

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby & Doug Turner
Imagine Church: Invited | Luke 5:32, 2 Peter 1:10

Sermon opens with the video:

<https://vimeo.com/152791645>

As soon as people stopped forcing me to go to church, I didn't go to church. And I didn't miss church—I really didn't. It seemed to be a lot about rules and people telling me that I was going to hell for the way that I was living. And yet, there was a sense in which I did not miss church, but I did feel like something was missing. That there was some God thing that I was missing.

I've become convinced that inviting people to see what's missing is at the very heart of what we call the good news, the gospel, the Jesus story. I think invitation is right at the heart. Let me show you what that means. The way Luke tells the story:

One time Jesus cured a paraplegic and the crowd went wild and then Jesus went out and saw a man named Levi at work collecting taxes. (Now you see a guy at work, big deal, but when you see a man in the Bible, a man collecting taxes, what you really should think is, Jesus saw Levi at work selling drugs on the corner. Or, Jesus went out and He saw Levi at work collecting money for the mafia. That's what a tax collector was like in those days.) But Jesus saw him and said, "Come along with Me" and Levi did. He walked away from everything and went with Jesus. And then Levi gave a large dinner at his home for Jesus. Everybody was there—other tax men, a cast of disreputable characters—and the Pharisees and religious scholars who came to Jesus, and the disciples were greatly offended. 'What's He doing eating and drinking with crooks and sinners?' When Jesus heard that, He spoke up and said, "Who needs a doctor? Healthy people or sick people? I'm here inviting people on the outside not people on the inside. This is an invitation to a changed life. Life changed inside and out."

[Luke 5:18-22 (Message version paraphrased)]

This is a very different kind of invitation than just *come to church and be a good person*. I was hungry for the invitation of something more, but I didn't know what it was. I think in some ways a lot of people are hungry, not to come to church, but they're hungry for something else; something is missing in their lives. But what would that invitation look like seven thousand miles away from where it started, two thousand years later; what would that invitation look like?

I got an email from a woman the week after Christmas and this is what her note said:

“Hi John, thanks for your note. Fun story. On Christmas Eve, I decided to call somebody that works with me who I heard was going to be alone for Christmas to invite her to join our family at the Christmas Eve service. She said ‘yes’ to my invitation and joined us Thursday night. And as we left the Sanctuary, she took that John Ortberg book. When I saw her on Christmas day—because we had invited her to join our family—she told me that she had stayed up and read half of the book Christmas Eve night. Yesterday I got a note from her. She said she thought that it would be a terrible Christmas and it turned into a Christmas she’ll never forget. John, this is the best Christmas gift I could have ever received and I’m so grateful. CPC is a place I felt comfortable inviting her. Brilliant to give people that John Ortberg book.”

Invitations change life. Invitations are powerful, and they’re scary to the people who make the invitations, and they’re messy, but they change lives.

I have a friend, some of you may remember, he’s preached here twice over the last couple of decades. His name is Dolphus Weary and his wife is Rosie. Dolphus and Rosie run a ministry of racial reconciliation in Mississippi and they are terrific people, but they grew up on a plantation picking cotton; in the Jim Crow south they were still stuck picking cotton. Nobody finished high school. Nobody went to college. But Dolphus got a basketball scholarship, went to California, and then went to college, never looking back. However, Rosie was still in Mississippi, so he went back, and God sort of hooked him in. Their ministry has lasted in total obscurity for decades. I first met Dolphus when he was asked to be on the board of World Vision. Well, Rosie and Dolphus were going to take a trip to New York, and along the way they stopped in Tennessee at the home of Bill, another World Vision board member. Now, Bill didn’t grow up picking cotton; Bill made his money the old fashioned way, he inherited oil wells, great guy. At that point he was running to be the mayor of a city in Tennessee; eventually he would become the governor of the state. That night when Dolphus and Rosie pulled up to Bill’s house, they said, ‘Oh wow, this is a house?’ They came into this beautiful home. Bill and Chrissy are great people and parents, and they all talked and had a great meal together. After dinner, Bill and Chrissy walked them into the bedroom. They had Dolphus and Rosie stay in their bedroom, in the master bedroom, and Bill and Chrissy went down to the other end of the house and slept with the kids. Rosie Weary told me later, ten years later, “So that night I’m sleeping in the bed of this man who basically owns the state of Tennessee and he invited me into his house to stay.” She said, “I guess I must be different than who I thought I was.” What a great line. I guess I must be different than who I thought I was. This invitation was extended and when the person came, they didn’t just say “hi”, they welcomed them. They made them feel like they were special. And it was messy and it was sacrificial. You and I get to do that. We get to invite people into the mansion of the King, into the place where lost people get found and hurting people get graced and people that are lonely get loved. Where life can come. We get to invite people into that house. It’s going to require some sacrifice and it’s going to be messy. The invitation Jesus gave Levi was messy. Nobody liked it. What’s interesting is the church people are thinking *what are you inviting them in for? We don’t want people*

