Him. Isaiah cries out "Here am I. Send me."

But Hosea gets to see another side of the very same God. Hosea meets Gomer in the seat of sinners and witnesses the unfathomable love of the Holy One.

That love was to be Hosea's message to Israel. It was an illustration. He was a living object lesson.

Hosea obeys, marries Gomer, and they have their first child. Within a short time 2 other children are born. You'd think Gomer would realize the importance of her family and feel some ties for home. That's not what happens.

Read Chapter 3 verse 1

Even though they had three children at home, Gomer was openly committing adultery.

Now here's the point. As we read about this sham marriage and the broken heart of God for His people we have to look at our own lives.

The real question is, how could God ever call me His bride? That's what the Bible calls the church. The Bride of Christ.

I have to believe that Hosea was making the same spiritual connection. He was beginning to fathom the width, length, height, and depth of God's love in his own life and for Israel.

Ultimately Gomer was discarded by her lovers. She didn't have their respect and she was probably showing the signs of her lifestyle and her age. In the end she had left Hosea and eventually up in the slave market for sale.

Gomer was now done. Her adulteries had led her almost to the grave. She was an outcast, beyond hope. Her shame, fear, and rejection couldn't have been more intense. She was bound, standing naked in the slave market so she could be inspected by potential buyers.

Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery..." **Read verse 2**

The bidding never went very high. Apparently nobody was impressed with the merchandise. Gomer was sold for the price of a common slave. But what happens next must have got the town gossip machine spinning.

Read 3-5

Hosea reaffirms his marriage vows and takes her back home.

*You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man-
-so, too, will I be toward you. "We'll be true to each other till death do us part."*

You know, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of God's forgiveness for us through the death of His Son is the greatest love story ever told. Where do you find an event that begins to parallel the Gospel? Right here.

Gomer was committed to getting what she wanted. Life was about her and her desires. She looked every where to try to be filled. Hosea didn't buck God on this world's hardest assignment. Hosea committed himself to being a reflection of the Divine Husband.

He knew it was impossible to satisfy his wife's lusts, but he kept pursuing her, calling her to turn away from her own desires and to find satisfaction in marital love.

Finally he redeemed her and brought her back.

What was life like for Hosea? What were the depths of his emotions? How did he emotionally handle the shame, the grief, the feeling of being the target of slander and misunderstanding by his family and neighbors?

Hosea never reveals that part of his life to us. We can just begin to imagine. What he does report is that he simply submitted to God and obeyed.

Now think about this. What is it like for God? You know, when we're hurt deeply by someone we usually don't go around talking about it.

When somebody we love rejects us and makes us look like a fool we don't advertise our deepest feelings.

But now listen to God. **Read 11:8-9**

Did you catch what the Almighty, the High and Lofty One, the One who is the Great I Am said here? *My heart churns within me.* The verb translated "churns" *haphak* normally means "to overthrow." *Sodom... was overthrown in a moment.* Lamentations 4:16.

You might translate *haphak* "gut wrenching." God is saying "This is how much I care for My people. This is the passion I have to bring My people back to Myself."

Does that surprise you? Does it surprise you that God loves a bunch of Gomers like us with a gut wrenching, passionate, unmeasurable, reckless love?

He does. And it wasn't like He doesn't have a choice. God had a choice just like Hosea had a choice.

The choice was to love the unlovely. This is what Ed Welch describes as a "vulnerable, passionate, faithfulness."

Aren't you glad God doesn't operate like we do? We'd have left Gomer in the slave market and said, "Good riddens."

God comes into the slave market and says, *I will not execute the fierceness of My anger... For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror.*

What is it that holds back God's holy wrath?

Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. I Peter 3:18

There's 3 NT words translated by the English word "redeem." One of them is *exagorazo*. *Ex* means "out" and *agorazo* comes from the word *agora*, which is the open market. When God redeems us He buys us out of the slave market of sin.

Now you might be thinking, "Wait a minute. I'm not that bad." God says, "Every one of you has sinned. You have all missed the mark of my perfection." We're all Gomers.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stood in Gomer's place. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stood in our place. He paid the wages of sin for us.

The Bible says, *Everyone who believes is justified from all things. Acts 13:39*

The Bible says: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.. Ephesians 5:31-32*

God takes Gomers who place their faith in Jesus Christ and calls them His bride. And He stops seeing them as wretched and starts seeing them as covered with the holiness and purity of Jesus Christ.

I. Faith Community Church Exists Because God loves Us With An Astonishing Love

II. Faith Community Church Exists Because God Has A Job For Us To Do That's Way Bigger Than Us As Individuals

This country was built on a sense of freedom and individuality. We have a hard time thinking corporately. People don't want to join organizations. We need our space. We don't want to touch anybody else. We have trouble coming in contact with other people.

