

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
January 24 & 25, 2015
Nancy Beach**

Introduction

My name is David Hammond and I'm the director of Creative Worship here at CPC. It's almost a giddy, but an exciting privilege to introduce our guest, Nancy Beach. I never thought I'd be standing here today. I grew up in the church. I was an introverted guy who loved music, who loved visual beauty and technical kinds of things. I found ways to use these in the church through Christmas productions, youth group, and things like that, but actually found out there was a possibility of doing this as a vocation. I've been serving here at CPC for the last year-and-a-half and ten years before that in other places. A lot of why I'm here today is because of Nancy's pioneering work in the area of arts and the church at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. I'm probably one of thousands and thousands who have a similar story about the way they have been influenced through her legacy and her writing. She comes to us as an author and a teacher, but one thing that she probably does most well and most passionately is coach leaders in churches in the United States and around the world. Would you please help me welcome Nancy Beach this morning?

Thank you, David. I appreciate that so much. It's a joy and an honor for me to be here with you again. I always feel your welcoming and gracious spirit. I've been listening and tracking through Pastor John Crosby's first two messages in this series about having a faith worth sharing. I've been stirred up to sow more seeds and to extend more invitations. Maybe like me you don't think of yourself as much of an evangelist. I definitely don't view myself that way. Maybe you can't wait for this next series to start so you can stop feeling guilty about not sowing more seeds and extending more invitations and I really do get that.

For over 20 years I have had the privilege of serving on the management team at Willow Creek. For part of that time, one of my colleagues was a man named Lee Strobel. You may have heard of him. He is known for his gift of evangelism and the terrific books he writes about tough questions that people ask about the Christian faith. This management team of about ten of us would meet every Tuesday, first for lunch and then we would move on to our business agenda. Over lunch we would always catch each other up about our weekends and just kind of tell each other what we did. If Lee had been traveling somewhere, often he would tell a story about how he went on the airplane and sat down next to someone and gave them this amazing spiritual conversation. Sometimes even before the plane had landed, he had led this person to faith. I just wanted to jump in and say, yeah, me, too. That happened to me, too. But I do not have spectacular stories of evangelism like that. For most of us ordinary Christ followers, sharing our faith and extending invitations seems like very risky business because it propels us out of our comfort zones and causes us to maybe wonder, is it really worth it? I want to jump ahead to the conclusion of my talk. Some of you are thinking, "Wow, she's done already!" But I'm just going to give you a clue where we're going to wrap up and say an absolute resounding yes! It is totally

worth it because lives are at stake. We never know how God will use us, in small or maybe big ways, toward the saving of a person who matters. Every single person you and I lock eyes with all day long matters to God.

I need to challenge myself frequently to not numb out and so sometimes I ask myself some probing questions and I want to offer them to you today. They offer us a chance to really do a check on our spirits. **The first question is: Am I growing more zealous for God's house?** This question comes right out of a remarkable episode in the life of Jesus. I'd like you to grab the Bible in the pocket in front of you and turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 2. In this story Jesus showed up in the temple courts in Jerusalem. I think of the temple courts kind of like a lobby of a church today, like out there in the Great Room where you gather and connect with people. Well, Jesus arrived in the temple courts and saw people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. Others were sitting at tables, exchanging money. Let's look at the astonishing response of Jesus, starting in verse 15.

15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. **16** To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" **17** His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

To be zealous about anything is to be full of energy and passion. When we are zealous, we are caught up, we are fully committed, consumed. You and I can be zealous about a hobby like snowmobiling or gardening or cooking or rock climbing. Recently I've been coaching some church leaders up in Green Bay and I have to tell you, those Green Bay people are zealous Packer fans. Those cheeseheads are just crazy! But if you've ever been to Green Bay, you know there are not a whole lot of things to be zealous about up there so it's all about the Packers. Right now they're a little devastated. They need our comfort. But I have a question for you, what gets you pumped up and makes your eyes shine? What almost keeps you awake at night because you get so excited? Does your zeal ever focus on the church?

When the disciples were commenting on the zeal of Jesus, they were actually referring to a Psalm, Psalm 69, where we read this.

9 for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.