like them in. Jesus is saying *these are the people who need it! Make room!* It still happens.

You and I need not only to invite people who don't *feel* invited, but also when they come, we need to make them feel *welcomed*. Invitations give life and hope, but invitations also shake things up. That means you have to prepare the house. You have to make the house a welcoming place. That's been a problem for us in these last years as we have grown, and so I've asked three of our staff to show you how this Invited Campaign might prepare the house.

Invited Building Project Overview Video:

<https://vimeo.com/152978864>

We did a staff retreat last May and asked what is needed in terms of facilities. The staff said, well, if it's us, we don't need anything. We've cracked the code. We know where to go, we know where to sit. We're doing fine. This church is like an old shoe; it fits just fine for us. But, the staff said, if we want to invite people in, we have to look at it through their eyes and see what would welcome them once they arrive. This is some of their best thinking. We hope it excites you.

We want to talk for this next month about "invited" and "inviting" as a campaign, as a movement, as a fundraiser, but also as the possibility to reinforce who we are. But, you know what? Whenever you talk about money, it gets weird. Let's just face it: we talk about money, you sit on your hands and grab your wallet, you grab your neighbor's wallet and you see how much you can get. And so I wanted to see if I could learn how we talk about money, and faith, and journey together. I got a coach. His name is Doug Turner. Doug is a pastor who has done a bunch of these, and on the journey he has found that what you don't want is people leaving like their hand has been twisted and they've been manipulated emotionally. There has to be a spiritual alternative. So, I've asked Doug to come up and share with you some of the things he's been saying to me about how our community might see this as a journey together.

Doug

Thanks, John. It's good to be with you. I escaped the frozen tundra of Georgia to get here and so it's good to be here. When I was invited to be here this weekend the first thing I found out was that you had John Ortberg last week, so now you have the major leagues in, right? Talk about a tough act to follow. But also, I was excited about coming because of just how much I've enjoyed being here. Through the last several weeks getting to know John and Laura, and John Mitchell, and David Hammond, and Jonathan Keller, and Jay Carroll, and other people; it's just been a great thing to see what God is doing here at CPC. You guys have some wonderful folks, you really do. I'm not being disingenuous by trying to butter anybody up, I'm just trying to tell you that you have an amazing leadership group. They've got a great heart for you and for the work here.

So, when I was invited, I was excited about coming because frankly the destination does impact what the journey is like, right? There are those journeys that you're invited on and it feels like you're doing it out of obligation. *Oh wow, I don't want to do that, but you do it.* Then there are those journeys where the destination is energizing from the moment you think about going. It changes everything about preparation, everything about getting ready. Today is the first step in the journey to Invited. Today is the first step.

The Bible talks about how we walk by faith, well today you're going to put one foot out and begin. Ultimately, what is the destination that we're asking you to go to? Because frankly, when it's all said and done, that's going to be very, very important. If this is simply about raising some money and making you feel like you've been beat over the head with that, even as great as the buildings are, that that in and of itself is just not enough. But, if it is about experiencing God, and knowing God, and understanding something unique about God and how He's working in your life, then that's a completely different destination. That changes everything. So for me, I was excited about coming here.