That mindset can spill over into the church. And here's the problem. Think about some of the commands of scripture and make them singular instead of plural.

I have to go into all the world and preach the gospel. I have to make disciples of all nations. I have to pray without ceasing. I have to care for the widows who are in need.

I have to teach the older men, younger men, younger women. And then in my spare time I have to go to work, finish up school, care for my family, and coach little league. It's not going to happen, right?

Do you think that sometimes the reason we don't fulfill our responsibilities in the kingdom of God is because we can't do it all so we don't do much at all? Do you think we look at all the commands in the Bible and are so overwhelmed that we just give up and sit back and say, "This is just too much?"

What's the answer? The answer is that so many of the commands in the New Testament are given to the church. It's only on the corporate level that we will evangelize the world.

If the kingdom of God is going to be advanced on the planet it's going to take a group effort.

When we decided to build the first building we had a meeting to figure out how to pay for it. We were a relatively small group of mostly young families with young children so we weren't cash rich.

We discussed borrowing and bless his heart, Ken Diamond, who is Eric & Paul Diamond's dad said, "I believe God wants us to build without borrowing."

We decided to set 2 dates. We'd trust God for so much by one date and the rest a few months later. And you know what? It happened. That's why this church is named "Faith Community." We believed God.

But see none of us could have done it alone. It took the corporate Body working together.

When it came time to build this addition it was going to ultimately cost \$1.6 million. This is Faith Community, so we believed God for the money.

Boy, talk about being driven to your knees. And I could tell you a hundred stories about what people did and what we did to involve everyone so everyone could feel like they had a part.

Along the way we discovered something. There were some people who sat back and say, "This is just too much." Because they couldn't give a whole lot, they didn't give anything.

This is why the body is so important. We started “The Elephant Campaign.” How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. We challenged people, “If you can give \$5.00 give \$5.00. If you can give a thousand, give a thousand. But we’re doing something that none of us can do on our own so lets all do it together.”

And in the end it got done. God’s not interested in raising money. He’s interested in raising and maturing His children.

Remember we’re Gomer turned bride of Christ. What does God want for His bride’s body?

The Bible says, *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.* I Corinthians 12:12

It’s actually kind of a humorous passage because it goes on to say, if the whole body were an eye, how could you hear.

If the whole body were a nose, how could you see? To go it alone in Christianity is as absurd as if there was a nose sitting up here on the platform and I tried to engage it. “So how’s it going Mary? What did you guys go on vacation this year?”

That’s how desperately we need one another if we’re going to engage our families, our community, and ultimately our world for Jesus Christ.

God established the nation of Israel, which was intended to be a blessing to the nations. Israel brought us the Bible and ultimately the Savior.

They needed to understand that God was too phenomenally great and awesome for any one person to bring Him the glory He deserves on their own.

Is the church perfect? Is Faith Community Church perfect? Far from it. Sometimes I hear people talk like the church, the Body and Bride of Christ, is an obstacle rather than a blessing.

Some people are angry at the church. Somebody in a church hurt them or disappointed them somehow and they reject the idea of a church.

Maybe they saw some people acting hypocritically or sinfully and so they reject the church.

I always tell people, “Not going to church because there’s too many hypocrites is like not going to the hospital because there’s too many sick people!”

That idea of a believer doing life without a local church is completely foreign to the Bible.

The two greatest commandments are love God and love people. That’s the path we’re supposed to walk down but it’s not always a smooth path. Some of our old Gomer-like qualities keep popping up and making the road kind of bumpy.

That’s the way it’s always been. It was that way right from the beginning in the early church. That’s why we have all the church epistles in the New Testament. Most were written to straighten out problems with people.

If you think about it, God could have protected Himself from all pain and disappointment. He could have wiped out the world in the flood and never have told Noah to build an ark. That would have been it. No more people. No more problems.

Instead, God physically preserved the human race. He even robed himself flesh and walked in our shoes. The Creator personally experienced our emotions and hurts so that He could be our Savior.

We have the example of God Himself. He didn’t need us or anyone else. He told Moses His name is I Am. He just is.

He got along fine before we were created and He’d get along fine if we’d never existed.

God chose to personally and intimately involve Himself in our lives. He did it because He loves us with an astonishing love.

He did it because He has a job for us to do that’s way bigger than any of us as individuals.

Why Faith Community Church? Why all the money, the activity, the time, the effort? What’s it all about?

And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things he might have the preeminence. Colossians 1:16-18

Why Faith Community Church?

To introduce people to Jesus Christ and equip them to become his devoted followers. So that they would give glory to God so that in all things He might have the preeminence.

Calling all Gomers. Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone for the forgiveness of your sins?

Here's the simplest verse in the Bible. There's not one word over one syllable! *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* I John 5:12