David is expressing his own zeal for God's house and says that when God's house or God's church is insulted in any way, he takes those insults deeply and personally. How do you and I react to people who criticize the church? How much do we care about the reputation of the church, the church worldwide, and then this specific church that you are a part of? I think it's really important that we first define reality. The truth is that worldwide, the reputation of the church is generally not good among those who do not go to church. Several years ago I was awakened to this issue in a fresh way by Pastor Dan Kimball from Santa Cruz, California. Dan wrote a provocative book titled *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*. He invested himself in a quest to understand the emerging generation and to really listen well to them. He engaged in numerous coffee shop conversations and uncovered six common misconceptions about the

church. Now remember, these are from people outside the door, who do not go to church. Here's what Dan discovered over and over again. Here is what they said.

1. The church is an organized religion with a political agenda.
2. The church is judgmental and negative.
3. The church is dominated by males and oppressive females.
4. The church is homophobic.
5. The church arrogantly claims that all other religions are wrong, and
6. The church is full of fundamentalists, who take the whole Bible literally.

Regardless of what you and I might think about those statements, these are the perceptions of young people outside the church. To people outside the church, Christianity is not normal. In fact, many of them think it's kind of weird. So how does that make us feel? Do you get stirred up with passion and zeal to be a part of transforming the picture people have of God's house? The good news and there is some good news is that while the young people Dan interviewed were very negative about the church, they were open to Jesus. They had very positive things to say about Jesus. When Dan would ask them about Jesus, there was more often than not, a smile on their faces, but clearly when it comes to the church, we have some work to do.

Jesus calls the church His bride. He treasures the church. If you and I are going to be zealous about the church, whichever one we attend, we are going to have to care about making it more and more healthy, more and more like a place people would want to come, more and more a place where all people who walk in the doors know they are welcome no matter what their stories. We are going to seek for local churches to have a strong reputation in the community because they serve the community in very practical ways. I think of a church my husband and I know in Costa Rica. That particular church has built sidewalks in their town and shelters for the sick. Even people who don't attend there talk about the good that church does in the community.

I've been part of only a few churches in my life. In recent months my husband and I are helping a new church that's been planted in a warehouse in the west loop of downtown Chicago. It's a very young church. We are two of the oldest people who attend there, but my ministry has allowed me to visit all different kinds of churches around the world. I've been to Zimbabwe and worshipped in a little hut there. I went to a church in Germany that was built out of a place where automobiles were sold. I've been to a church in New Jersey that was a converted bowling alley. I've been to cathedrals in London, but I've never been to a perfect church ever, yet I love the church. I want every church to thrive. I am zealous that other people would love the church, too. I use *zealous* about God's house. Are you growing in your zeal?

What would that look like for those of you who call this church your home? It would mean that you pray regularly for the leaders of CPC and believe the very best about that. It means you figure out what part you are supposed to play in this community and you show up and serve with faithfulness and joy. It means you observe where the church is not as great as it could be and instead of being a critic, you lovingly do what you can to make improvements. It means you speak well of the church and its people. You avoid slander and work through conflicts because inevitably, in every single church there is conflict. It means you don't see yourself as a consumer of this church and its ministries, rather, you yourself are consumed with zeal to be a player on the field. It means if you head to the restroom after church even today and there are paper

towels lying around, you clean them up because this is your church and you want it to be as beautiful as it possibly can be. God is calling you and me to be zealous about His house.

Question No. 2 I often ask myself: Am I a friend of sinners? Last weekend John mentioned that the longer we are Christians, the fewer the number of friends we have who are not Christians. This has been shown in many studies. The longer we are Christians, the fewer friends we have outside the faith. Now, it's probably not that we don't know any non-Christians. Most of us have neighbors, coworkers, fellow students or other acquaintances who are not followers of Jesus. But what happens over the years is that you and I tend to spend more and more time with people inside the faith. Our social lives gradually become exclusively this holy huddle of people we feel comfortable with, people who already know Jesus and share our same values. What's worse is that we can develop an attitude about people outside the door and look at them with contempt and judgment.

This is not at all the way of Jesus. In fact, the religious leaders of His day were full of criticism for Jesus. In chapter 11 of Matthew, Jesus was called a *friend of sinners*. It's really ironic, isn't it? Because those religious leaders, and by the way, every last one of us is a sinner, too. We're all sinners. The only difference is that we have received the gift of grace. When Matthew, the tax collector, decided to follow Jesus, he immediately invited some of his friends to come to his house. Look at this scene. This is described in Matthew, chapter 9.

¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ . . . I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Now in our day, we may wonder what the big deal was about tax collectors. The IRS may not be your favorite people, but we don't look at them like scum as they did back in the first century. Back then, the tax collectors would take a profit by taxing more than was necessary and they were looked upon as thieves, people to be hated. Well, Jesus included tax collectors and prostitutes and the sick and the marginalized in His gathering. What is striking about this story is that the invitation for all those very sketchy people to come to Matthew's house was initiated by Matthew himself. He was a fresh convert. He had just met Jesus and he couldn't wait for his friends to come to his house and meet Jesus.

You and I only have so much discretionary time in our lives. In fact, if you are a parent here today with young children, you may be thinking, "I have zero discretionary time." We make choices about what to do with any open time we have, with any social time that we have. So let's just pretend that you have an open Friday night and you decide to get up off your couch and hang out with some people, maybe go to a movie or dinner or a sporting event. Who are you going to call? Well, without even thinking most of us are going to contact one of our Christian friends. It's just so comfortable and easy. There's a couple my husband and I have known for over 30 years, Dan and Lynn, and we just love to do dinner and movie with Dan and Lynn. But what if sometimes we think about someone outside the door? What if we become more intentional in our hanging out time, more inclusive? Pastor Bill Hybels calls this having a Matthew party in honor of the tax collector who invited his friends over. Maybe you have a group of Christian friends and you could include someone not yet in the faith to join you for a meal or an activity. Maybe my little movie foursome could be expanded and we could invite a couple or

an individual who is far from God. Being a friend of sinners requires intentionality. It's not going to happen if we're not intentional.

I want you to think about your spheres of influence right now. Think about someone in your neighborhood or your workplace or at your school who does not yet know Jesus. Does everybody have a name in mind? Could you make an intentional invitation of some kind to that person? Maybe just to get a cup of coffee. Does anyone accuse you or me of being a friend of sinners? I would like that phrase to describe me more accurately and that leads directly to **Question No. 3: Am I living a magnetic life?** No matter how knowledgeable you are about the faith, no matter how much theology you have in your head, no matter how often you sow seeds or extend invitations or how great the preaching is here or the music or the youth ministry or what you do in the community, it will not make a whit of difference unless you and I are living lives that draw other people to Jesus.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "We must remember that it is possible to affirm the existence of God with our lips and deny His existence with our lives." People are watching you and me. They are observing our characters. They hear our words. They notice whether we seem to be joyful and loving and kind and generous. They watch you and me when we're going through suffering and loss to see how we handle disappointment. Would people want to participate in the kind of life you are living? Let me be completely blunt for a second. You can be scary smart about this Book. You can know the Bible cover to cover and actually be jerk, a person no one really wants to know. When we talk about spiritual growth or formation, sometimes we lose our way and we think it's all about gaining knowledge and impressing other people with our Biblical knowledge. That's absolutely not the goal. You and I are constantly being formed into a certain kind of person. We are either becoming more like Jesus or less like Jesus with every choice we make.

If we, over time, are growing to become more kind and free and just and tolerant and wise and courageous and above all, more loving, other people will be attracted to us and ultimately to Jesus. Frank Laubach describes God's plan this way: "The simple program of Christ for winning the whole world is to make each person he touches magnetic enough with love to draw others." That's a great phrase, magnetic with love. If you get nothing else out of this three-week series, I hope you will walk away knowing that with God's help, you can do this. You don't have to be a Lee Strobel. You can do this because no matter our education, how long we have been in the faith, no matter our personality, whether we are a bold person or kind of a shy person, we can become a more loving person, every last one of us. Over time we can resemble Our Savior, the friend of sinners. We can become the kind of person other people would want to emulate, and by doing that we will be pointing the way to Jesus.

The earliest followers of Jesus in that first-century culture did this in remarkable ways. We read in the Book of Acts that thousands of people were added to their number day by day. There is a comment in Acts, chapter 4 that reveals the kind of reputation these men had. Look at this.