I get to go see great places. I go to places that are sort of crackling with creative energy. I go to places where you just sense a real urgency around what God is doing. I go to places where great people are thinking through complicated things and are reaching out in their community and loving people unconditionally. It's great to be there. At the end of Invited, what's that place then that you're going? Is it just about the money or is it more than that? There's a passage of Scripture I want to look at with you. It's from the book of Matthew. It's sort of the closing of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is going to talk about what it means for us to experience God as we pray and look to Him for guidance.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. [Matthew 7: 7-12]

It's an interesting kind of conclusion to The Sermon on the Mount. If you understand the Sermon on the Mount, what's happened here is sort of a look at what good people are trying to do to motivate them to do good. It's not a sort of good and bad people comparison, it's a good and good people comparison. So, you look all the way though the sermon and Jesus says over and over again, “You've heard it said”, and then he talks about something. Then he says, “But I say to you now . . .” So, you heard it said—this is what you should do or shouldn't do—but I tell you, here's something different to think about that and what it means to have a heart for God. How do we do good in the way that really pleases God? And then there's a phrase in there that I love. He comes to this place where he says, “Ask, seek and knock . . .” You're able know how to give good

gifts to your children, means that you and I, who are inherently selfish, still know how to give good gifts to our children. How much more does your Father know how to give you good gifts? So it's not a matter of less or more. It's kind of a matter of much to more.

Now again, no analogy is perfect, but let me give you a couple of them. I love to play golf. I enjoy playing golf. I could enjoy playing golf almost anywhere. So you know, if the weather's nice, and a little bit warmer hopefully than now, and you go out and you put me on a course somewhere, you find out that's "much" to me. Augusta National? That's more. That would be wow!

I really like doughnuts. Do you like doughnuts? I like doughnuts and I don't know if you can relate to this one like I do because it may be a southern thing. I really like doughnuts and I pretty much don't find a bad doughnut anywhere. That's much to me. But you know what more is? A hot Krispy Kreme doughnut coming off that conveyer belt. You see that hot doughnut light flashing and it's like *ah, man I have to have that!* I mean that's more, right? Isn't that more? I mean, doughnuts are much, but that's more!

If you're a parent you kind of know what Jesus is talking about. You know how to give things to your children. I don't mean spoil them and give them stuff they don't need, because He's even talking about stuff they need. Give them stuff that takes care of them. Give them a sense of maturity. You want them to grow. Even when they hurt, you won't be able to take it away from them. As a parent you kind of get that, right? And how much more does God desire to give to you and me?

Several years ago I was working with a church in Chicago and I was trying to get in for a meeting. It was a Friday and there was a blizzard coming in. We literally landed and O'Hare Airport shut down as soon as our flight got in. So I got a 4-wheel drive Jeep and got out to the meeting, had the meeting, and then I'm trying to get back to see if anyone can get out of there that night. It's just not going to happen. My son, who was really young at the time, was going through some struggles and he had a basketball game the next day. So, I called him and said, "Hey bud, I'm stuck here. I'm not going to be there tomorrow. I can't get to the game." I don't know what about that he didn't understand because his next response was, "Well, you're going to be there, right?" "Well, I just don't know bud. I don't know if I'm going to be able to get out of here." And so I hung up the phone and started looking at the weather. I couldn't get out of Milwaukee, but I found where the line of that storm was—just north of Indianapolis. If I could get in that Jeep, I could drive to Indianapolis, and that's what I did. I literally drove all night to get there. I rented a hotel room to take a shower, and then went to get on an airplane. I flew home and walked in right at tipoff. Now what does that make me? Superman? Hero? Makes me a dad. That's all, just a dad. I don't want to disappoint my boy; I know what that's like. How much more does God desire to give to you and me?

What's the destination? Is it an "all-too" journey? Is it a journey out of some kind of religious devotion because you're looking through the Sermon on the Mount and understanding that you can do good because you try to move God to be obligated to

what you're doing, or you can do good because God has captured your heart by His grace and mercy. You know real forgiveness and you want to say *I love you* as a result.

What is God's heart? In this process, that's what we want you to find. We want you to really find what is God's heart for you in this. Now ultimately gang, we're going to ask you to do something at the end of this process. We'll ask you to do something financial. We'll ask you to respond by giving. We'll ask you to do something that at the end of it, it might be the most generous thing you've ever done, maybe the most sacrificial gift you've ever made, but it shouldn't come out with an "all-too" thing, it ought to come out of a joy-filled thing.

