

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
November 21/22, 2015  
John Crosby | We Invite | Acts 2:42-47**

I've been waiting for this for months. Literally, waiting months. We talk about the church. All autumn we've been talking about We the Church and the story that's involved in it. Rich talked about how that chapter of the story starts last week, didn't he? He said this from the book of Acts:

2:37-38 About fifty days after Jesus died and was raised from the dead, a crowd gathered for a feast. And when that crowd heard Peter they were cut to the heart and they said, "What can we do?" Actually what they said was, "What can we do to be saved?" "Repent and be baptized, all of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit." And about 3,000 accepted his message and were baptized that day.

Instant church. We the church. Over the next 10-15 years in Jerusalem it said:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. We spent the last month describing that first church. Here's how the chapter ends. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. [Acts 2:42-47]. What can we do to be saved, the crowd asked? And the Lord added daily to their number those being saved."

What a great story. Stories. You know, great stories start when something changes in an ordinary life and we need to discover what to do next. Something changed; we need to discover what to do next. That's what starts the story. A little girl falls down a rabbit hole and finds herself in Wonderland. The story starts long ago in a universe far, far away. You know, a young man out in the boondocks buys an old broken down robot. A hobbit opens the door for a wizard and he gets sent on a journey. A crowd of people 2,000 years ago gather for a Thanksgiving feast and they hear a speech. They are cut to the heart and they say, "What can we do to be saved?" And a movement starts of following Jesus that's still moving 2,000 years later. Each story. What do we do when everything changes? Let me tell you a story . . .

In the decade after WWII there was explosive growth in the Twin Cities. The suburbs started to swell and a young man came back from Yale to help a small group of people start a church. The first picture we have of it is this, the small church started on this corner here, but before this picture and after this picture, that young man, Roger Anderson, went door to door inviting people. He wasn't inviting people to a building, it wasn't there yet. He wasn't inviting them to church; he was inviting them to come together and experience what God might do.

It's an important word because churches invite before there are buildings. Most of you are here because somebody invited you. Most of you are here because when you got

here somebody made you feel welcome. Inviting matters. So it's 59 years after that young man came back from Yale. Fifty-nine years later, this past February, the elders have a retreat. We met and were trying to figure out what to do because things had changed. The story. What to do? Things had changed. For more than 20 years, more of the last 20 years actually, this church has experienced solid, sometimes spectacular growth. Done wonderful ministry, but for the last several years, we have gone through a tough slog. We've had a tough time. We had this issue of going from one denomination to another and that was, frankly, contentious. We are involved in that, and also, the worst recession in our lifetimes affecting all of us.

Last February, we were on the edge of our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, coming up next month now, and we're asking, what are we supposed to be doing? That seems a long way from when this started. So, being Presbyterians, what do we do? We set up a committee. The elders met with the pastors to figure out where to go from here. We started drafting and re-drafting vision statements. We assessed the needs we have all around us. We talked and we argued, and we prayed, and we thought, and just kept on going all the way through the summer—no breaks, all the way through the summer—and we made progress. It was really good, but there was something missing. All the words were there, but there wasn't a sense of unity, so we asked for some outside help.

We asked some people who had grown up at CPC, who had been on staff, and now had started their own firm called Open Book Communications. We asked if they could help us tweak our vision statement, and they said, "That's not what we think you need. What we think you need is to go back to the beginning. We think you need to look at what makes this church this church." All churches everywhere do so much of the same thing. What we read in Acts . . . they gather for worship, they pray, they study the Bible. What makes this church different? And Open Book said to us, "Where's your heart, because you'll follow your heart into the future?" And so, we engaged them and they interviewed 36 of our elders and our staff and our core lay leaders and asked, "Where's the heart of this church?" And over 120 pages later, they gathered us back at their office—a small group of us in September—and said, "This is what we see when we look at CPC. What we see isn't what you see."

They took six pictures of us. They said these six pictures are what we see when we see you. Is this who you want to be? And by the end of the hour, I was in tears because they had caught us.

Now, I have to tell you, we're going to be talking a lot about the 60th anniversary next year. We're going to be talking about a big capital campaign—we haven't done anything to the building in 20 years—we need to do some stuff, other projects. We're going to be talking about really exciting plans we think, but one of the things I relearned this autumn is that Dr. King didn't say, "I have a plan!" He said, "I have a dream." And that's what we want to talk about. It's our dream. What's at the core? What's most important to us? How do we discover these values in a fresh way? How do we own them? How do we find God's dreams for us with some passion? How do we live them out and follow Jesus into a very different future?