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

When people are with you or me, do they take note that we must have been with Jesus, that there's something different about us? Are we centered and peaceful and giving and fun and free

and very kind? Am I becoming the kind of person people would perceive as being transformed to become more like Christ? Every single day you and I cross paths with people who are far from God and whether they show it or not, no matter how put together they may look, they have some kind of brokenness. It could be loneliness. It could be anger or bitterness that they are harboring. It could be loss or just a profound sense of emptiness. You and I may very well be one of the only individuals with the potential to sow a seed, to really listen to their stories, to ask some good questions. We can live the way Jesus would live if He were in our bodies. How easily we lose sight of the fact that this is actually a matter of life and death, to have that eternal perspective. We are talking about a person's eternity. So many people are just one invitation or one friendship away from receiving the grace of God and embarking on a lifelong adventure of walking with Him. The stakes could not be higher.

I don't have to go any further than my own family to see the fruit of seeds sown in invitations extended. God works often, you know, over the decades and divinely orchestrates conditions and appointments and connections and opportunities that have a ripple effect on so many lives. My story starts with my great Aunt Ellen. She was an immigrant to this country from Sweden and arrived at Ellis Island when she was a teenager with her little brother. They moved to Chicago. Ellen never got married. She lived a long life. She never married, and yet she was very involved in the lives of her three nephews, including my father Warren. My dad and his brothers grew up during the depression. My father's parents were not people of faith. They didn't go to church. My grandfather was actually an alcoholic and they struggled quite a bit.

Aunt Ellen invited my dad and his two brothers to go with her to a church down the street and to go to Sunday School. The other two boys had no interest, but my dad, for some reason, would go often. He most remembers sitting in Sunday School in a little red chair, singing the song *Jesus Loves Me*. My dad did not commit his life to Jesus as a young boy. It wasn't until his twenties when another person sowed a seed that my dad came to faith. No doubt though, he remembered those moments from his youth, singing that Jesus loved him.

My dad was a fighter pilot in World War II and in the Korean conflict. He was in the Marines. Here is a shot of him by his airplane. [Slide shown.] While he was in Korea, there were young local boys who cleaned up the Marine barracks. A boy who was 16 years old named Jongyun Lee was assigned to my dad's area. My dad began to build a friendship with him and to have conversations with him in spite of the language barrier. Over time, my dad told Jongyun about Jesus and one day this young boy, who came from a Buddhist family, who had 12 siblings, came to faith from talking with my dad. If you knew my dad, this would surprise you, as it does me, because my dad was really a shy person. He wasn't one to have a lot of those kinds of conversations, but he did that day.

When my dad came back from the war, his Presbyterian church on the south side of Chicago raised some money to bring Jongyun Lee over to the United States to study at Moody Bible Institute because he wanted to study the Bible and become a pastor. Jongyun went from Moody to Los Angeles and was the pastor for many years of one of the largest Korean-American churches in this country. At least three or more of his siblings came to faith and his mother, who is still living, came to faith in Christ. Two of his brothers went into the ministry and one became the president of a Christian college.

Several years later, that little church in Los Angeles wanted to honor my parents because they had heard the story. The church invited them over to a special service and ceremony and we have a picture of that. [Slide shown.]

My middle name is Lee. I'm named after Jongyun Lee and I've been told this story about him all my life. I am the second of four children. I learned about Jesus and His love for me as a little girl, coming to faith as a seven-year-old. I often sang *Jesus Loves Me* at my church. When I was in high school, I got to be a part of a youth group that decided not to just hang out with all the Christian kids, but to extend ourselves to our high school friends. That youth group exploded and grew and eventually, in the 1970s, we launched a church called Willow Creek Community Church in a movie theater. I have had the profound privilege of being a part of that church where, literally, thousands of people have come to faith.