Several years ago when I was pastoring in Atlanta, we were in a campaign and I had a lady in the congregation by the name of Robbie. Robbie was a single mom in our church and she was very involved, did all kinds of stuff at the church—volunteered and had three children at home. Robbie was going through a tough time. She was having a hard time making ends meet. There were times, frankly, that we helped her with groceries and that kind of stuff. In the middle of the campaign, she came by to see me. She said, "Doug, I'd really like to be a part of this. I just don't know how I can." And she knew that I knew what she was talking about. We knew she was trying to do everything she could, but it was tight. But gang, here's how I responded to her: I said, "Robbie, here's the only thing I'd like to ask you to do. Is there a way you can pray about this and say, 'Lord, is there anything I can give up so I can be a part of this?'" Now gang, am I doing that because I'm trying to squeeze every dime I can out of people in my church or we're not going to raise all that money? No, no. I just realized that there would be a time later when there would be a celebration. There would be a time when we all came together in that new space that'd we sort of see God changing lives. There would be a time when we say *this is what God's doing through us!* I didn't want her to feel like she was on the outside looking in. And she said, "I don't know what it would be, but I'll try."

That day I went to lunch with a guy named Joe. Joe was a business owner in our church and doing really well in his business. We're sitting there and Joe looks at me at lunch and says, "Doug, Pam and I have decided we're going to give a million dollars to this campaign." That blew me away. I grew up in a mill town in North Georgia and I didn't know anyone who had a million dollars, much less they'd give it away. So I kind of float back to the church all energized and excited about it, and waiting for me when I got back there was Robbie. And I walked in and she's smiling, holding a sheet of paper, and she looks at me and said, "I found a way." And we go in my study and we sit down. She hands me the sheet of paper and there's a list of things on it. It's her grocery list and some of those items have check marks by them. She said, "You see the things I checked? If I buy generic brand stuff instead of name brand stuff I can save five dollars a week on my grocery bill. I can do that." Seven hundred and eighty dollars over the life of that campaign. You see, Robbie wasn't just doing it because she felt she ought to do it. She did it because she felt a sense of great joy in doing it. Hey gang, that's what we're inviting you to do. At the end of the process, we are inviting you to connect to the vision that God has given your church. You, as one people, at one moment in time, connect to that vision. We're inviting you to experience a deep sense of community with

one another. Were inviting you to discover the heart of God in this. And frankly, we're inviting you to do something extravagantly generous when it's all said and done. Whatever that is, you and I will always realize how great that might be and how much more God has already given for us. You're invited.

John

In this environment, we have sort of an anti-arm twisting thing about money here. We talk about money because it's part of discipleship, but our passion is not to emotionally manipulate, or twist, or put the arm on people. But, we, at the same time, want to invite you to join in the journey. For some of you that's going to be spending time these next weeks asking questions. *Do we really need this? Do we want this? Will this help our mission?* For others of you, it's going to be talking about *who we are and whether I'm part of this*. For some of us, in different ways, it's going to be *where am I in my journey of faith, and money, and generosity?* I want all of that to happen and not just to talk about money. The most important thing is the "why". The week before Christmas, you might remember, we had a special service where we sort of toned things down and got ready for Christmas. It was wonderful. As we were going out, a young woman comes up to me and says, "You got a minute? I have invited my neighbor to church six, seven times and every time this woman who's a single mom, older, she has found a nice reason to say 'no'. But this week, my son was singing and so I asked for the seventh or eighth time and she said, 'yes'. And she came." This woman points over to her and said, "Her kids don't spend much time with her, so she spends time with our kids, and she said to me as we walked out of the service today—I looked at her and she had tears in her eyes—and this woman said, 'Do you think I could come back sometime?'" And this young woman said, "I just feel so good!"

That's for the joy. That's what we're trying to inconvenience ourselves for. That's what Jesus did with Levi. Jesus picked Levi up, inconvenienced himself, ruined his reputation, invited him to eat with all of the wrong kinds of people; they got into a fight at the banquet. Decades later, the apostle Peter who was there that day said *I don't think this is such a good idea to invite him, Jesus*. You know he was there that day, saw the party, remembered the trouble, and he never forgot it. This is what he writes to some on his friends about inviting:

So, friends, confirm God's invitation to you, God's choice of you. Don't put it off; do it now. [2 Peter 1: 10]

The power of God's invitation to you, extended to everybody else. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we are going to stumble forward here together with excitement, and trepidation, and see what we can learn together. We're excited about some of this and we're a little scared about other parts. We want this to unite us a people. We want every person here to feel like whatever they decide is between You and them. And we want at the end of the day to invite people to come and sit with us and hear about love that

changes life, grace that gives joy, amazing grace. Help us extend that invitation. Help us welcome them when they come. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit we give thanks. 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.