Last night at the Saturday evening service, we had 50+ people join the church. Perfect time for them to come to see what they've actually joined. So, if you're new here or you're checking us out, this is who we think we are, and this is who we want to be. You can decide. If you've been here a long time, if you're a member or this is your home, at the end of this I'd like you to tell me which of these six values, which of these six pictures makes your heart sing. What makes your heart sing so that you want to do something about it? I don't want you to feel good. I don't want you to say that was nice. I don't want you to say, "Wow!" I want you to DO something. And I think God will lead us through that.

So, six of these pictures of who we are, so far, the essence of CPC. As they talked to the 36 people, by far the most visible of the values, the most commonly expressed was, what do they love most about CPC? They said, I love it that you value tangible care and hospitality. I love it that you value tangible care and hospitality, because love changes lives.

If you come here, we pray that you will experience people at CPC showing up in tough times in extraordinary and sometimes even extravagant ways. About 25% of the memorial services that we do here are not for our members. They are for people in the community who don't have a church, who don't have a pastor, who are in crisis and say can you help? And we believe that love changes lives, so we help. We have groups for people wandering through grief, and lost jobs, and divorce, and other places that hurt.

This community cooks meals for the entire Twin Cities it feels like, and brings them to people who need a break. One of the things about a value is that it just happens. Too long, way too long to make a list, but if I were going to point to the next sign of this, it would be a week from Tuesday, because we've recognized that for many of these people inside or outside our community, when you've lost somebody, the holidays can be a very tough time. You keep thinking of what you've lost rather than where God is. So next Tuesday night, for probably the thirtieth time, we're going to have a Candlelight Memorial Service and offer comfort and hope to people in pain, because love changes lives. Let me share with you somebody who knows this a lot better than I do.

Video Shown [ Link: <https://vimeo.com/153784773> ]

Because love changes lives. You know as I'm doing these, I want to make sure you don't think we're saying we do this better than anybody else. We don't. We're just saying, this is us and this is what's important to us. We value care, but also, people who live here would say that we focus on all generations. And the reason that we focus on all generations is because we believe that faith is a lifelong journey. So, every week you're going to see kids in all the worship services that, frankly, is quite unusual for a church our size. We're one of the few churches that I know that still does a Children's Sermon. We have hundreds and hundreds of kids here on Wednesday night. It's dangerous place to be on Wednesday night. We have thousands of kids who go to camp. We're excited about that. Over 140 kids in our confirmation class. That's just great. But you know what we're just as excited about? Is that we have a group of 70, 80,

and 90-year-olds who meet every month. It's called Edynamoes, and they sit together and they pray together and we get to love them. There are dozens and dozens of people in their 80s and 90s around the Twin Cities who are in Bible study groups, still learning about Jesus in their 90s, and the reason we focus on all generations is because we believe that a 90-year-old matters as much as a 9-year-old. Church planners will tell you, "Dude. Grab the young parents and their kids. They need you. Build your church." We want to say that 90-year-olds matter as much as 9-year-olds.

You know where I saw this best? The last time we gathered here and we did Feed My Starving Children. We take over the gym and it's a riotous thing with people running everywhere. You see the little kids involved. They are right in the middle of things and it's a great thing to watch, but then you look out on the edges of the building and you see places where we assemble the labels for the bags and there are older people. A: because this is a way to contribute and B: because it's a lot safer out there than in the middle. And what I loved to see is an 80-year-old handing a bag to an 8-year-old so they can both feed people on the other side of the world, because faith is a lifelong journey.

Another value here that may or may not be strong in other places is that we believe that the people who come to this church tend to be, are not always, but tend to be people who have a spirit that is more excited about the future than the past. What can we do differently? How can we reach out and do something different? There is a spirit of possibility that exists. There is a spirit of possibility here because we believe that we're created to create. We believe that we are not supposed to do the same dull thing. Our value is to create because we are created to create.