Do you see the ripple effect going all the way back to my great Aunt Ellen? My father passed away exactly a year ago on January 22 at the age of 92. In his final days when he could no longer talk, we would sing to him. I have a terrible singing voice so I would wait till everybody else was gone and then I would sing songs of the faith to my dad. His favorite, the one that made his blue eyes twinkle, was, of course, *Jesus Loves Me*. At the memorial service for my dad last January, we told the story of Aunt Ellen and the little red chair. After the funeral my daughter Samantha was on a flight back to New York where she lives and she decided to write a poem. The poem is titled "The Little Red Chair" and I'd like to close with it. She describes all the different kinds of chairs that my dad sat in throughout his life, including his chair as a fighter pilot and the big, cushy, blue chair that she remembers him sitting in in his elderly years. She also mentions that my dad and my mom were married for 68 years even though they were engaged after only six days as he was heading off to the war. I used to tease him that he probably got engaged to three or four people before he went to the war and then decided when he got back which one to marry. But somehow, knowing each other for such a short time, they were married for 68 wonderful years. So here's the poem The Little Red Chair. My husband bet me that I can't get through this, but I will try.

In the little red chair a little boy sat
Where Aunt Ellen had dropped him until she would return.
In the little red chair a little boy learned *Jesus Loves Me*.
That's what he was told. *Jesus loves me. This I know*
This he came to know, the boy in the chair.
And he sang along to his new favorite song
Because singing it might make it true
And because it's by far the most catchy of all the songs
that were taught to red chairs in those days.
Was his voice hollow even then?
A little boy with my grandfather's voice?
Little ones to Him belong lifting up little voices to little red chairs
Not knowing anything of the chairs to come.
At the Illinois Institute of Numbers where he worked to study
And studied to work, he'd sit in the fifth chair
And prove that he knew enough to sit in a cockpit,
A small chair, a severe chair with a dangerous view entrusted to him.
A chair he'd probably only know the edge of
Like the wooden pew he'd barely touched, giddy as he'd be

When he'd say *I do* to a woman he barely knew
But would sit with in movie theater seats,
At booths, on benches, car seats and couches,
In waiting room chairs, and upon kitchen stools
For 68 years to come.
His chair at the table with three girls and a son.
His seat behind the wheel on a sticky road trip.
Folding chairs at the receptions of the weddings of his babies.
Hospital chairs where he'd hold the first babies of his babies.
A padded seat in the dining room of a retirement buffet
Until finally, a likely chair that slightly sways
From which he will watch whatever sport is in season
Next to his bride who has never not been in season.
But he didn't know of this then, singing boldly from the first chair
Because Aunt Ellen told him to because the Bible told him so.
Is this then what is meant by a legacy of faith?
Someone called Aunt Ellen sat a little boy in a little red chair
And he learned *Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me*
And he sang it right from there until knew it by heart
And could sing it from any chair he would occupy
Because singing it, he found it to be true.
And he would sing it to his babies in their highchairs
And they would sing it to their babies in their car seats
And they would all sing it back to him
When he could no longer sit up
But this he knew, *Jesus loves me, yes, yes, yes!*
And even now, Aunt Ellen drops kids in little red chairs
And Grandpa sings that song before a big red throne.

My friends, my Aunt Ellen had no idea decades ago that she would sow seeds that would have such a ripple effect on my dad's life, on Jongyun Lee's life, on an entire church in Los Angeles, on my life, on Willow Creek, on my children and, hopefully, their children one day. You just never know.

Are you zealous for God's house? Are you a friend of sinners? Are you living a magnetic life of kindness and love? I invite you to take an intentional bold step, a step of kindness, even just this week, toward someone. Get out of your holy huddle and move toward someone who so desperately needs Jesus.

Remember that name I asked you to think about earlier in the service? Think of that name again. And by the way, if you're stuck thinking of a name, that's a sign of a problem. That means you don't know any non-believers, but may God prompt you with a name. Someone in your neighborhood, someone you work with, a stranger at the local store who you see frequently. Think of that name and bow your head and we're going to pray for that person. Bow your head with me and in a moment of silence, we will just offer up that person to God and say, "God, would you use me in some way to sow a seed or extend kindness and love to that person?"

[Moment of silence.]

Gracious Father, please forgive us for getting so comfortable that we fail to see. Awaken us to see those people who so desperately need Your love and help us to take a step toward them this week, to listen well, to ask good questions, to extend invitations when the time is right. God, we have no idea how You might use us, ordinary people like us. May we be a part of Your Divine Plan. May we not miss any of Your promptings and Your Divine assignments for the sake the Kingdom and for the sake of bringing home to You those who are lost. Thank You for Jesus, a friend of sinners. It's in His Name that we pray these things. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.