Again, too many in this value to count, but let me just run through this with you. Two-thousand kids sponsored in Rakai, Uganda through World Vision. Another 800 of them now currently in Zambia. That was the first time that that had ever happened, that a church had sponsored 2,000 kids in one part of Africa, and it changed all of Rakai. Over a million meals packed in a week for Feed My Starving Children—that really had never happened before.

When we saw how many of our kids loved the youth group, went through the program, got all excited about Jesus in high school, went off to college, and we didn't see them again until some of them had kids and came back. One of our youth pastors said, "What if we started a service for young people and we called it the Upper Room?" And it exploded. Over 1,000 young people worshipping in this space and then as it grew and grew, we didn't try to hold on to it or micromanage it, we set it free. One of our youth workers, Paul Bertelson, saw how nothing changed kids' lives like short-term mission projects around the country. Nothing changed lives like helping the poor, and we did tons of that, and he said, "How come these other churches don't? It's because they can't afford to." So Paul started a mission ministry called YouthWorks. And this last year more than 40,000 high school kids went around the world on short-term mission projects because it was started here.

In the same way, Urban Homeworks got its start here. It's very much like Habitat in the Twin Cities, with a CPC imprint, and we have been privileged to partner with them. They have built over 150 houses in the Twin Cities for people who couldn't have done it on their own.

Really, literally I could go on and on and on, but let me just do one more for you. Rich talked about our lay care, that's a cool thing, but how about Student Lay Care? We have a group called SLAY Care—Student Lay Care. These are high school kids who love other people; they are trained and they pray for, and they reach out to, and they write notes, and they bring meals to people. High school kids who reach out to love others because it was possible.

We have a church that I think is a little bit different. A while ago, we had a couple of young moms come in and they have kids with disabilities that make it hard for them to just do this—to even just sit in the pews. And they came to our staff and they said, “Could you do like a special ministry for these kids?” And very wisely the staff said, “No, we can't. But WE can.” And these young moms took that on and together we have created this ministry called Mosaic. Once a month at 12:15/12:30PM, the Mosaic service is LED by kids with disabilities. They get up here and they lead it. You want a good cry? You want to believe that God works? Come to Mosaic. You think you're having a tough week? Come to Mosaic because we believe that we're created to create.

When you do that, when you have that value, it changes the way you look at the world. So I say that if you looked at our church, frankly, here is one of the places that we're quite different than other churches. There is an awareness of the world here that is a little bit different. In our world, in America, people tend to get in their own lane and it's hard enough to stay in your own lane. When you come here, we do not have a mission month. We do not have a mission week, because almost every week we are talking to you about the larger world. For our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we badly needed some additional space and instead of building classrooms, the elders decided to raise two million dollars and give it to the least and the lost and the left behind around the world. About 30% of our receipts go outside to help people that other people don't care about because there is an awareness of the world here. Countless work days and mission trips and experiences across the street and around the world, whether that's in Zambia or Nicaragua or over at Urban Ventures. And here's what I want to make sure you hear me say—it's not because we're great people. It's not because we're nice people. It's because this church realizes that when we do this, it changes us more than it changes them. It changes us.

Anybody here last year when Bob Lupton spoke? We gave a book of his away called *Toxic Charity*. He said, “Churches love to be generous to people, but they're often making it worse. Their charity is toxic because of the way that they give it. And he came and spoke here and it impacted us quite a bit. Just this last week, Bob did an interview with Christianity Today. At the end of the interview—so it's not in the article—at the end of the interview he was asked, “So what gives you hope when you look at this?” And he said, “It's churches like CPC who have a big heart and are willing to change their mind

to go from toxic charity to transforming generosity.” So, this Advent we’re going to continue to do our Joy of Giving, where we help people, but it’s not going to be a handout, it’s going to be a partnership that develops people. You can get information about that out there (points to Great Room). I believe God wants us to be aware of the world because there’s more to life than just us.

I have to tell you, that came home to me. About ten years ago we were at the height of the relationship with Rakai, Uganda . . . a couple thousand sponsored kids and there was a civil war going on in Uganda, and one of the things that happened was that the rebels, who didn’t have an army, would go into villages and literally steal children. They would steal children out of the village, put guns in their hands, and make them shoot other people so they could not go back to their villages, and that’s where they got child soldiers. So, one morning I’m listening to MPR as I’m getting ready to come to church and it says in a village more than two dozen children have been stolen and are presumed to be turning into these child soldiers. I said a brief prayer and said, “Oh, thank you, Lord.” I went to church and I have to tell you, before I got up to preach at least a half dozen people, more than a half dozen people came up to me and said, “Are those our kids? Are those our kids?” They had heard the story already. Now, ten years before that none of us knew where Uganda was, right? But now that we are there . . . “Are those our kids?” And so I was able to say to them, “No, the civil war is really up north in Gulu and our kids are down south near Tanzania, our kids are safe.” I got up to preach and I just realized I was wrong. When somebody comes and says, “Are those our kids?” The answer is yes, those are our kids. That’s part of this church. So, when you build that kind of a church, it’s a different kind of place to come in to. And part of it is that when you come into a church, you get a sense of what their values really are.

What we want to make sure is that when people come into our church they are experiencing what we would call a welcoming on-ramp. We think it’s important that they experience a welcoming on-ramp, because following Jesus can start from anywhere. Most churches, you come in and ask what does the church believe and we’re glad to tell you. And then we say to the people who join us, “What do you believe?” And if they line up then, “Hey! Join us!”, if not, “See ya later.” We don’t want to do that. We believe that repels the people who need God’s love the most. One of our friends here said she went to a church and the elder asked, “Well, how did you come to Christ?” And she started to tell what Jesus had done in her life, and the elder stopped her and said, “No, no I think what you mean is that after this there was sanctification.” What? She wasn’t using the right words. We don’t want to be like that. We don’t want to make it about the right words. We believe that wherever you are on your spiritual journey, people need to feel welcomed here and not judged.

Now, we have deep convictions; we are committed to God’s word. We believe that following Jesus is an important thing. I’ll never forget we had a New Members’ class and this woman stood up and said, “I love this church. You can believe whatever you want to!” Uh . . . not quite. But what’s important is that you can start wherever you want to and not feel judged.

One of my friends wasn't ready to come to this church for over a decade and he finally came and he committed himself to Jesus Christ in a powerful way, but he didn't know any of the right words; he didn't know any of the right things. And so he joins a small group and they talk about what's hardest for you and your faith and he goes, "Well, I can't pray very well. Every time I pray, I close my eyes and I fall asleep." One of the other guys in the group goes, "Well dude, I pray best on my way into work." And my friend says, "Well, aren't you killing people?" The other guy says, "You don't close your eyes and talk to anybody else. God doesn't need you to close your eyes." And my friend says, "Well, I think you're wrong." But he started to pray with his eyes open because he found a community that welcomed him in right where he was and led him toward following Jesus.

We need to have a hundred more welcoming on-ramps and we need you to build them, because following Jesus can start from anywhere. We don't want to be people who have it all together. Not really much danger in that, but we want to be the kind of church that says you can start anywhere.

When you do that, when that's a value for you, it gets messy. It gets messy. A lot of people in our church know a lot less about the Bible than a lot of people in other churches. We're fine with that. If you keep coming you can learn. If you go away you just say oh those hypocrites! But it's messy, and that means that the last value of our church that people identified by our leadership is that you need to have a willingness to live in the tension. We live in a society that is filled with tension, whether it's the presidential debates, or it's sexuality, or race, or immigration, or whatever it is, we're in conflict and we bash each other and go apart. We want to try to be the kind of community that lives in the tension because we believe that if we stay together grace wins. This is hugely important to us. Many churches have the same politics . . . we don't. Many churches have the same feelings on dynamic issues . . . we don't. We want to try to live in the tension because we believe that grace wins. That doesn't mean that we're going why can't we all just get along? Mr. Feel Good. We believe that God's grace holds us together.

I think that this is powerful. I think it's very hard. Some of you are not going to stay here because we want to live in the tension, and so we have a young Christian guy standing here who is gay and says, "I've come to believe that God wants me to marry my partner." And on the other side about eight feet away from him is a young Christian guy who is gay and says, "I've come to read the Scriptures and believe that God has asked me to be celibate." And they weren't debating each other; they were saying what God had been doing their lives so we can learn from both of them.

Now we have convictions, but we want to live in the tension and whether it's about sexuality or race, we've had black and white here, Israelian and Palestinian, immigrant and anti-immigrant, we want to live in the tension and teach people not only how to live together, but how to listen to one another instead of just doing all the talking. This value requires convictions. I need to know what I believe God wants me to believe from the Scriptures and from The Body, but more than convictions, I need humility to believe that

God and I should not be confused in the mirror. Living in the tension. Let me show you a person who I think knows how to live this out.

Video Shown [ Link: <https://vimeo.com/153784775> ]

I love it, too, but it's hard and it requires people who cross the lines that other people will bang away at because we believe that grace wins.

So these are the six pictures that Open Book saw, our values. What we found is that our values help us to view a new vision. Out of these values has emerged a vision for this next season. What's so fascinating to me is we're back to the beginning. We're right back to the book of Acts where it all started and it says daily the Lord added to their number those being saved. People kept coming into this community where Roger Anderson went door to door inviting people to come. We believe that we need to invite people to come. And so that's our vision. In this next season, in these next few years, to boldly extend the invitation that Jesus makes to us—not the invitation Jesus made—the invitation Jesus *keeps* making to you and me, to everybody. As we boldly extend the invitation Jesus makes to us, to everybody, we discover that this community of people is all about Jesus and His word. And because it's all about Jesus inviting others, it looks very different, because some people came and Jesus forgave them, right? So we learned to forgive. Jesus came and served other people, so we learned to serve. Jesus came and He wept with people with broken hearts, and so we want to do that, too . . . inviting them in. Jesus gave some people new life, and we want to say come here and experience hope and joy.

I had dinner a couple of weeks ago with some couples, one of whom is a friend of mine and I've known him for a long time, but he left the church for a while. They've started to come back, and he was checking in. He said, "You know we love this church, but we love these other churches too, absolutely, and we would go to these other churches, and then one of my friends from work would say, 'Hey, we don't go to church and one of the kids needs to start going to church. Where should we go?' And we would say, if you want to go to a church, go to CPC. Not the church we were going to, but to CPC." They asked why and we said, "Well, they talk about this intellectually and as well as they can. They're trying not to just stay in the pews and they're trying not to pretend like they know it all." And he said, "I found myself inviting to CPC when I wasn't going to CPC. I realized, I wasn't inviting people to CPC, I was inviting them to a community that's following Jesus. So John, I'm coming back."

I believe that inviting and welcoming happens all different ways, but it happens when you care, because love changes lives. When you focus on all generations because it's a lifelong journey. When you have a spirit of possibility, you invite because God creates us to create. When you are aware of a larger world, you see the people that nobody else sees, because life is not just about us. If we value this church as a welcoming on-ramp, we will find that Jesus meets people everywhere. And if we will live in the mess—because it is a mess, if we will live in the mess and live in the tension, we will find that grace wins. We the Church.

Now what we're going to do here is sing two more songs, and we're going to invite you to take these values and bring them forward, and then there's going to be people down here on the steps in front of each value with a bowl of colored dots. And we're going to invite you, if you would like this to mark you; If you'd like to say, "I'd like to do more about this value. Not feel about it or learn about it, I'd like to *do* something about it and this part of our church." We'd ask you to come forward and take one of the dots and put it on this We the Church board so that we can see where God wants us to go.

I'm sorry; I just have to tell you this last part. In the last service at 9:30AM, a bunch of people did this and down the aisle, here comes Roger Anderson, our 90-year-old founding pastor, in his walker. He comes to the front right here and he picks up the dot that talks about a Spirit of Possibility for the future. Dude. Our prayer is not that you would go, "Oh I like this. This is a great church." Our prayer is that you would become part of a community and decide what God is calling you to do. Let's pray, and I'm going to pray first and then ask you to pray this again all this Christmas season. Listen to this prayer and pray this with me.

Lord Jesus, what would You like me to do in my life? What would You like me to do in my life to connect to this vision here in this community? Not just to hear it or agree and get excited. Lord Jesus, what would You like us to do as we follow You?" Bless us in Your holy name. Amen.

God bless you. If you are like me, you'll say you really like those values, what was that fifth one? So, Open Book has created a book called *Imagine Church*. We've got tons more and want to use this for a while to say this is who we are and this who we want to become. Our prayer is that you'll take this home and read through it and see where God will lead you. Here now, a blessing.

Lord God, I thank you that You created the Church with people that mess up just like me. That, God the Father, may You show us Your love. God the Son, may You refresh us with Your grace. God the Spirit, may Your peace rest upon us as we go out from this place. And all God's children said, "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.*